

Voice of Women/La voix des femmes

by Kay Macpherson

In 1960 when Voice of Women was founded, there were also several branches of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. This international organization began in 1915 during World War I. Its members visited the leaders of the warring countries, urging them to seek ways of ending the war. They were unsuccessful, but they are still very active today. Many women's organizations were formed between the wars, but no others were specifically women's peace groups.

Voice of Women's objectives were clearly laid down in Article 2 of its Constitution (1961) and its activities still reflect its purposes:

The purpose of Voice of Women — La Voix des Femmes shall be: to unite women in concern for the future of the world; to help promote the mutual respect and co-operation among nations necessary for peaceful negotiation between world powers having different ideological assumptions; to protest against war or the threat of war as the decisive method of exercising power; to appeal to all national security and the peace of the world; to appeal to all national leaders to cooperate in the alleviation of the causes of war by common action for the economic and social betterment of mankind; to provide a means for women to exercise responsibility for the family of mankind.

It was hoped that women around the world would join in demanding peace and international cooperation, replacing violence and war among nations. The women soon learned that their objectives were not to be easily achieved. They became more knowledgeable and sophisticated, learning on the job about politics, economics,

power and greed. Although many women did not realize it clearly, they were in the vanguard of the liberation movement of the '60s. Housewives and mothers rediscovered their abilities and talents for political action, sometimes at the expense of family relationships — some husbands couldn't cope with wives whose priorities now tended to be world peace rather than spouse's every comfort.

In line with their aims, VOW members tackled their governments on such actions as banning Bomarc missiles in Canada, and measuring radioactive fallout from nuclear tests. This latter led to the collection of thousands of children's baby teeth to test them for the presence of strontium 90, and to monitoring fallout patterns geographically. Eventually the partial test ban treaty was achieved. VOW members learned of conditions facing women in other countries, exchanging visits with Soviet, Vietnamese and other women. Three international women's peace conferences were held; many VOW members attended those as well as similar gatherings around the world — including NATO headquarters, Hiroshima, and the United Nations. Concerns about violence, war toys, the environment, nuclear power, and human rights claimed VOW's attention, as well as the growing awareness of discrimination against women and many minority groups.

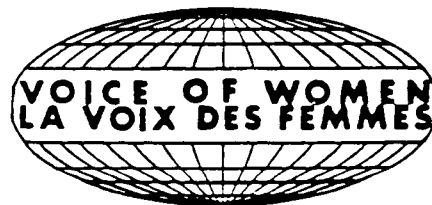
At present VOW members are spending time at the United Nations, and a group is observing the Geneva disarmament talks.

Others are trying to bring women's ideas and perspectives into negotiations and peace talks. Women are linking the arms race and huge expenditures on militarization with deteriorating social services and cuts in budgets for health, education, housing, etc. VOW works with many groups with similar concerns, collaborating for more effective action.

In June 1987 Perrin Beatty, Minister of Defence, presented his White Paper on Defence, *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada*. Before this event, citizens had been encouraged to offer suggestions on how they viewed Canada's future defence policy. Certainly submissions were made, but the Government was listening to the high tech specialists and to the manufacturers of military goods, not to those seeking new non-military ways of settling disputes between nations.

A few representatives of peace organizations were invited to "informal consultations" with the Minister of Defence and members of his department. As a member of the Voice of Women I was included in the first of these consultations in Toronto. There were half-a-dozen other citizens present, including representatives of "Peace Through Strength" who could not be considered part of any peace or disarmament organization. The majority of the forty or so individuals present were either from the military establishment itself, retired or reserve officers, members of strategic studies programmes (often also with a military background), and representatives of major corporations, many of which have contracts with the Department of Defence.

We were told that, since this was an informal gathering, no press would be admitted, no notes would be kept. The



Department members and the Minister, when he arrived in the afternoon, would just make mental notes of the "good ideas" which emerged. There were, therefore, no records of any proposals made which did not fit in with the thinking of the majority present. For example, in attendance were the chief executive officers or presidents of Litton Systems, Spar Aerospace, Control Data Canada and Noranda. The theme of the meeting was how the military has been starved of funds; Canada cannot "pull its weight" in NATO and other areas; equipment was outdated, numbers down, reserves and cadets sadly lacking support, while peace movements were getting huge sums to support their disrupting activities.

About six or eight similar meetings were held across Canada before the White Paper was presented, and several members of VOW and other peace organizations were invited. Apart from some unrecorded intervention by these people, there appears to have been no consideration of any alternative ways of dealing with the current unstable and threatening situation posed by the confrontation between the USA and USSR.

The White Paper itself is an expensive, richly illustrated, multi-coloured production. It includes graphs and tables and emotionally charged illustrations in the best comic book style. It has been widely criticized for unsubstantiated statements and statistics, for its assumptions: a) that the greatest threat to Canada today is a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union (contradicted by a recent poll taken by the Canadian Institute of International Peace and Security, CIIPS, which records that 72% of Canadians do not subscribe to that statement); and b) that military solutions including nuclear missiles as detriments are the only way in which disputes between nations can be settled. No alternatives are considered.

While there is considerable emphasis on the build-up of Soviet troops and arms, there is no mention of the increase in American armaments nor of the developments which have been initiated by the US — continued nuclear testing during the Soviet moratorium, 'Star Wars' and the militarization of space and the North, naval manoeuvres all over the world, etc.

Although many initiatives for disarmament, negotiations and cooperative actions have been proposed recently,

there is no mention of these alternatives in the defence document.

The growing military budget will increase by 2% above inflation rate each year and will amount to approximately 200 billion dollars (two hundred thousand million dollars — \$200,000,000,000) over a 15 year period. The White Paper asks for:

- \$6 billion for 10 to 12 nuclear powered submarines not including maintenance and operation;
- \$3 billion for 6 more frigates (\$500 million each);
- \$1.8 billion for new naval helicopters;
- \$1.6 billion for 300 new battle tanks;
- \$600 million for 30 minesweepers with sonar equipment;
- \$350 million for 10 more F18 aircraft;
- \$300 million for anti-submarine tracker aircraft; and much, much more.

It should not be difficult to balance some of these costs against what might more usefully be provided for Canadian families instead of military hardware for questionable uses.

A couple of years ago the Association of Mayors and Municipalities made a proposal to the Federal Government. Many of our major cities and towns are in desperate need of renewal of their public water supply, sewers, bridges, roads, waste disposal, etc. The Association proposed a five-year renewal programme at a cost of \$14 billion, paid for, in equal thirds, by provinces, municipalities, and the federal government. The two lower levels of government accepted, the Federal Government turned it down — less than \$5 billion was the Federal Government's share. The plan would provide 60,000 person-years of work. Those people would be off UIC and welfare and would be paying taxes, right across the country. For the cost of much less than nuclear subs, or tanks, and frigates.

There are, as we all know too well, cuts being made to medical, education, research, cultural, and other social services while Mr. Beatty gets his shopping list without much apparent opposition. [A fully equipped and staffed day care centre for 50 children might cost \$250,000.]

Here is an excerpt from the National Action Committee's letter to the Prime

Minister regarding the White Paper:

In light of the new spirit of cooperation between the USSR and the USA we are asking you to withdraw the Department of Defence White Paper. Instead of reaffirming our differences with the Soviet Union, escalating further the very dangerous arms race and increasing our economic military burden, we are asking you to adopt a more rational, humane and effective policy.

Already we can see a decline in government services as people live on the streets and line up for food. Far more jobs are created in responding to human needs in Canada and around the world than in military production. We also do not believe that more weapons make us more secure. We prefer non-provocative defense and nuclear free areas, particularly a nuclear free Arctic verified by all the Arctic nations.

The deployment of expensive nuclear-powered submarines we believe endangers the fragile ecosystem and violates the spirit if not the letter of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The cost of one submarine could radically improve life for the one million Canadian children who live below the poverty line.

Excerpts from The Voice of Women's statement regarding the White Paper follow:

Voice of Women (VOW) rejects *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada* for its outdated cold war rhetoric which offers nineteenth-century solutions to counter twenty-first century weapons.

We believe no country is secure unless people of all nations are free from fear.

We suggest alternatives to replace the military solutions which are all that the White Paper offers.

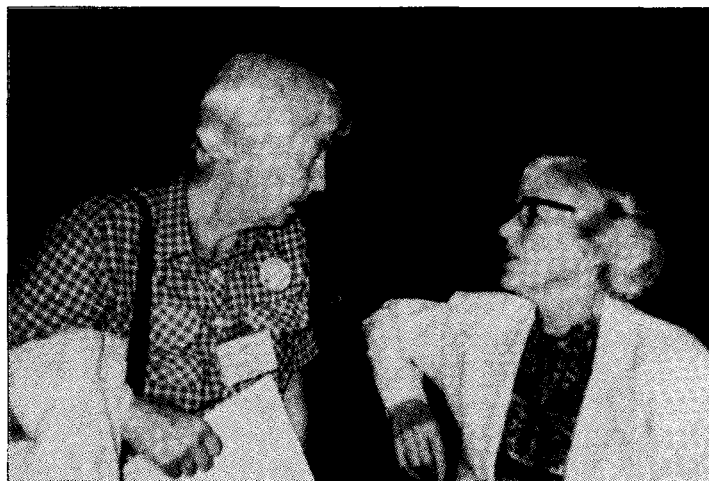
The required revisions are so basic that VOW supports public demand for its recall.

Voice of Women/La Voix des Femmes was founded as a national organization in 1960. VOW works for disarmament, international co-operation, responsible environmental policy, and human rights. We are represented at the United Nations as an NGO, and work with many other women's and peace groups across Canada and abroad. We have presented briefs,

have consulted with and lobbied governments for over 25 years.

We object to the white paper on the following grounds:

1. The rigid assumption of the Soviet Union as a perennial enemy despite recent progress in East-West relations.
2. The document is self-serving to the military establishment and defence-based industries, as only military solutions to international stresses are considered. No alternative views which were presented at Department of National Defence (DND) 'consultations' are even acknowledged.
3. In this nuclear age, society must recognize the participation of civilians in defence decisions, since we, not the military, are on the 'front line.' Defence policy is developed within the larger framework of this country's domestic and foreign policy. DND must follow these directives, not set or develop them.
4. It jeopardizes Canada's ability to act as an independent, sovereign nation; it confirms support of U.S. military requirements regardless of our own national interests.
5. Well-documented criticism has condemned the acquisition of nuclear submarines as being fiscally irresponsible, environmentally dangerous and potentially useless.
6. Canada's Arctic region is seriously endangered by the military and nuclear hazards of short-sighted continental defence projects.
7. The proposals sap Canada's economic vitality by developing capital intensive military projects rather than by increased job creation with consumer spin-offs, thereby starving urgent education, health and social programs.
8. It is an unbalanced, glossy, expensive



Kay Macpherson (left) and Muriel Duckworth at the Halifax Conference

- propaganda exercise, containing many inaccuracies which have been documented by several authorities (see letter by Bill Robinson, Project Ploughshares, *Globe & Mail*, July 7, 1987). Regrettably, the White Paper has already been summarized in "Peace and Security: Information Kit" as a highschool teaching tool. This should be withdrawn from circulation.
9. Proposed accelerated military spending (\$183 billion over 15 years) is authorized without public approval by a government elected on a program of serious endeavor for world peace.
 10. And finally, it runs counter to our established foreign policy which outlaws nuclear proliferation, offers peace-keeping services through the United Nations, and supports disarmament.

There are alternatives

The White Paper denies there are alternative ways of thinking and planning for Canada's security and independence. This is nonsense. Over the past 40 years, much research and thought has taken place to provide us with a new vision of peace with social justice. VOW, along with other peace groups, tried to acquaint the Minister of National Defence with these alternatives.¹ We again draw attention to what we think Canada should do:

- Find ways of forming non-military alliances, for example, with other Nordic countries to begin a coherent plan for a non-nuclear and demili-

tarized Arctic zone, with non-nuclear surveillance technology to ensure its observance.

- Work toward establishment of international data and communication centres where monitoring information from global collecting devices such as satellites would be available to all countries. This information flow to be under the control of ISMA or similar international agency.

- Continue to upgrade the Yellowknife seismic array and similar installations which will contribute to international monitoring of nuclear testing and will help to enforce a future comprehensive nuclear test ban.
- Bring home Canada's armed forces from Europe and develop a small professional standing force with competence and equipment to patrol and monitor Canadian air space, land, and ocean territories.
- Expand the core of personnel now available for international peacekeeping duties under the auspices of the United Nations.
- Work to demilitarize the North Atlantic so that shipping and lines of communication are under international civilian monitoring and control.
- Develop a high-tech civilian and commercial economy without reliance on a military-industrial base.

In conclusion:

VOW has always considered that military alliances contribute nothing to reaching peaceful solutions to international difficulties. Since 1947, NATO, NORAD, the Warsaw Pact and others have only increased tensions and divisions among nations. Now, forty years later, it is time Canada seriously considered seeking a peaceful role outside the East-West military alliances.

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Seven VOW members had the oppor-

tunity to present this Brief in person to the Minister of Defence, Perrin Beatty, in his riding office last November. The Minister responded at length, disagreeing with most of our points. He challenged our comments on the one-sided and inaccurate figures, and emphasized the inaccuracy of one of our own points.

The interview, which lasted nearly an hour, was *not* a meeting of minds, and we will have to find ways to find even small points on which we can agree. After all, this is what we are trying to get the nations to do. But non-violence, common security and cooperative moves for disarmament are not yet in Mr. Beatty's vocabulary.

Excerpt from a Statement by the Victoria Voice of Women, October 1987: "The White Paper has only one main point: that the USSR is the only military threat to Canada and that increasing Canada's military and continuing in NATO and NORAD are the only security we need.

This believe is stated without evidence, using visual propaganda, half-truths and lies. Throughout the paper the USSR is displayed as an ugly military power, using many photos of Soviet armaments and

misleading graphs. We are constantly confronted with statements about USSR's military buildup and long term political objectives. In contrast, there is not a single photo of USA military equipment or any mention that the USA has consistently led the global arms spiral, threatened the use of nuclear weapons as a basis of its foreign policy and invaded many countries in the last 45 years.

Canada's military is presented as everything from an answer to our regional economic ills, to a justification for our increasing arms exports, to the education of our young. No information is provided to show how many more people could be employed and educated in productive civilian industries, or that subsidizing useful technology for the third world would be equally profitable.

Nuclear submarines are presented as safe in spite of well-documented public information to the contrary. The CF-18 fighter, shown as 'state of the art technology,' is well-known to be a defective airplane we got stuck with because of the Defence Production Sharing Agreement — a treaty whose true costs are not explained in the paper.

In many ways the omissions are the most serious part of this political statement. First, there is no meaningful discussion of global or national disarmament proposals. Military neutrality or unilateral disarmament are dismissed out of hand with blatant hostility. No Canadian initiative such as 'suffocation of the arms race' is even mentioned. It needs to be repeated that presentation of the USSR as a major threat to the "Canadian way of life" is never substantiated and no evidence of the threat of military invasion is given. All the polarized cold war myths are perpetuated.

Without any serious consideration of international disarmament, it is not surprising that the paper does not examine what the real threats to Canadian security are, and may be in the rest of this century. The continuing militarization of our country without public consent, our role in militarizing the rest of the world, the increasing gap between the rich and poor, as individuals and as nations, the depletion of global resources, and the destruction of the earth's environment are the real challenges to our security and they are not even considered."

One woman's response to the struggle for peace in Central America

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