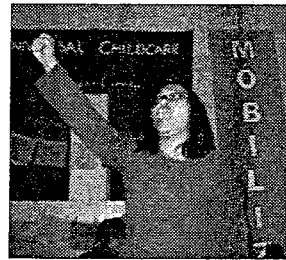


GRASSROOTSWOMEN

newsletter



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10 Years of Struggle for Genuine Women's Liberation

By Rachel Rosen

2005 was an important year for Grassroots Women: the 10 year anniversary of our founding.

Little did women realize back in 1995 what would become of the informal grouping that began meeting under the title of Grassroots Women's Discussion Group in the spring of that year. Initiated by the Philippine Women Centre of BC, Grassroots Women was born out of the desire of these women to address the piercing political oppression and economic exploitation of working class and other marginalized women worldwide.

It was through these discussions that members of GW grasped the importance of exposing and

opposing free trade agreements, particularly APEC (the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) as APEC members would be meeting in Vancouver in November 1997. These members knew that APEC – as a tool for regional control by the US, Japan, and even Canada – would mean massive job loss and increased poverty, displacement of Indigenous peoples, environmental devastation and traffick in women and children.

In August 1996, the No! to APEC coalition – initiated by GWDG members – was launched in Vancouver. The over 60 coalition members conducted a year long campaign against APEC and imperialist globalization including popular education workshops, forums, rallies, and an international

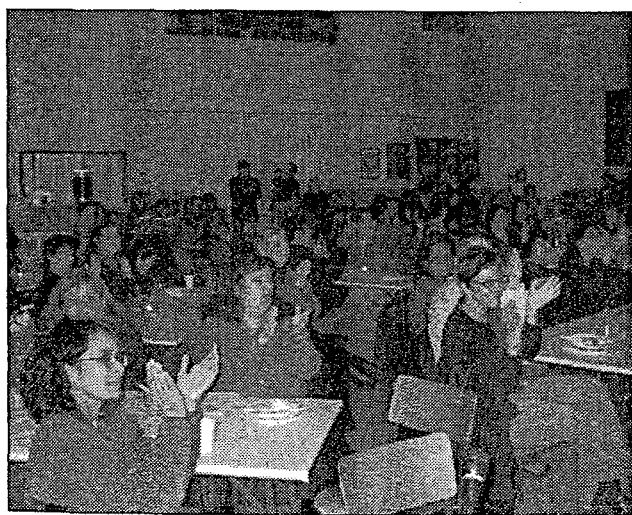


People's Conference Against Imperialist Globalization and 5000 people strong rally.

During this campaign, GWDG members made an important contribution to International Women's Day events under the theme "Women Resist Imperialist Globalization".

They led the No! to APEC Women and Children's Pre-conference in June 1997 where over 100 women gathered and confirmed their clear anti-APEC and anti-imperialist unity and developed a comprehensive set of actions.

As GWDG continued its work educating, organizing and mobilizing, it became clear that there was a need to develop into a comprehensive organization for working class women.



After detailed discussions, numerous forums and workshops, GWDG launched itself as an organization with an anti-imperialist basis of unity. We also joined the International League of People's Struggles (made up of over 300 democratic and anti-imperialist mass organizations from around the world.)

As part of these developments, GW has successfully launched 4 major political campaigns. (See page 6-7 for a more detailed description of campaigns.)

“Universal Childcare is a Women’s Right!” (launched in Spring 2000)

“Stop the privatization of Health! Health for All!” (launched in Spring 2001)

“No to Wars of Aggression” (launched in Winter 2001)

“Down with Flexibilization! No to Exploitation of Labour!” (launched in Spring 2003)

In recognition of our 10th anniversary, Grassroots Women launched a 2 month long assessment process. Active members of Grassroots Women – both past and present – joined together to review the history of the organization and evaluate both the strengths and weak-

nesses of our work in order to learn lessons for the future. We do not want to continue making the same mistakes or have to reinvent the wheel for work that is successful. So, this important

process has informed our planning for the future. We have developed a constitution for Grassroots Women to help guide our work and inform our members. We are developing an exciting and comprehensive “Anti-imperialist Women’s Studies Course” to build on the years of informal educating work we have done in the community.

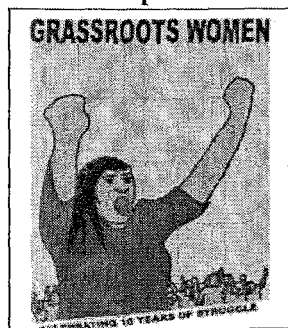
We look forward to seeing where the next 10 years will take us. Join us as we continue to build Grassroots Women, develop our political campaigns, and advance the movement for women’s genuine liberation. The conditions of working class and other marginalized women’s lives continue to deteriorate. War, Health, Labour, and Childcare persist as urgent is-



sues for working class women. Let us take our victories over the last 10 years as sources of inspiration, just as we are inspired by the life and death struggle being waged by women on the front lines of movements for national and social liberation from Iraq to the Philippines.

Women: the rest of our lives must be lived in the best of struggles!

Down with imperialism!



Reclaiming International Women's Day: Building Anit-Imperialist Solidarity

By Suzanne Baustad

Revolutionary Roots: Peace, Bread and Land

In the midst of turbulent political and economic times prior to World War I, over 20,000 women garment workers staged a general strike for 13 cold, New York winter, weeks. Their call: better pay and working conditions. Inspired by these Italian and Jewish immigrant garment workers, socialist and feminist delegates to the 1910 International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen called for an annual International Women's Day. It was to be a day focused on working class women's demands and an expression of international solidarity and resistance as imperialism ravaged the lives of women the world over.

With two million Russian soldiers dead, it was the wives, daughters, and mothers of soldiers and armament workers in Russia who first went out for International Women's Day on March 8, 1917. Striking for "Peace, Bread and Land" they launched actions against the war and their own dismal work and living conditions. The wave of food riots, political strikes and demonstrations would end in revolution.

During World War II, women went into the streets on March 8th in Italy and Spain to demonstrate against fascist forces on the rise throughout Europe. But in the Cold War era, widespread IWD street demos came to an end in North America and Europe. By the late 1950s, IWD was celebrated among fewer women, often in small meeting halls and homes.

Inspired by revolutionary struggle in the Third World, struggles within the US and Canada against national oppression, and the growing anti-war movement, the "second wave" women's movement emerged in North America in the 1960s. In places like Vietnam, the Philippines, South Africa, Algeria, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, women were armed and fighting for their own liberation in the context national liberation struggles. In North America, after 20 years of quiet, in-door commemorations, IWD was revived as a day of revolutionary struggle for the rights and freedom of the most oppressed women—in the context of world-wide struggle against imperialism and war.

Building an anti-imperialist

women's movement in Canada

In the midst of a 21st century "war on terrorism," war-fed monopoly capitalism, fierce



competition between advanced capitalist states for resources and markets, increased deportations and restriction on the rights of immigrants, criminalization of resistance, a 'know-your-place' patriarchal resurgence...the list goes on—the impact of imperialism on the lives of women worldwide intensifies. At the same time, the organization and resistance of the people is growing—often with women in the lead as they stand up for themselves and

their families and communities. The need for a militant International Women's Day to show support for people's struggle and to build anti-imperialist solidarity could not be stronger.

For most marginalized women living in Canada, 'imperialism' is not a foreign or abstract concept. Colonialism and imperialism have been a daily feature in the lives of Indigenous women in 'the Americas' and in the lives of Third World women for centuries. Indigenous, (im)migrant, refugee and non-status women know the reality of families dispersed and communities displaced by economic and military force. Indigenous women have learned first hand the land interest and white male supremacy behind Canadian state policies whether based on 'consultation' or coercion. Third World women understand the true compulsion behind Canadian immigration policies that have, for generations, demanded gratitude and relied on dire circumstances and false promises to get cheap labour. Women who have experienced male/state violence know all too well how immigration and economic status create greater vulnerability to abuse. And working class women who daily struggle to

access food, housing, healthcare, childcare, and transit see who is not struggling as every level of government coddles big business no matter how anti-social their ventures.

As more women living in Canada are connecting their experiences within imperialism, the need for anti-imperialist analysis and resistance grows. On Wednesday, March 8, 2006 women in Vancouver will take to the streets in solidarity with working class women worldwide and in recognition of the militant history of International Women's Day. Leading up to the march, Grassroots Women will host a day-long conference on the theme of "Building Anti-Imperialist Solidarity: Towards a Just and Lasting Peace". It will be a time to look at what it takes to achieve real freedom and peace and the critical role of women in the world-wide struggle against

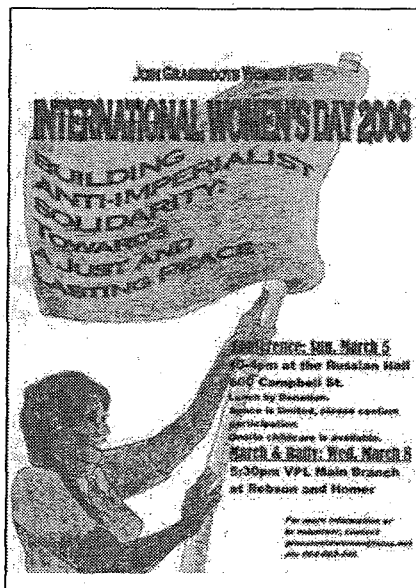
this new wave of imperialist aggression and war.

Join Us

On March 8th, Grassroots Women will be taking to the

streets as we have every year since our founding in 1995. Women will be demanding rights for Indigenous, (im)migrant, refugee and non-status women who face intensified violence and exploitation with state policies of displacement, deportation, and exclusion. We will be calling for an end to exploitative living and work-

ing conditions for women here and around the world. We will be pressing ongoing demands for child care, healthcare, livable wages and working conditions, and public transit for all. And in the midst of imperialist wars of aggression, occupation and intervention, we will be reclaiming International Women's Day as a day of militant solidarity with working class women worldwide.



Campaign Updates: Onward with the s

"No to Wars of Aggression" (Launched Winter 2001)

The world's peoples are facing intensifying militarization, occupation and intervention under the "war on terrorism."

National governments, including Canada, have used anti-terrorism hysteria to justify racial profiling, tightening of immigration laws, and repression of civil, political and social rights. With the global assault on women and children reaching new depths, Grassroots Women

launched a campaign in opposition: No to Wars of Aggression!

This campaign has incorporated numerous educational events, including an international women's conference against imperialist war and plunder entitled Towards Our Liberation that was co-hosted by Grassroots Women in November 2002. Based on discussions at these events, Grassroots Women made presentations to the Citizenship and Immigration Standing Committee in opposition to the imposition of a National ID card and to demand the de-linking of immigration and terrorism in citizenship law.

Grassroots Women is launching a new project to examine the impact of policies of deportation and

exclusion on working class women. Share your experiences – let us know how you are affected by (im)migration and refugee law in the climate of anti-terrorism!



"Stop the privatization of Health! Health for All!"

Early on, GW members recognized how health is a basic human right that is being ripped away from us at a rapid pace. Not only health services, but our illnesses and even our bodies are being used for massive profits. Under privatized settings, health care workers face massive layoffs, substantial

wage cuts, and intensified exploitation.

To address privatization, a 'wrong diagnosis' for health, GW launched our "Health for all!" campaign in 2001. We have developed educational materials including a "Women and the Privatization of Health for Beginners" booklet. The campaign includes rallies / forums / workshops to highlight the way working class women have worse health because of our class and to expose the hypocrisy of the Canadian State as it continues to masquerade as a supporter of public health while it pushes privatization on the international arena.

While all of the pre-election campaigning of major political parties said they would protect public health care, Grassroots Women knows that we have

truggle for women's liberation!



never had an entirely public health care system (i.e. we've always had to pay for medication and dental); that there has already been massive privatization of health care (i.e. laundry and food service workers in hospitals had their jobs privatized in 2004); and, on the international level, Canada has been pushing for privatization, such as allowing for private health insurance within WTO negotiations. Grassroots Women continues to mobilize against privatization of health care and women's other basic needs.

"Down with Flexibilization! No to Exploitation of Labour!" (launched in Spring 2003)

Systemic oppression confines working class women as sources of cheap and unpaid labour, from work at factories in export processing zones in the Third World to live-in domestic and service sector work in industrialized countries. In countries like Canada, immigrant and migrant women work the dirtiest, most demanding and dangerous jobs as their temporary or unstable immigration status leaves them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation for fear of deportation.

In Spring 2003, Grassroots Women launched a labour committee to look at the issues of women workers. Through focus groups, discussions and workshops it became clear that one of the greatest concerns for working class women is the increase in contracting out and the preponderance of short-term, part-time, temporary work otherwise known as "flexibilization." These techniques allow owners to easily adjust the size of the work force – by hiring and firing workers– when business picks up or slows down. While owners maximize their profits, workers lives become less stable.

GW has continued to campaign against flexibilization through numerous public forums and educational activities. With the attacks on workers rights to organize themselves in BC – from teachers to hospital employees to unemployed workers – we see the increasing importance of continuing this campaign.

"Universal Childcare is a Women's Right!"
(launched in Spring 2000)

Childcare is expensive and inaccessible. Childcare workers–95% of whom are women - are notoriously underpaid and overworked. The current childcare system puts working class women in economic shackles and does not allow them to develop to their full potential. Yet instead of implementing a national childcare program to address the childcare crisis in Canada, the federal government has been using the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). While this program allows upper middle class Canadian women to enter the workforce, it consigns workers to modern-day slavery.

In order to address the true needs of working class

Campaign Updates continued on page 10...

Understanding and Resisting the WTO

By Merryn Edwards

The WTO, one of the main instruments of imperialist globalization, held its 6th Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong last December. The location of the talks was significant since Hong Kong, as one of the largest ports in the world and a centre of international trade, in many ways embodies the "free trade" goals of the WTO to advance the agenda of multinational corporations and their government backers by removing all barriers to trade at the expense of oppressed peoples throughout the world. Significantly, Hong Kong authorities used shipping containers, instruments of intercontinental trade, as barriers to

keep the over 10,000 protesters who gathered in the city away from the WTO delegates whose policies they sought to challenge. The symbolic resonance of these barriers is heightened when considering that shipping containers such as these sometimes harbour economic and political refugees

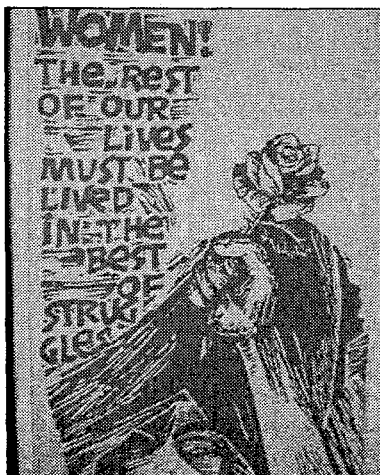
so desperate to escape the devastation wreaked by imperialism in their countries that they would risk an often-deadly voyage in the hopes of a chance at a better life.

In order to understand how the WTO functions as an instrument of imperialism, it is necessary to look to the history of its formation which stretches back to the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) at the US-hosted negotiations in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in 1944 following the end of the Second World War. The overall goal of the GATT is to reduce or abolish trade barriers between nations. The GATT has gone through several "rounds"

of negotiations, and the WTO was formed in 1995 as part of the Uruguay Round. It continues the goal of the GATT to reduce or abolish barriers to trade by establishing a decision-making body with powerful enforcement mechanisms at its disposal. Despite that WTO representatives are not elected, the

WTO has the ability to impose heavy fines or trade sanctions on any member country with laws that are considered barriers to trade, and it works in concert with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, international finance institutions that were also established through of the Bretton Woods agreements.

The GATT, as with other agreements and institutions governing the flow of trade, aid, and finance are based on the legal fiction that these agreements are carried out on terms that are mutually agreed upon by equal and sovereign nations, and therefore are mutually beneficial. In fact, the relationships between nations were and are anything but equal, as the US had emerged from the Second World War with its industries intact and in a position to profit from post-war reconstruction. In contrast, the legacy of colonial occupation and exploitation has left conditions between imperialist powers and colonies or newly independent countries that are far from equal. Despite undergoing national liberation movements, unequal trading relationships have continued to



relegate former or existing colonies as sources of raw materials and cheap labour and as dumping grounds for surplus products and capital even.

Capitalizing on these unequal conditions, the WTO seeks to commodify all aspects of life, resulting in the denial of basic human rights to any who cannot afford to purchase them. Women are often superexploited under this system that results in their experiences of displacement and forced migration, serving as cheap labour in the service sector and as domestic workers, objectification and trafficking of their bodies, and being burdened with increasing responsibilities to their families and communities when childcare is unavailable, health care is being privatized, and housing is unaffordable. In particular, two of the topics of special focus at the Hong Kong WTO talks—agricultural subsidies and trade in services—have important implications for working class women.

The imperialist countries including the US and the EU have consistently flaunted their own regulations, creating conditions favourable for corporations

based in imperialist countries; one case of where these unequal relations are particularly clear is in the arena of agriculture. While the WTO requires so-called “developing” countries to allow their markets

to be flooded with foreign agricultural goods, imperialist countries heavily subsidize their domestic agricultural industries, making it impossible for developing countries to compete. The issue of agricultural subsidies has highlighted inter-imperialist rivalries between the US and the EU as each seeks to profit the most from this unequal playing field. In the meantime, both show flagrant disregard for the right of people throughout the world to engage in agricultural practices that will meet their communities’ needs, and women, who are frequently charged with providing food for their families, are left in a particularly untenable position.

Women are similarly threatened by the WTO’s focus on increasing trade in services. Although services have traditionally been considered domestic activities



that are difficult to trade across borders (services account for 70% of global economic activity, but only about one third of international trade), the WTO seeks to find new avenues for profit through the General

Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The WTO has enforced policies of deregulation, privatization, and liberalization that have allowed private companies to inherit publicly funded infrastructures for delivery of services such as health care, education, transportation, and utility delivery, forcing people to pay exorbitant amounts for services that ought to be considered fundamental human rights. This situation forces women who are unable to afford such services to assume a greater burden in providing them to their families and communities. Similarly, the growing commodification of services exploits women as service workers as it seeks to profit from the undervalued status of unpaid service work that women

Resisting the WTO continued on page 10...

...Resisting the WTO continued from page 9

perform in the private sphere.

As a result, it is all the more essential that women struggle to expose and oppose the impacts of the WTO. Many women joined in the marches, rallies, and educational events as part of the resistance against the WTO in Hong Kong, coordinated by the Hong Kong People's Alliance. Here in Vancouver, Grassroots Women continues to provide women with opportunities to educate ourselves about and to resist the policies and practices of the WTO and other instruments of imperialist globalization as part of our work to build a grassroots women's movement for genuine women's liberation.

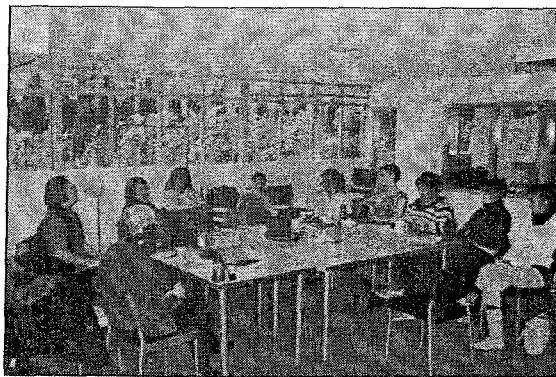


...Campaign Updates continued from page 7

mothers, childcare workers, and domestic workers GW launched a childcare campaign in 2000 that has included forums, workshops, discussions highlighting that without a free, universal system of childcare, working class women will continue to be doubly exploited: in the workforce and unpaid labour in the home. We have also published a participatory action research project entitled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place" that exposes how the lack of childcare means underdevelopment, exploitation, and isolation for working class women. The report underlines that women's liberation cannot be won on the backs of Third World domestic workers. We have had two annual Mother's Day March and Rallies and over 7,000 postcards have been sent to the Prime Minister calling for a universal childcare system and the scrapping of the racist and anti-woman LCP.

In its pre-election speeches, the new government of Canada announced its plan for childcare: \$1,200 per year to families for each child under six. \$1200 /

year will barely cover the cost of childcare for a month. Rather than creating a quality and universally accessible childcare program, it thrusts the responsibility of child-



care into the private sphere where working class mothers will continue to suffer on their own. Grassroots Women believes it is more important than ever to continue the fight under the banner: "Universal Childcare is a Women's Right!"

We want to hear from you. Tell us your experiences with health care, childcare, work experiences, and immigration!

Become a member of Grassroots Women and join in the struggle for the rights and liberation of working class women!

ILPS Update

Towards a Just and Lasting Peace

An important conference will be taking place in Vancouver this June 16 to 19, 2006. Hosted by member organizations of the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) – including Grassroots Women – the conference will boast international speakers from a variety of people's movements around the world who will come together to discuss building a just and lasting peace.

The conference will tackle the unprecedented situation of imperialist war and plunder facing the world today. The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, under the pretext of the so-called war on terror, have resulted in the deaths and displacement of thousands of people. Now, the conditions for bigger wars and intensified militarization, aggression and fascism loom as the crisis of imperialism worsens.

Yet, this crisis has also generated favourable conditions for people's resistance against imperialism, war and plunder to advance. While large-scale mass mobilizations against the wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq have taken place, there is an urgent need to advance a critical analysis of the question of peace. Peace does not just mean the absence of war, for we must also confront the questions of the root causes of imperialist war, plunder and conflict.

The conference will provide an opportunity to explore the important role of those at the forefront of the fight for a genuine, just and lasting peace through movements for national liberation, including armed struggles (like those in Iraq, Palestine, the Philippines, Nepal and Colombia), and through mass organizations of workers, peasants, women, youth and other sectors of oppressed peoples in the countries of the North and South.

In preparation for the conference, ILPS groups in Canada have been organizing forums and rallies. The next forum will be held on March 19, at 5:00, the 3rd anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq. To attend the forum or to get involved in one of the committees organizing the conference (logistics, media, education and outreach), contact Grassroots Women at 604.682.4451 or check out the ILPS website at <http://ilps2005.tripod.com>.

Membership Form

Our basis of unity is to:

Deepen our understanding of imperialism and its impact on women;

Conduct campaigns on the impact of imperialist, neo-liberal globalization;

Build a genuine and militant grassroots women's movement; and,

Join in solidarity with international people's struggles against exploitation and oppression.

Yes, I agree with GW's basis of unity and I wish to join the organization!

Name:

Email:

Telephone:

Address:

Grassroots Women would like to learn more about women's experiences, their current issues or challenges and to build the membership of the organization.

1. Tell us about yourself (life / work experience, background, age, education, loved ones in your life).

2. What do you feel are some of the most pressing issues facing women today?

Membership Form

3. How did you hear about GW (friends, family, through an event, on-line, etc)?

4. Why do you want to join GW?

5. Please share with us skills you wish to share with the organization and / or areas of work you would like to focus on (writing; web design; desktop publishing; layout; media skills; research; data entry; word processing; cultural skills; other skills)

6. How can you support the objectives, programs and activities of GW? (e.g. outreach, making a donation, attending meetings, attending events, distributing GW information, other)

7. Signature:

8. Date:

Suggested membership donation is \$20. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. Please make cheques payable to "Grassroots Women" and send with form to #304 - 207 West Hastings St. Vancouver, BC, V6B 1H7. You will be mailed a membership card.

Upcoming Events

IWD 2006 Conference

Sunday, March 5th, 10am-4pm:
Building Anti-imperialist Solidarity: Towards a Just and Lasting Peace.

Conference will be held at the Russian Hall (600 Campbell, Vancouver).

Please confirm attendance. Lunch and on-site childcare available. Suggested donation \$5.

IWD 2006 Rally and March

Wednesday, March 8th, 5:30 pm:

Building Anti-imperialist Solidarity: Towards a Just and Lasting Peace

Meet at the Vancouver Public Library (Robson and Homer)

"What is a Just and Lasting Peace?"

Sunday, March 19, 5:00 PM
Forum and Discussion

Hosted by member organizations of the ILPS.

On the weekend of the 3rd anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, join us in a forum and discussion examining the meaning and prospects of building a just and lasting peace within the present context of imperialist wars of aggression, plunder and

the U.S.-led 'borderless war on terror'.

Kalayaan Centre, 451 Power Street (Vancouver, between Dunlevy & Jackson)

Grassroots Women Annual General Meeting

Saturday, March 25, 1:00pm

Open to Grassroots Women members. Contact Grassroots Women at (604) 682-4451 for details June 16 to 19, 2006.

Towards a Just and Lasting Peace
An international anti-imperialist conference against imperialist war and plunder. For details, contact the ILPS groups in Canada at Phone:

c/o (604) 215-1905/Email: ilpscanada@shawcable.com

For more information about event or to get involved, contact Grassroots Women at (604) 682.4451 grassrootswomen@telus.net

