

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Naïve About US Influence in Haiti

I looked forward to and enjoyed reading Cary Hector's article (*Peace&Security*, Summer 1988) on Haiti. I was dismayed, though, at the seeming naïveté that was indicated by the scant reference to the part played by the US in the recent history of that country.... Their [US] interests were manifest in the fact that they supported Duvalier for many years and had not one word of condemnation about the deplorable working and living conditions that prevailed during his and his father's regimes.... I have been aware for many years of how many companies send goods to countries with poor or non-existent labour legislation and certainly Haiti was a favourite with many of them. Proof of that appeared in the Report on Business section of the *Globe and Mail*, 30 January 1988. In "Haiti retrenches as international aid cut off" we read that: "Many U.S. and international companies send electronics and textiles for assembly to Haiti, where the minimum wage is \$3.00 a day, thus lowering their labor costs. Haiti worked hard to attract these companies but recent political instability has frightened off some investment...." Apparently ... during those earlier, stable times, the US supported Duvalier while people who opposed him were imprisoned, tortured and murdered by the Ton Ton Macoutes. The general population was weakened by poverty, illiteracy and political powerlessness. The US looked on, as the dream of a democratically

elected government was shattered by violence and bloodshed. They have therefore ensured that the misery of the Duvalier times will return to Haiti, cheap labour will continue to be available and yet another country will have been saved from the democratic control of its own destiny. Cary Hector, how could you not have commented on such a negative influence when it played such an important role in the affairs of your country?

Jean Smith, Toronto

Selin's Critique of Feminist Peace Activists Blames the Victims

As a doctoral candidate in international politics who happens to be a woman, I can sympathize with the situation discussed by Shannon Selin in: "Could Women Really do a Better Job?" (*Peace&Security*, Spring 1988). She rightly contrasts the richness of the feminist peace movement with the relative dearth of women in responsible foreign policy positions and the strategic community in general. I was sorry to see that rather than addressing the structural causes for this phenomenon, or trying to find ways of bridging these two communities, Ms. Selin preferred not only to obscure the positions of feminist peace activists but to blame them, rather than the difficulties posed by what she admits is a male-dominated arms control establishment, for the lack of women in positions of power and influence.

... Selin notes, with no little condescension, the proliferation of feminist peace groups, while lumping them all together as a monolithic "women's movement." I would like to think that the diversity of the movement entails a certain respect for the potential for variation and sophistication of positions. Yet, Selin chooses to lump us all together in a single, uneducated mass.

The strategic community, concedes Selin, is male-dominated and would benefit from women's participation. But she fails to consider the possibility that there may be social and structural reasons why women do not enter peace and security fields. As a woman who has studied security and arms control extensively I have found that few women have had encouragement to study in military fields, and many women lack the confidence to feel that understanding strategic issues is within their competence. It is also a fact that many women, as well as many men, are alienated by the tendency of strategic studies to focus on the mechanics of violence rather than to question its use and abuse as an instrument of power. Many women find that the strategic community itself is not hospitable to people with alternative ideas on peace and security, and there exist those few who will seek to discredit a woman who questions the basic tenets of strategic thought, by slurring her competence as a woman.

Selin attacks the credibility of those with whom she disagrees by calling them "moral mothers," rather than treating them as colleagues who have their particular views on issues.... Not only does this attack the seriousness of the women's movement, but it also blames women for the fact that they are left out of political decision-making, an issue that Selin herself laments earlier in her article. This technique is known as blaming the victim.

Similarly, in dismissing feminist holistic views of politics – which see disarmament issues and social welfare issues as integrally related – as "utopian," Selin chooses to focus on what she perceives as the lunacy of the desire for profound social change, rather than to make the simple equation that since, as she herself admits,

this is a male-dominated world, politics tend to address male priorities. Selin asserts that feminists have a biologically determinist position that women are nicer human beings and thus would rule better, implying that the women's movement is chauvinist. The issue is not whether women are better fit to rule than men. The issue is that women, who have been, and continue to be, left out of positions of power and influence, might, if [they were] in power in large numbers, have the leverage to devote more resources to female policy concerns, such as child care and health.

Selin's article points to a broader problem. One of the ways in which advocates of arms control criticize peace activists, who disagree with their positions, is to belittle them as ignorant, naïve and utopian. It is implied that only those with a thorough education in international security and arms control are qualified to discuss such serious political matters as disarmament. The result of such an elitist position is that peace activists say, quite rightly, that the "bombs-and-rockets" people cannot talk to anybody who doesn't "speak their language." In such a climate, yes, Ms. Selin, ending the arms race is utopian. And whose fault is that?

Governments, not peace groups, have control over weapons. And if those in government do not allow disarmament to enter the range of possibilities, then disarmament is unrealistic. But to say that we cannot have disarmament is to say that human beings do not control this planet and do not control their own destiny. Technological determinism does not run this world – people do. And if arms control advocates disagree with that, so be it. But it is a valid viewpoint, and the cause of political stability is not served by discrediting peace activists as naïve.

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