

Peace Petition Caravan delivers 450,000 signatures to Ottawa

OTTAWA (CUP)—While prime minister Brian Mulroney ignored the pleas last week of hundreds of thousands of Canadians to put an end to Canada's cruise missile testing, he failed to discourage them from continuing their efforts.

Organizers of the Peace Petition Caravan campaign, which gathered nearly 450,000 signatures on a petition demanding a halt to cruise missile testing, say they are more determined than ever to change Canada's position in the nuclear arms race.

At a press conference Oct. 22, the organizers put on a brave face and said Mulroney's refusal did not disappoint them.

"We didn't expect it to happen overnight," said Bob Penner, spokesperson for the campaign and an activist with the Toronto Disarmament Network. "We felt the meeting with Mr. Mulroney was a success in that he said he would encourage more government consultation with the peace movement."

But one organizer later personally admitted he was disappointed with Mulroney's performance during the meeting with caravan participants. National campaign coordinator Michael Manolson said he hoped Mulroney would have responded directly to their demands, instead of reading from previously prepared speeches and shrugging off activists' questions.

"We did not go into the meeting in the hope that Mulroney would say, 'Oh my God! You got 450,000 signatures, I've seen the light, I'll stop the testing,'" Manolson said.

"We had no expectations. But I personally hoped he would have been more forthright with us and felt more comfortable dealing with the peace issue."

Manolson said the Peace Petition Caravan organizers and participants plan to organize a national conference for peace activists in Canada, which will most likely be held this spring. The activists want

to set up a national coalition of peace groups across the country to launch national campaigns for disarmament. The peace petition caravan campaign was the first national campaign undertaken by Canada's peace movement.

The bundles of petitions, wrapped neatly in boxes according to federal ridings, will be presented to the Speaker of the House shortly after Parliament resumes sitting. The petitions call for Canada to be declared a nuclear weapons free zone, that research and production of nuclear weapons be halted and that "wasteful spending" on arms be diverted to "human needs."

The petitions also seek a free vote in the House of Commons to approve these measures, but all three federal party leaders rejected the idea.

According to Manolson, Liberal leader John Turner admitted his party was "badly divided" on the issue of cruise testing and would review its position. NDP leader Ed Broadbent, whose party endorsed the campaign in its early stages, said he does not support the idea of a free vote because it would not alter the federal government's position.

Manolson said Mulroney pledged to conduct public hearings across Canada on the government's foreign and defence policies. Mulroney also promised to release a white paper on defence and a report prepared by external affairs minister Joe Clark, who conducted public hearings on disarmament earlier this year.

One participant in the campaign, Stephanie Sydiaha, said although the petitions did not prompt Mulroney to change his position, the campaign strengthened Canada's peace movement and encouraged people in small communities to set up local peace groups.

"People were overwhelmed when we passed through. It was like a band of gypsies travelling through town. Everyone got excited, as if the circus was coming," Sydiaha said.

A part-time arts student at the University of Saskatchewan, Sydiaha joined the caravan on the spur of the moment when it stopped in Saskatoon Oct. 6. "I was feeling kinda hopeless about the issue and wanted to connect with other people in order to empower myself," she said.

Sydiaha said she thinks the campaign heightened federal politicians' awareness of the peace movement's strength and support. "This isn't the end, it's the beginning of a whole different movement. That energy is going to keep spreading."

Manolson agreed. "About 450,000 signatures is not to be sneezed at. Before you make progress, you have to be recognized—it's kinda like having a big club and hitting politicians in the ass to let them know you exist," he said.

The East and West caravans left St. John's, Newfoundland and Vancouver, B.C. on Sept. 29 respectively. Five people in the West Coast caravan met the two people from the East Coast on Parliament Hill Oct. 20, where they were greeted by local peace activists.

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MUN sends students back to grade school

ST. JOHN'S (CUP)—Overcrowding and a lack of classroom space at Memorial University may force students to go back where they came from—grade school.

The university administration is considering the idea of purchasing an old grade school near the campus, which it has rented this term for first year English and psychology classes.

But Mary Barry, general studies English co-ordinator, said there are many problems in holding classes away from the university.

"It's difficult on the students and it's difficult on the faculty. There's no quiet workspace tutorials."

Barry said many students have

dropped morning slots at the school to take afternoon courses at the university. First year English is a requirement for every graduate at Memorial.

While general studies English classes will not be held at the school next semester, the university is anxious to use the property for extra classroom space, said Wayne Thistle, vice-President academic and finance. Enrolment is expected to climb higher in the coming years, he added.

Negotiations are now underway among the university, the school board and provincial government officials to buy the building. □

U of T discriminates against women staff

TORONTO (CUP)—Women staff at the University of Toronto make less money than their male counterparts, according to a report by the U of T staff association.

The report, released recently, compares the salaries of male and female administrative staff in secretarial, clerical and administrative positions.

"Yes, it really is true that women are discriminated against at the U of T. We finally have hard, cold facts," said Dominique Burs, editor of the UTSA newsletter.

"This is the first time we've actually had statistics. Before we did not have anything to back up our arguments. We've never had it this clear."

The report, based on information obtained from U of T's personnel office, says the majority of women on staff earn between \$15,000 and \$19,000 while the majority of men earn between \$25,000 and \$29,000.

There are twice as many female

staff as there are male at the U of T.

Statistics showed women made up 100 per cent of secretarial staff, the lowest income bracket and traditional female job ghetto.

Lois Reimer, the newly appointed officer for the Status of Women at the U of T, was not surprised by the report but said more information on the data used on job classifications and a profile of the staff were needed.

"I want to look carefully at the situation and see what can be done to improve representation of women at U of T," she said.

Reimer said one of the problems with the report was that it did not consider what percentage of women studied are mothers. Reimer said the years of career advancement, 20-30, coincide with child-bearing years.

"The choice between a woman's career and her children is like a catch-22," Reimer said. □