

Regional Variation in Attitudes Toward the Peace Movement and Nuclear Disarmament

by Sharon Froese Nielsen and Patricia Froese

The peace movement has continued to remain in the public eye for the last several years as an outward expression of people's concern over nuclear disarmament and related issues. Both of us have been interested and active in the peace movement and felt that it was important to examine various aspects of it in a scholarly fashion. The focus on regional variation in attitudes toward the peace movement and nuclear disarmament is part of a larger study which originally focussed on gender differences.¹

To begin with, we collected questionnaire data at a large university in Toronto. Nielsen's move to Cape Breton provided an opportunity to enlarge the scope of our investigation. We revised the original questionnaire and collected data in both Toronto and Cape Breton during the spring of 1985.

Questionnaires were distributed, during class time, to students in universities in both regions. The vast majority of student respondents were in their first and second years: 83% of Toronto respondents and 91% of Cape Breton respondents. In total, 433 students completed questionnaires. Of these, 155 were from Toronto and 278 were from Cape Breton. Overall, 242 respondents were male and 191 were female.

We were interested in examining the responses to two main pairs of questions:

- Whether or not you think it is successful, do you think the peace movement is or is not a good thing? [Response categories: yes, no, don't know];
- Why do you feel that way? [12 possible responses were provided with

the last one being "Other" with space provided to specify];

- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The best way to prevent nuclear war is for the super powers to continue their nuclear arms buildup. [Response categories: agree, disagree, don't know];
- Why do you feel that way? [12 possible responses were provided with the last one being "Other" with space provided to specify].

We hypothesized that we would find some differences in attitudes toward the peace movement and the concept of nuclear disarmament depending on region. We anticipated that the peace movement would receive relatively less support from respondents in Cape Breton as compared to respondents from Toronto. We also anticipated that the reasons they gave as to why would also vary by region. Moreover, we anticipated that the more anti-peace response categories would receive relatively more support from Cape Breton respondents than from Toronto respondents. Finally, we felt that the same pattern would be found regarding the issue of disarmament.

There are a number of reasons why we felt our findings would emerge in this way. The sociological literature tends to suggest that a more conservative attitude would be prevalent in areas which are more working class, Roman Catholic, rural, and isolated. As well, unemployment is extremely high in Cape Breton and would likely be seen as a more urgent problem than a more abstract problem such as peace and nuclear war. Moreover,

the peace movement itself is much more visible in Toronto. There are numerous public demonstrations which are well covered in the media. At the university there is also a small, but active and visible peace group. In contrast, the peace movement is much less visible in Cape Breton. Some demonstrations are held, but they do not receive the same proportional support. Nor is the issue of the peace movement and nuclear disarmament covered in the local media as frequently. And there is no actual on-campus peace group.

For these reasons, then, we felt it was reasonable to expect less support of the peace movement and more support of nuclear arms proliferation in Cape Breton. And because of the demographic differences between the two populations — especially as there are proportionately more middle class students at the Toronto university and proportionately more working class students at the Cape Breton university — we expected the two groups would vary in the reasons they provided as to why they felt the way they did.

Our results were very interesting. Overwhelmingly, people in both regions found the peace movement to be a good thing: 86.7% of Cape Breton respondents and 80.1% of Toronto respondents. The respondents were to indicate why they had evaluated the peace movement as they had, choosing one of the 12 possible response categories. The most popular responses for the Toronto respondents was the "other" category (14.9%). The modal category for Cape Breton respondents was "The peace movement is our only chance of preventing nuclear war/arms buildup" (24.2%); this was by far the most popular choice of Cape Breton respon-

dents.

The second pair of questions dealt with the concept of nuclear arms proliferation. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the "peace through strength" statement: *The best way to prevent nuclear war is for the superpowers to continue their nuclear arms buildup.*

Again, people in both regions responded in the same way. The vast majority of both Cape Breton and Toronto students disagreed with nuclear arms proliferation: 81.4% of Cape Breton respondents and 82.3% of Toronto respondents. When asked to indicate why they felt this way, the most popular response was the same for both groups: "The escalation of the arms buildup increases the possibility of a nuclear accident" (29.1% of Cape Breton responses, 21.5% of Toronto responses). As well, the second most frequently chosen response category was the same for both groups: "Any possibility of nuclear war is so horrendous that it must be avoided at all cost" (Cape Breton: 20.8%; Toronto: 17.7%). Moreover, the least frequently chosen response — chosen by less than 1% of Cape Breton respondents and by no Toronto ones — was that "limited nuclear war is possible and winnable."

We found these results to be particularly interesting as they did not provide support for our hypotheses. We had anticipated that there would be general support for the peace movement and disagreement with the concept of nuclear arms proliferation in both regions, but that there would be less support to be found in Cape Breton compared to Toronto. And we had expected that the nature of the support — the belief system informing the stances taken — would differ by region.

However, our findings in terms of region demonstrate a similarity of attitudes on these two related issues by the two groups of respondents. The majority of both groups evaluated the peace movement as a good thing and disagreed with nuclear arms proliferation. Moreover, the reasons chosen as to why were also essentially the same.

There are a number of possible explanations for the finding that no real regional variation in attitudes exists. For one, there may be methodological problems with the questionnaire itself. We listed every possible reason, for and

against, that we could think of. However, these may have been stated too generally or we may have inadvertently missed one or more. However, the questionnaire did serve to illustrate gender differences in terms of such attitudes.

It may be that there is no regional variation on these issues: perhaps the peace movement has been sufficiently active to have educated the entire population. Over the last few years, the media have covered the various peace talks, demonstrations and the like. Perhaps this media coverage has had the effect of raising the consciousness of people everywhere. Certainly the peace movement has long felt that the importance of the issue of peace was sufficient to transcend partisan political beliefs. It would seem, too, that the importance of this issue has also transcended some regional boundaries.

We argue, in an earlier discussion of gender differences, that to be effective the peace movement needs an ideological stance that encompasses all visions of peace.² In that case, we felt it important that the peace movement recognize the differences in vision as held by men and women. In the case of region, however, it would seem that the ideology of the peace movement is sufficiently broad to cover the different regional interests.

However, visions of peace do need to encompass the need for social equality. Peace without equality between men and women is surely a travesty. In the same way, peace that does not include equality between disparate regions is also surely a travesty. Peace and nuclear disarmament are imperative. For them to be effective, there also must be social equality and an eradication of disparity between the genders, between Canadian regions, and between the over- and under-developed regions of the world.

¹See Patricia Froese and Sharon Froese Nielsen, "Gender and Attitudes Toward the Peace Movement and Nuclear Disarmament," *Atlantis*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Fall 1986), pp. 129-135.

²op. cit.

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STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA: THE PERSONS AWARDS

The Persons Awards, which recognize outstanding contributions towards improving the status of women in Canada, were initiated in 1979 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Persons Case. On October 18, 1929, women in Canada won the legal right to be considered for appointment to the Senate. This victory was won through the efforts of the "famous five" Alberta women — Emily Murphy, Louis McKinney, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby and Henrietta Muir Edwards — who signed a petition requesting an amendment to the *British North America Act* to grant women "persons" status.

THE 1987 RECIPIENTS

Like those of previous years, 1987's recipients exemplify the courage, dedication and community spirit that characterized the "famous five" of the Persons Case. All made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian women. They are:

Margaret Catherine Harris, of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, has been involved for years with the Council of Women at all levels, including a term as National President. She was a founding member of the Canadian Council of Women Development Organization and the Family Planning Association of Saskatchewan, and was the first Chairperson of the Saskatchewan Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Jacqueline Laprise-Demers, of St-Félicien, Québec, has been active for many years in status of women activities in the region of Lac St-Jean. Founding secretary of the Union catholique des femmes rurales in 1948, she has also been provincial vice-president of the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFÉAS).

Frances Laracy, of Conception Harbour, Newfoundland, as President of the Women's Institutes of Newfoundland and Labrador, and as a Council Member of the Associated Country Women of the World, championed the cause of improved social and economic conditions for women, particularly those living in rural areas.

Kay Macpherson, of Toronto, Ontario, is a long-standing activist in the women's movement in Canada and played a key role in the establishment of Women for Political Action and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Long committed to the cause of peace and disarmament, she was prominent in founding the Voice of Women.

Norma E. Walmsley, of Wakefield, Québec, is a tireless promoter of women's involvement in the development process, and has been a long-time member of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. She also founded the MATCH International Centre to assist women in developing countries.

THE NOMINATION PROCESS

Nominations for the awards are submitted every year by individuals, women's groups and status of women committees within various organizations across Canada and are reviewed by a non-partisan selection committee which makes a recommendation to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. Nomination forms are now available and the deadline for submitting nominations is mid-April.

For further information concerning the 1988 Persons Awards, contact:

Status of Women Canada
151 Sparks Street
10th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1C3
(613) 995-7835.

CONDITION FÉMININE CANADA: LE PRIX DE L'AFFAIRE 'PERSONNE'

Le Prix de l'affaire 'personne' vise à honorer des individus qui se sont distingués par leur contribution à l'avancement de la cause féminine au Canada. Il a été décerné pour la première fois en 1979, lors du 50e anniversaire de la décision qui, le 18 octobre 1929, reconnaissait aux citoyennes du Canada le droit de siéger au Sénat. Cette victoire a été remportée grâce aux efforts de cinq Albertaines, soit Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby et Henrietta Muir Edwards, qui organisèrent une pétition afin de faire reconnaître aux femmes le statut de "personnes" dans l'*Acte de l'Amérique du Nord britannique*.

LES RÉCIPIENDIARES DE 1987

Tout comme les célèbres instigatrices de l'affaire 'personne,' les récipiendaires de 1987 sont des exemples de courage, de dévouement et d'esprit communautaire. Elles ont toutes contribué remarquablement à l'amélioration de la condition féminine. Ce sont:

Margaret Catherine Harris, a occupé différentes fonctions à tous les niveaux du Conseil des femmes, dont celle de présidente nationale, et fut l'une des fondatrices de l'Organisation de développement du Conseil national des femmes du Canada et de la *Family Planning Association of Saskatchewan*. Elle a également été la première présidente du Conseil consultatif de la situation de la femme de la Saskatchewan.

Jacqueline Laprise-Demers, de St-Félicien, Québec, s'occupe activement de la condition féminine dans la région du Lac St-Jean depuis de nombreuses années. Secrétaire fondatrice de l'Union catholique des femmes rurales en 1948, elle a plus tard occupé le poste de vice-présidente provinciale de l'Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFÉAS).

Frances Laracy, de Conception Harbour, Terre-Neuve, en tant que présidente des *Women's Institutes of Newfoundland and Labrador*, et membre du conseil de l'*Associated Country Women of the World*, a cherché à améliorer la condition socio-économique des femmes, tout particulièrement des femmes vivant en milieu rural.

Kay Macpherson, de Toronto, Ontario, pionnière du mouvement des femmes au Canada, a joué un rôle primordial dans la fondation du *Women for Political Action* et du Comité national d'action sur le statut de la femme. Elle se dévoue depuis très longtemps à la cause de la paix et du désarmement et a pris une part active à la fondation de l'organisation Voix des Femmes.

Norma Walmsley, de Wakefield, Québec, a travaillé sans relâche à promouvoir la participation des femmes au développement. Depuis longtemps membre de la Commission canadienne pour l'UNESCO, elle a fondé le Centre MATCH International pour aider les femmes des pays en voie de développement.

MISES EN CANDIDATURE

Chaque année, les candidatures proposées par des individus, des groupes féminins, ainsi que par des comités de la condition féminine de diverses institutions canadiennes, sont évaluées par un comité de sélection non partisan qui présente ensuite ses recommandations au ministre responsable de la Condition féminine. Les formulaires de mises en candidature sont disponibles. La date limite pour soumettre des candidatures est habituellement fixée à la mi-avril.

Pour plus d'information concernant le Prix de l'affaire 'personne' de 1988, communiquez avec: Condition féminine Canada, 151, rue Sparks, 10e étage, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 1C3 (613) 995-7835.