



# BOOK REVIEWS

## MILITARISM VERSUS FEMINISM: WRITINGS ON WOMEN AND WAR

Catherine Marshall, C. K. Ogden and  
Mary Sargant Florence. Edited by  
Margaret Kamester and Jo Vellacott.  
London: Virago Press, 1987.

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The women's movement today is grappling with a variety of peace-related issues, recognizing that peace is necessarily an important concern. One of the feminist dilemmas has to do with the issue of whether women are natural peacemakers, given their ability to give birth and create life, their role as nurturers. The peace movement, too, is having to recognize women's concerns, in the face of evidence that women's vision of peace differs from men's. Moreover, the peace movement has been given impetus by the work of such feminist pacifists as Helen Caldicott and Ursula Franklin.

This book examines the interconnectivity of feminism and militarism and makes the argument that the two are inextricably interwoven. The major thrust of the arguments presented is that "the more militaristic the society, the lower the status of women."

Catherine Marshall's "Women and War" argues that it is imperative to work actively for peace rather than merely trying to avoid war. She points out that people have not insisted that their rulers "should, positively and constructively, *make peace* — make the conditions that promote mutual trust and co-operation instead of acquiescing in conditions that promote mutual suspicion and enmity."

She suggests that women must "face and visualize the full horrors of war, ac-

cepting our share of responsibility as those who might have helped, had we cared enough." She cautions people to examine war honestly and to refuse "to be blinded by [the] glamour" of battle. Her major point is that we are all responsible for war and peace and that it is imperative for women to work actively for peace.

In "The Future of Women in Politics," Marshall takes her argument further, examining militarism and the role of women in changing the political climate. She defines the militarist as "one who believes in the supremacy of force, who justifies the use of power to compel submission to the desires of its possessor, without any further sanction than his own conviction that his desires be reasonable." Militarism, then, involves "the desire to dominate rather than to co-operate, to vanquish and humiliate the enemy rather than to convert him into a friend." She argues that women have a vital role to play in setting up new attitudes and politics based on cooperation instead of conflict. Women's lack of experience in the political arena is even seen as a possible advantage as our experience in the home is more likely to foster the values necessary for peace: men's attitudes and values are based on their experiences of providing for the family, while women's are based on giving and nurturing. Women recognize that "life means inevitably growth and change" and women would thus seem to be the more flexible in the political arena. Women's particular experience would make us well-suited to political life that involves working actively to set up the conditions necessary for peace.

Ogden and Florence's article, "Militarism versus Feminism," makes a convincing and broad-ranging argument that "Militarism has been the curse of women" and that militarism "must always produce an androcentric society, a society where the moral and social position of women is

that of an essentially servile and subordinate section of the community." Drawing on anthropological and sociological work, they go on to show that across time and culture, those societies where women fared worst were militaristic in nature. They discuss the ways in which the concept of militarism has corrupted or perverted every social institution: *government* ("the state is still constituted primarily as if for war"); *industry* ("men trained in the ethics of imperialism will apply that ethic to the advancement of their individual interests in the business world"); *religion* ("in spite of all that Christianity has done to soften the heart of the world it is doubtful whether any body of ethical teaching has so often been adapted to meet the requirements of militarists" and "militarism is quite capable of using the purest religious motives deliberately for its own purposes"); *education* ("the whole organization of our educational system is influenced by the obsessions of military administration" and, as a consequence, the average person "still thinks of the past in terms of warriors and battles"); *sports* (which encourage children to think in terms of killing, victory, competition); *women's status* (militarism encourages woman to "exhaust all her faculties in the ceaseless production of children that nations might have the warriors needed for aggression or defence"); and *the press* (which is more likely to be financially successful writing of war than of peace).

Ogden and Florence also note that "war is only one of the evils which can be grouped under [the] conception of militarism. War is but the outward sign of the military spirit.... Militarism is first and foremost a system." They call for women to recognize that militarism is the enemy that keeps women in subjection; therefore any hope of attaining equality must be linked to the eradication of militarism.

The arguments made throughout this

book are, on the whole, interesting, convincing, elegant. The most startling thing, however, is that these arguments were first published during World War I! The concepts discussed are extremely relevant today in feminists' search for understanding of peace, militarism, and women's role in peacemaking. The editors point out that:

*...the argument was really about whether women would prove themselves responsible citizens by accepting the male-defined support roles in peace and war, agreeing to bear and nurture the warriors; or whether they would insist on taking their supposed predisposition to nurturing and conciliation into the decision-making sphere, and*

*have the preservation of life become an important consideration in international relations.*

As an historical document, this book is invaluable: we do tend to think that the suffragists' movement was focussed almost exclusively on attaining the right to vote. Although the views espoused in this book were not prevalent at the turn of the century, they do point out that range of concerns evident in the feminist movement of the time. The introduction is especially useful for setting the remainder of the book into its historical context.

Because the book was written in the early 1900s, the rhetoric of the time, with its "heavy emphasis on an almost mystical quality of mothering," is evident. This

should not, however, deter us from examining the radical ideas presented.

Finally, the warning given in 1914 is frighteningly prophetic and important to remember now as we work for peace:

*Shells and machine guns were said to be an insurance for peace before war broke out, but today they are the munitions of war. The infants of today are destined to be the first and chief munitions of the [next] war.... No war in the past has ever produced such casualty lists as the present war ... but all this falls into insignificance with the possibilities presented by the next war.... If this thing is to go on, the human race as we know it today will be wiped off the surface of the planet.*

## WOMEN AND PEACE

Edited by Ruth Roach Pierson. London, New York, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987.

### *Milnor Alexander*

The task of reviewing *Women and Peace* is a very pleasant one for me. Having worked in the peace and women's movement for over 35 years, and having attended three international women's conferences, I feel myself to be in a particularly advantageous position to review the book. I was very glad to read a book with such a range of theoretical, historical, and practical perspectives on the subject. Ruth Roach Pierson of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education is to be commended for bringing it together.

The first contribution, by Berenice A. Carroll, raises the very interesting connections, both historical and theoretical, between feminism and pacifism. Since I worked as the director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's legislative office in Washington, D.C. from 1964 to 1966, I know the history of the WILPF very well, and even had the experience of talking once with Alice Paul about the WIL's position on ERA. And I talked several times with Dorothy Detzer when she was retired and living in Washington, and then in California. She wrote a fascinating account of her work for the WILPF in her book, *Appointment on the Hill* (Henry Holt & Co., N.Y., 1948).

I was not "aware" enough to be a pacifist during World War II (I was in college at the time), but I think I was *always* a feminist, and I began to see the connections to pacifism as I worked for the University Division of the YWCA and for the American Friends Service Committee in the 1950s. But it is true that many feminists still do not see the necessary correlation with the pacifist position. Berenice Carroll makes the case on the basis of the inextricable connection between patriarchy, dominance, and war, and also on the premise of inalienable rights.

Dorothy Thompson, in the second article, presents an overview of women, peace and history. Her survey is different than Sandi Cooper's in the fourth article, inasmuch as Thompson stresses that the support for war and opposition to it have been the province of *both* sexes. Thompson mentions the women warriors amongst the Celtic tribes during the Roman period, contrasting them with the Greenham Common women. In this connection, I would recommend the National Film Board film, *Behind the Veil*, to get a picture of the extent of female activity throughout history.

Micheline de Sève, in the third article, makes the case that pacifists are, in a sense, trapped between war as a logical consequence of relations of force and an intolerable servitude. She feels that feminists cannot ignore the dangers posed by militarism, nor be satisfied with "a mitigated form of pacifism which pretends to

reduce the panoply of weapons which are lethal in any number." This is what she calls "tranquilly playing Russian Roulette," with or without nuclear missiles.

Sandi E. Cooper's contribution on women's participation in European peace movements, and the struggle to prevent World War I, shows how important the role of women has been. It also shows how women peace activists varied among themselves as greatly as did men.

Nadine Lubelski-Bernard presents the case for the participation of women in the Belgian peace movement (1830-1914). Ursula Herrmann writes about the Social Democratic women in Germany and the struggle for peace before and during World War I. Judith Wishnia shows the French connection between feminism and pacifism. I cannot comment at length on all these articles, but suffice it to say that we in the English-speaking world need to know more of this history of women in other-language-worlds.

I was particularly interested in Jo Vellacott's article on feminist consciousness and the first world war. She shows the split within the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies before and during World War I, and asks whether it would have been different had the feminist pacifists been able to carry the majority within the National Union with them during the war. My additional question is how to change the power system so that when women do get in (e.g., Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meier, Indira Gandhi), they do not "out-do" the men. As has been