

# Women and Militarism

by Ursula Franklin

Some of us have come into the women's movement through peace concerns, others participate in the current struggle for peace as feminists on the basis of their own direct experience and analysis. All of us know and understand militarism as the prototype of structures of threat and violence that are only too familiar to women.

What do we mean by militarism? *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* tells us militarism is the "spirit or tendencies of the professional soldier; the undue prevalence of military spirit or ideals." In fact, it is much more than that. Beyond the traditional training for war and the preparations for "combat" (whatever that may mean), militarism today is an internally consistent system of attitudes, perceptions and actions; it is the ultimate manifestation of the threat system which, when stripped of all its extraneous verbiage, simply says: "Do what I tell you — or else." The institutional arm of the threat system, aptly called Armed Forces, provides the scope, the tools and the logistics for the "or else." The political arm of the threat system directs and finances the development and acquisition of these tools and utilizes the knowledge of their power and availability. One arm can not exist without the other; together they constitute modern militarism. This system operates with our money and without our consent.

Women are among those who have had lots of experience being at the receiving end of threat systems designed with their resources and without their consent. It is not surprising, then, that today the most penetrating attacks on the roots of militarism and the most creative approaches to alternate structures have come out of feminist analyses.

Deepening and broadening of the structural critique of militarism seems to me a most urgent task. This task is sometimes forgotten, as the war/peace discussions

center on the tools of the military. After all, the fate of the earth is at stake, when nuclear war threatens. People have good reason to be frightened by the mounting stockpile of nuclear weapons, by new chemical agents, by Trident submarines and by cruise missiles, by escalating responses and responses to responses.

But our fundamental objection to militarism is not related to the size of its arsenal or the destructiveness of its weapons. What women must object to is the threat system *per se*. We have not consented to live in the or-else world of threats. We want to build a why-not world of mutual respect and diversity.

Feminist analyses of social structures, of typical situations in the workplace, in schools or in the larger community have clarified for us the tactics and approaches of threat-based systems. They all work under the implicit assumption that some people matter much less than others and that all people are of interest only as long as they are needed to support the system or to justify it. Women know how hierarchi-



Ursula Franklin

Photo: NFB

cal systems can threaten any opposition with social and psychological isolation, with economic penalties and with political blackmail. Thus, militarism should be interpreted as the ultimate development in this line of structures. The threat now is the survival of the collectivity itself. The threat that militarism asserts is blind, diffuse and random, it is not related to individual people or specific issues. (If this last observation is not correct, maybe someone can tell me what a harmless female scholar like me has done that can be rectified only by the use of nuclear weapons.)

It is clear that the weapons we fear are the logical outcome of the development of the military threat system. If we want to get rid of the weapons and of the danger to global survival they represent, then we must face up to the system of militarism and not just its tools. And let us not forget that there are facets of this system that are already deeply embedded in what might be seen as the civilian sector. Just think of the incidents of blind obedience (—"I'm just following orders" —), of automatically equating rank with competence, of disregard and lack of respect for anyone outside the system ("Women, native people and the handicapped," as the then Minister of Employment and Immigration put it so succinctly), not to speak of the pursuit and glorification of brutality in all its psychological, physical and technological aspects, and you gain an idea of the intrusion of militarism into our supposedly peaceful lives.

The twin relationship between militarism and the hierarchical structures that oppress women was clearly understood by many of the pioneers of the women's movement. In 1915 Alice Duer Miller wrote:

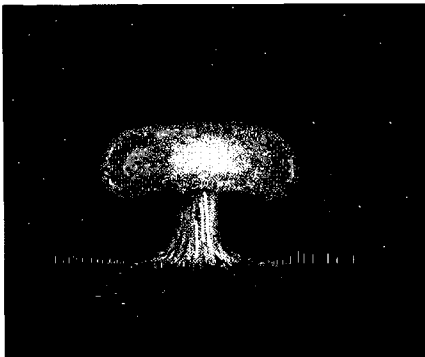
*Men shouldn't vote: 1. Because men are too emotional to vote. Their conduct at baseball games and political*

conventions show this, while their innate tendency to appeal to force renders them particularly unfit for the task of government. 2. Because no really manly man wants to settle any question otherwise than by fighting about it. 3. Because man's place is in the Army. 4. Because men will lose their charm if they step out of their natural sphere and interest themselves in other matters than feats of arms, uniforms and drums. 5. Because, if men should adopt peaceable methods, women will no longer look up to them.

This is more than just a clever repartee; it illuminates the symbolic and structural roots of the male domination women are exposing. Many leading advocates of women's rights were pacifists — such as Jane Adams, Sylvia Pankhurst or Clara Meyer-Weichmann. Conversely, men who were opposed to war were often very supportive of women's struggles for personhood and equality. And so it should be. To me the struggle for women's rights and the opposition to militarism in all its forms are two sides of the same coin. And that coin is the promise of a livable future, a future without "aye, aye, Sir, ready Sir," a future without sexist or jingoist stereotypes. If this future is to be realized it must be based on respect and not on domination, and its principles will hold for relations between individuals, between groups and between peoples. I am convinced that, if these goals can not be achieved, there will be no future. Ironically this may be the ultimate "or else."

*This article is reprinted from NAC Status of Women News (February 1983).*

*Ursula Franklin is a peace advocate and University of Toronto physicist.*



# Early War Crimes of WWII

by Rosalie Bertell

*After Hitler came to power in 1933, the Nazis made the city of Nurnberg the site of their annual party congresses and the capital of their anti-Semitic propaganda. It was here, in 1935, that the Nurnberg Laws were first promulgated, depriving German Jews of civic rights.*

*It was fitting, therefore, that after the Second World War, Nurnberg was chosen as the seat for the international tribunal on war crimes. At these famous trials the principle was established that the wanton destruction of civilians is a violation of international law, and that individuals may be held responsible for violations of this law even when they are following the orders of their government.*

*It is also fitting that in February, 1983, another Tribunal was convened in Nurnberg to gather scientific testimony regarding preparations for mass genocide in a nuclear war. Rosalie Bertell, Ph.D., G.N.S.H., was asked to give testimony at these hearings. Her testimony follows.*

It is important in these Tribunal deliberations not only to look to the past with remorse and to the future with fear, but also to face the present with honesty, courage and compassion. World War II did not start suddenly with the 1939 outbreak of hostilities. It began for the Jews in 1933. Episodes such as forcing the Jews to clean the streets of Vienna with toothbrushes, an event with evoked laughter from the Viennese spectators, served to prepare the way for the concentration camps and gas chambers.

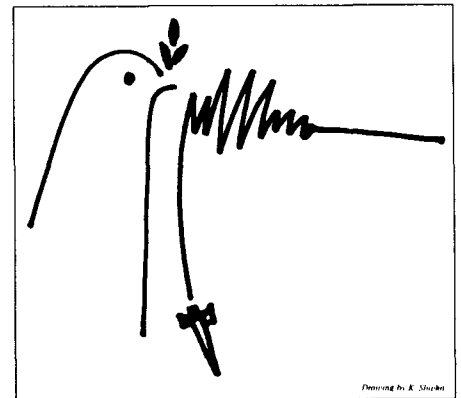
I wish today to publicly expose the brutalization process now taking place in preparation for World War III. Hopefully we will be able to abort the brutalization process, and prevent the further escalation of violence against the people of the earth and the life-supporting earth itself.

## Unlimited National Sovereignty Challenged

It is an understatement to say that we live in a time of crisis. A crisis moves inevitably toward *breakdown* or a *breakthrough* to new understanding and behavior. We are at a point of termination of a primitive stage in human development, the stage of national sovereignty. This stage has been characterized by the nation's right over the life and death of its citizens. The right of nations to wage wars, demand military service, give out death sentences and produce weapons of mass destruction has been hardly challenged until recent times. Both war-making between nations and human rights violations within nations employ violence or force as a basis of human relations, and both are being rejected globally as suicidal and counterproductive modes of human behavior.

War-making needs to be relegated to the history books, along with castle-building, fortification of cities, duelling, cannibalism and slavery. The nation's right to destroy its own people or those of other nations for some political advantages is as outrageous today as was the old custom establishing a male's right over the life of his spouse and children.

The crisis caused by national sover-



Drawing by K. Shuckin