

# Violence lives in the system

by Marie Paturel

On December 6, 1989, a man entered the Université de Montréal campus. His sole purpose was to kill women — women whom he blamed for the failures in his life.

The response to this massacre was quick. Within several days vigils were held and press conferences were called across Canada. Women and men pointed out that this act was representative of violence women face in this society.

Unfortunately, as they say, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The backlash was just as swift. Some politicians, clergymen, student leaders, students, professors, academic administrators, etc., were quick in their actions to silence women's outcry against male violence towards women and try to present this massacre as the solitary act of a madman. For example:

- When the Dalhousie Student Union prepared a statement on the murders, the phrase "violence against women" was mentioned once and this only after a female councillor argued for the inclusion of such a statement. One

their own space to mourn and come to terms with this violent attack on women. Instead, they intentionally invaded these spaces and, in some places, verbally harassed women.

Individually, these acts may seem harmless. Some were not meant to silence women. But their collective effect was to deny the issue of violence against women.

The facts stand for themselves: 14 women were murdered, some were deliberately separated from the men. Lepine's words were, "I am looking for women" and "I hate you. You are all feminists." His actions were violent and directed specifically towards women.

There have been statements that this was an act of a solitary madman, not representative of the treatment of women by society, particularly universities. The chance of a young man, bursting into a university building, separating and shooting women while shouting anti-feminist/anti-women remarks is slim. But the possibility of being sexually assaulted, physically attacked, verbally harassed, and/or made the butt of so-called

etc. In response, a sit-in was organized by women who were then threatened with rape and physical violence. A "hit list" is now circulating with these women's names on it.

- A law professor at Queen's was the target of harassment and verbal threats from faculty and students because of her feminist teachings.

- After the Montreal massacre an effigy of a female engineering student with engineering tools imbedded in it was hung in public at a university.

- A cartoon in the University of New Brunswick school newspaper depicts a snowman holding an axe and a decapitated woman lies at his feet. The caption reads "Another liberated woman."

- One evening in the Grawood, a male student made comments to a friend. He explained that a great

bar scene would be a brawl and that the best way to start a brawl would be to hit a woman.

- A male student writes an article for the *Picaro* in which he rants and raves against feminists at the university because he feels they have ruined his chances of getting a job with his business degree. (He now writes a regular column for this university's newspaper).

- The Women's Studies board and doors of professors' offices at Mount Saint Vincent University have been repeatedly vandalized during the past year. The Mount also received threatening phone calls after the Montreal Massacre.

- Several members of Saint Mary's University's male varsity athletic teams had complaints of sexual harassment lodged against them and were brought before the sexual harassment committee. One has to wonder where the

SMU student president was during this incident when he stated that he has never seen any sexism at SMU.

- A poster with a woman's name and an outline of a female figure, with "Dead or Alive" on it were posted across the Dalhousie campus in response to letters by a woman criticizing the men at Dalhousie. Some people say the letters were a joke. The facts, the posters were not.

These are only the incidents I heard of — the ones I remembered. They are not separate little incidents. A lot of violence against women goes unreported on our campuses, and there are many things that university administrators feel are not in their best interests for the public (including students) to know about. Taken as a whole, these represent a much broader societal treatment of women.

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copy, posted on a bulletin board, had the words "against women" scratched off (the act of scratching out these words does not erase the gender of Lepine's victims nor the fact that they were killed solely because they were women).

- A sign which announced the Memorial Mass at Dalhousie had no mention of the gender of those people being mourned (one has to wonder why there was such fear of using the term woman or female).

- At several events across Canada, male students refused to honour the requests of women for

jokes because you are a female student is on the increase. Reports of incidents of violence or threats of violence against women on campuses across Canada have been increasing.

If one takes a look at recent anti-feminist/anti-women behaviour in university settings, one can see a definite trend. Here are just a few examples:

- The No Means No campaign at Queen's university where male students decided to rewrite the slogan and post it in their windows, "no means tie her up," and "no means kick her in the teeth,"

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## IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN ...

Elections for the following 1990/91 student union positions will be held on March 13, 14 and 15:

**President/Vice President** (run in teams)  
**Board of Governors Representatives** (2)  
**Senate Representatives**, 1 each from:

Arts  
Dentistry  
Graduate Studies  
Health Professions  
Law  
Management Studies  
Medicine  
Science



Nominations open Feb. 5 at 8:30 am. and close Feb. 26 at 4:30 pm. Forms and further information can be obtained from room 222 of the SUB or from Edythe McDermott, Chief Returning Officer, at 424-2146.

**This is your chance to make an impact on life at Dalhousie!**