

Grassroot Feminist Economic Thought

A Reconstruction from the Working-Class Women's Liberation Movement in 1970's Britain

Prof. Dr. Toru Yamamori
Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan

The history of economic thought, as a discipline, has concentrated on the thoughts of professional economists. Recently there have been some admirable efforts to broaden the scope of whose thoughts should be considered as appropriate to the discipline. Economics in the Public Sphere is one such project by Tiago Mata et.al., in which the authors shift their focus from academic output to economic journalism (Mata, forthcoming). Another is the publication History of Women's Economic Thought by Kirsten Madden et.al., which shifts the focus away from male economists (Madden and Dimand, 2018).

Encouraged by these attempts, here I wish to broaden the discipline's boundaries even further by suggesting that we ought to also be considering in earnest economic thought articulated by grassroots movements.

One might dismiss such a move by following Keynes's famous remark that 'practical men [...] are usually the slaves of some defunct economist' (Keynes 1936). While it is sometimes true that grassroots movements channel preexisting economic thought, I wish to argue the case for grassroots economic thought at times preceding ideas and concepts only subsequently developed by economists. The case presented in this paper is one at the intersection of the women's liberation movement and the claimants unions movement.

I have previously conducted extensive oral historical research on women who organized the claimants unions movement and joined the women's liberation movement in 1970's Britain. These women articulated the concept of what now we know as universal basic income (UBI) drawing on a broader concept of a guaranteed income, a decade before academics did the same. At a National Women's Liberation Conference they made the feminist case for UBI and succeeded in pass-

ing a resolution to make UBI an official demand for the British Women's Liberation Movement.

While my previous paper dealt in detail with historiographical particulars and showed how the women's achievements were sidelined by the white middle-class mainstream in the movement, which eventually resulted in a collective amnesia of these working-class women and their achievements (Yamamori 2014), here I would like to reconstruct the grassroots feminist economic thought that underpins the women's UBI demand.

In this paper I hope to demonstrate, firstly, how grassroots economic thought was unique at that time and a product of the intersectionality on class, gender, race and dis/ability; secondly, that it prefigured ideas, some of which subsequently developed by feminist economists (as well as other ideas that have yet to gain traction in academia); thus finally, I wish to suggest, grassroots economic thought ought to be properly acknowledged within the history of economic thought.

References:

- Keynes, John Maynard. 1936. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, London : Macmillan
- Madden, Kirsten and Robert W. Dimand (eds). 2018. *Routledge Handbook of the History of Women's Economic Thought*, London and New York: Routledge
- Mata, Tiago (ed). forthcoming. *The Economist in History: The Political Economy of Liberal Journalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Yamamori, Toru. 2014. *A Feminist Way to Unconditional Basic Income: Claimants Unions and Women's Liberation Movements in 1970s Britain*, Basic Income Studies, vol. 9, no. 1-2, pp. 1-24