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Abstract: *Labouring for the Vote: Immigrant and Working-Class Women in the Canadian Suffrage Movement*

This paper focuses on the transnational and working-class influences on the Canadian women's suffrage movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Histories of the Canadian suffrage movement often focus more on the middle-class, English and French-speaking, Euro-Canadian proponents of suffrage who came to dominate the public voice of the movement by World War I, and in Quebec, in the interwar years. It is not surprising that these women became the public face of the movement: their access to news coverage, social and professional networks, knowledge of institutional power, and their class-based confidence, all helped put them at the political centre. So too did their *time*. In 1910, the largest occupation for working-class women was paid domestic labour. Middle-class women's ability to be politically was premised on working-class women doing their domestic labour for them.

Yet, some of the earliest writing on women's rights came from other sources: first, the African-Canadian abolitionist writing which was briefly manifested in an anti-slavery paper in the 1850s, and later in the 1880s, the Knights of Labor newspaper, which endorsed women's voting rights as the basis for a true democracy. Indeed, the labour, working-class and socialist traditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries sparked new debates about suffrage across the globe and these influences were similarly felt within Canada. Nonetheless, even in feminist revisionist writing of the 1980s, labour and farm-based feminists were designated those on the "fringes" of the suffrage movement.

Not only were working-class, labour and socialist organizations, newspapers and women's groups an important part of the suffrage movement, but some of these activists and leaders were also immigrants whose intellectual baggage included feminist ideas. Although Canadian women were less visible in international suffrage *organizations*, immigration provided a transnational stream of ideas encouraging feminist and suffragist thinking. The period before World War I saw a large increase in immigration, though within a preferential system that favoured white, European immigrants. Still, the migration of workers, whether they sojourned or stayed, provided a global transfer of ideas about women's equality.

At the time of the suffrage movement, the mainstream press was preoccupied with one transnational issue: whether British suffragette tactics would spread to Canada. This inordinate focus on Britain as the 'origin' of suffrage ideas was somewhat misleading. True, the WSPU's tactics helped take the suffrage news in Canada from the women's page to the front page, and British working-class immigrants, such as Helena Gutteridge and Gertrude Richardson became important suffrage activists. However, there were other European influences as well: Quebec feminists looked for French examples, Finnish socialists contributed to the first utopian socialist-

feminist experiments in Canada, and Icelandic feminists, notably Margaret Benedictsson, sustained the longest running Canadian women's paper supporting suffrage: *Freyja*. If we examine some of the writing and organizing of these European women, we can see the transnational influences of women laboring for the vote with new eyes.