

SSS President's Report 2024

The Society for Socialist Studies embarks on a rebuilding period. The SSS Executive Board and Conference Planning Committee have spent the past year working to make your Society more open and focused, doing our best to ensure that this is a durable academic organization of and for you, the members. We still have much work to do on this front, no doubt, but my hope looking back over the past year is that we've made a strong start in the right direction.

I want to focus this report on some of the SSS's major challenges, initiatives, and successes over the past year, with an eye on the opportunities and threats that lie ahead.

It is with gratitude and awe that I pay respects to the many SSS legends amongst us, including this year's Erroll Sharpe Book Prize honoree and keynote speaker Paul Kellogg, and the institutional memory, hard work, and keen judgement of Abbie Bakkan, Jennie Hornosty, and Terry Maley, among many others who have contributed to the SSS this year and in years past. I personally value Bill Carroll's fecund political sociology contributions as central to the disciplinary enterprise of Sociology. Those knowledge contributions may have a long life. But I have also relied on Bill's everyday, habitual graciousness, institutional memory, and strong judgement. He has held steady for the SSS throughout and deserves all due honour. I look forward to working with him as part of a new editorial collective in the Socialist Studies journal relaunch. I will also miss the calm amiability, resourcefulness, and ice-cold editing and procedural acumen of Socialist Studies Editor Sandra Rein, who has almost single-handedly funded, planned, edited, and published the Journal of the Society of Socialist Studies. I look forward to learning the ropes from her, and working with U Alberta PhD student Melissa Wilk as well as Bill, in rebooting the journal as an editorial collective.

I dearly appreciate working with my colleague JP Sapinski. I honor the value this environmental sociologist places on work-life balance and appreciate that resultingly, his contributions to the organization are judicious, research-based, and very helpful. I hope I can entice other brilliant balancers to join the Exec and journal editorial board. My sincere thanks go to the dervish Cheryl Hewitt, whose activist experience and tolerance of scholars constitute a steadying asset to our organization even as she whirls from responsibility to responsibility. Cheryl's patient, experience-informed, indefatigable contributions to the SSS include the constitutional modernization we vote on this GAMM. I trust that she and Sandra will help me learn Robert's Rules on the job.

We appreciate our student Executive members, Brendan Devlin and Burak Reisman, in their attentive participation and preparation for future leadership. The SSS has been fortunate to be reinvigorated with the energy and competent leadership of up-and-coming scholars like Membership Secretary Megan Aiken, Conference Organizer Phil Henderson, and Secretary Will Kujala, who have done so much over the past couple of years to get the SSS up and running on more solid footing. It is plain fun to be in a meeting with these people; they get work done and

they do it with merriment and wit. After many years of diversion into the FHSS's expensive and unworkable subcontracted membership software, Megan has put in the long hours of research and detail work to set the SSS up with sounder, more appropriate, ethical, intuitive, and affordable membership service. In the background, we always rely on the kindness of Sean Cain's website services. Will has diligently scheduled regular Executive meetings and contributed planning and communication work throughout, as well as helping to select authors to be honored this year. While Phil has led the conference planning committee, including Jennie Hornosty, Terry Maley, Veldon Coburn, and Audrey Laurin-Lamoth through the oceans of work, engaging with the long, and often difficult FHSS Congress conference planning process, and pivoting with alacrity to alternative venues as the FHSS's relationship with McGill University has forced scholars onto a runaway train of strikebreaking, imperial policing, and imperial genocide.

We appreciate the difficult logistics of relocating our conference and GAMM to UQAM, and deeply appreciate our conference planning committee and Executive Board members for the work it took to make this pivot. While we also appreciate the convenience of online meetings and know that, for some of us, isolating with the people closest to you and the Zoom retreat have come in recent years to signify solidarity, including solidarity with people with physical disabilities, the Executive voted to prioritize meeting together in Montreal because we take very seriously the need to distinguish the tactic of boycotting imperial genocide and strikebreaking from disconnecting from each other.

Putting aside my sociological understanding of the conditions that capacitate or incapacitate organizations and their members, I want to extend a bit of the recent years' epistemic break with business-as-usual and warmly thank the Executive and the membership for recognizing that in-person connections are a crucial component of the mental health, productivity, and relational capacity of the significant minority, the one-third of humanity who are sensitive to connection and disconnection.¹

Many of us are still recuperating from, or as professors, friends, and family members, administering to the mental disabilities set on fire by prolonged pandemic isolation. Thank you for being here in Montreal, and helping us rebuild through human connection. In-person connection ameliorates some of the common mental health and productivity disabilities manufactured as capitalism deforms the human and life on Earth. In-person connection allows more of us to learn better, work better with each other, to be capacious agents (even at odds with governing ideology), and get some socialist work done. Meeting in person, listening to each others' formal presentations of our work, becoming inspired in our own work, and following through with informal time together builds relationships and trust, allows us to forgive us our awkwardnesses and our overconfidences, and take advantage of our abilities. Your organization, the Society for Socialist Studies must prioritize rebuilding, and this rebuilding is relational.

¹ I reference Canadian medical scholar Gabor Mate', who has long influentially argued for a contextualized, historicized, materialist, social-psychological understanding of the generative roots of ADD.

Your Society runs on the energy of its members. While the SSS needs to continue to work for your involvement, to hear more of your voices, I ask you to take some time (precious and rare, we know) to meet us halfway. We don't ask you to dedicate your life to the SSS. Our Executive Board and the SSS Journal have benefitted from some of your participation and certainly your support in the past, and we will count on you in the future. Think about the social good of maintaining a long-standing socialist academic organization, across generations and profound political-economic changes. Help us plan the SSS conference, and the all-important social events that allow us to feel connection within a community of coalescing values. Help us find members to fill important vacancies, or communicate better. Bring friends in who should be with us. This year I was so happy to meet Eric Pineault of UQAM. He was instrumental in making a UQAM conference happen, and he is the epitome of scholarly fraternity. Bring the students you are mentoring into the SSS and contribute to succession planning. Contribute to organizing for the future and stability by donating to the SSS, a rare example in the Anglo-American world of a durable socialist organization.

Most of us share a lifelong history of passionate and intelligent engagement with liberatory and democratic-socialist social movements and organizing. This year as always, the SSS took a stand as an organization for scholars under state repression. We wrote to McGill and the FHSS to argue for human rights, academic freedom, and freedom of expression. We ran multiple reconnaissance lines with the Students for Palestine encampments around Canada to ensure we touch grass when we make our decisions as an organization. The SSS will support you to bring your passion, your intelligence to your work, to share that with our community, your community, and to contribute your experience, your energy, your bravery, your skills, your research knowledge and your well-informed, thoughtful ideas to the long, contested, crooked unfurling of the democratic Enlightenment.

After all that talk of the importance of connection, I'll end by stating firmly: We have never been alone. Opportunities abound to bring the SSS together in coalition with other academic and organizations and publishers. Opportunities abound within the SSS to meet colleagues you otherwise wouldn't, to connect through the SSS network with organizers and colleagues from around the world, to contribute your big executive skills, scintillating network connections, and innovative ideas to planning and hosting upcoming conferences—possibly in a bold new independent conference approach planned parallel to but separate from the FHSS. Opportunities abound to protect and advance socialist scholarship in an often-inhospitable institutional context, to defend academic freedom and to improve our work life, to maintain a foundation of *egaliberte* ideas for the future, including through serving as a reviewer and editor in the next phase of the Socialist Studies journal. I'll close where I started, with a statement that is already true, but that is in practice an aspiration; one that I hope you'll join in helping us realize. You are the Society for Socialist Studies.

Mara Fridell, May 2024