

The fight isn't over, says activist Judy Rebick

By
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Judy Rebick used to hear a lot of young women distance themselves from the cause, saying, 'I'm not a feminist,' but, over the last five years, the tide seems to be turning — for better or worse.

More young women — and indeed young men — are standing up as proud feminists, but conversely, Ms. Rebick said some of the fights she and her generation won might now have to be refought.

The iconic Canadian activist, who became a symbol for the pro-choice movement in the 1980s and has dedicated herself to gender and racial equality for the better part of four decades, was at the Aurora Public Library last week to speak with this writer about her new book, *Heroes in My Head*, which charts her journey through abuse, trauma and dissociative identity disorder.

Ms. Rebick told the audience that the traumas she experienced as a child helped her to be fearless in her activism as well as compassionate to individuals who might be marginalized.

'I teach a class at Ryerson called *Movements that Change the World*,' said Ms. Rebick. 'When I tell [students] that abortion was completely illegal until 1969 and mostly illegal until 1988, they can't believe it. The comment I get from young women is always that they had no idea we had to fight so hard for the changes that happened.'

And the fight, she says, is far from over.

Asked how activists and, indeed, the public at large, can combat instances of racism and intolerance around the world, Ms. Rebick said the way to do it is 'by standing up to it on every level.'

Certain political movements, she said, run the risk of 'destroying the world that we've built, the country that we've built,' and it's time to put a stop to that.

'The most important thing we can do is stand up and work with those people who are being assaulted,' she said. 'In Canada, I think we're doing a pretty good job of that at the community level in solidarity with the communities that have been assaulted. I think in the States, it is a lot scarier because of the gun culture and it is much more advanced.'

Another threat, she

said, were changes to Ontario's health care system and funding cuts to bodies like public libraries.

‘There are people organizing and there are demonstrations at Queen's Park practically every day now,’ she said, noting that one of the most ‘tragic’ cuts has been towards safe injection sites, which will put many ‘marginalized’ people in peril. ‘We're in a very precarious time and the left is weak. The movements, however, are organizing and I think that is good.’

People know a big change is needed and we have to decide what kind of society we want, she said.

‘Either we're going to have a big change where the rich get richer and everyone else just fights it out on the streets ’ and I have no doubt in the United States that's where it's going ’ or we want a society where we take care of people and take care of each other,’ she said. ‘That's why I like the Green New Deal or the Leap Manifesto because it links the environmental, the social, talks about caring work as Green work; to start talking about libraries and nursing as jobs that bring value to the society, that they're green jobs, they're caring jobs, they're helping people. To put more value on that and to not accept their frame that everything is about money and success and so on.’

‘I think my generation is the most privileged generation. Our parents lived through terrible discrimination, terrible abuse, state discrimination and every generation before suffered terrible violence and lack of resources and everything else. Our generation was the lucky one and now I think it is our responsibility to stand up and make sure the generations to come have a decent life ’ and it's not all about money and success.’