

# SPECTRUM



Books are weapons

By Nik Carrier

Amid cutbacks being imposed by governments: federal, provincial and municipal - is an attack most people seem to have overlooked.

In cities like Fredericton, there have been proposals for more cutbacks to our devastated public library systems. And I've heard people argue that "something has to go," or "it's not exactly essential," or worst of all "nobody reads anymore anyway": all to justify library closures and cuts. This all flies in the face of the fact that, as students, reading is absolutely essential. And even after that, people don't just turn into mushrooms and stop nourishing their appetites for literature.

Did you ever wonder where libraries came from? Did they suddenly appear because rich and powerful people decided one day that it might be nice if all the little people had something to read?

In 19th century Britain, you were in the workforce by the time you were 12 and what education you received, was rudimentary and administered by the church. You worked 14 hours or more, six days a week. You lived in squalor and you were old and used up by the time you were 40.

Workers began to organize to defend themselves, to demand the eight hour day and improve their lives. That included fighting for education, literacy and books. It was in the offices' of the first unions that the library was born.

The idea of sharing knowledge and resources was as natural to these workers as breathing. Certainly some used this as a means of "getting ahead," but many believed that education should teach the working class to think for, and, as a class.

As the 19th century came to a close, things began to change. Bosses and their political stooges realized that leaving education and libraries in the hands of the workers was a bad idea. At the same time, they discovered each capitalist could get a profitable advantage over competitors by employing fewer workers to operate more complicated machinery. That meant better educated workers were needed, at least better educated in the things that the bosses thought they ought to know. So the state began to take control of education.

Building and running libraries was part of that American steel baron Andrew Carnegie, who is lionized as a "philanthropist". He used part of the fortune he screwed out of his workers to build 2800 libraries world wide. Maybe Carnegie was a do-gooder, just a rich guy trying to get through the eye of the needle. Maybe not.

The result was education and libraries became "public" and widespread, and controlled by the state. The worker run library was a place of hot debate. The public library was a place where you had to whisper. In the worker run library, education was a collective, class act whereas in the public library, it was isolated and atomized.

For the first time, Toronto is closing a branch. A poll shows that 70% of the users are workers who live in the suburbs and don't pay taxes in the City of Toronto. Of course, their bosses, the banks and corporate offices downtown/ don't pay any taxes, but that's another story.

The York Regional Public Library, has already reduced it's operating hours over the past few years. That means the library is becoming less and less accessible. And when you do manage to get there when it's open, you'll find fewer staff there to help you, fewer books in the system, etc. In Ontario they are proposing user fees. This will start with a charge to find books not in the local branch. But once instituted, the idea of paying a fee for a library card will soon follow. After all, who wants a bunch of moochers like unemployed workers hanging around all day, trying to improve themselves?

Demands for the system to cut deeper and deeper still will eventually mean closing local branches here in NB. Maybe it will start with the whole system closing down on Saturday, possibly no longer be open during hours when workers can get there and cost money to use. Students too, have felt the cuts. Soon we will have gone full circle and the bastards will have turned the clock back 150 years.

This is not inevitable. Library workers will not take cuts without a fight. When they do strike, we'll have to stand with them and demonstrate and organize against their library cuts/closures. Libraries came from a need of the working class. Books are weapons and we need them now more than ever. So go straight to the Harriet Irving Library and make your librarian's day by asking if they have a book about "How to fight against library cutbacks".

## Sharkey says...

Here's how you get a column in Spectrum.

1. Think of an original subject people might wanna read.
2. Write 3 samples of your proposed column
3. Gives it to da Editor-in-Chief
4. Let da Bruns Editorial Board vote on it.
5. It's ok'd or given back to ya for revisions to try again



## Opinion of the Week

# A women's peace platform for the 21st century and beyond

Women see a world without wars, weapons or violence. We see a society free of nuclear weapons, militarism and repression. All proposals emerging from the Earth Summit, the Population Conference, the Social Development Summit, and the Human Rights Conference require resources for implementation. The Platform for Action to be approved at the Beijing Women's Conference will need billions of dollars to implement. The only place to find these funds, to carry out the demands of all these meetings, is from the \$2 million per minute the world is currently spending on the military.

According to UNICEF, children and women bear the severe brunt of war, civil strife and ethnic conflict. During the past decade more than 1.5 million children were killed, over 4 million left homeless. . . and an estimated 10 million traumatized by conflict. Countless numbers of women and girls have been raped. There is one landmine for every 20 children to become amputees every day. They cost \$3 each to make and between \$300 and \$1000 to clear away. Africa has the highest concentration; Afghanistan has 10-15 million, Angola 9 million. We must ban the production and use of all land mines.

**THE WORLD SPENDS**

Billions per year

Golf	\$ 40
Wine	\$ 85
Beer	\$160
Cigarettes	\$400
Advertising	\$250
Military	\$800

**THE WORLD NEEDS**

Billions per year

Basic child health and nutrition	\$13
Primary education	\$ 6
Safe water and sanitation	\$ 9
Family planning	\$ 6

- Total** \$34
- In the United States, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes.
  - Of the world's 18 million refugees, 80% are women.
  - In Africa, few women receive wage payments though they cultivate 80% of the continent's food.
  - Global military spending equals the

combined income of the poorest half of humanity.

• One of every 5 people on earth lives in debilitating poverty and 70% of them are women.

• 100 million children (2/3 are girls) have no schools to attend, not even primary school.

• 32,000 children die every day largely from preventable hunger and illness.

### AS LONG AS THESE INEQUITIES EXIST THERE CAN BE NO PEACE.

Through women's eyes peace is not only the absence of war, but the presence of justice, caring and harmony. Peace requires the equal participation of women in all decision making -national and international- to be effective and permanent.

### WOMEN CALL FOR . . .

. . . creating a culture of peace. We reject all forms of violence including violence against women in the home, abuse of children, demeaning of human dignity, degradation of the environment. We call for an end to the arms trade, an immediate halt in the production, testing, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons.

. . . the reduction of every nation's military budget by 5% a year for 5 years, transferring the savings directly to support women's and human needs. After 5 years there will be \$1/2 billion a day to spend on providing health care, clean water, environmental clean up, literacy, job training, education, and courses in conflict resolution and nonviolence. At least 1% of those saved funds should be spent on the most pressing problems defined by women:

. . . conversion of military industries to civilian production and services which will promote equitable growth and reduce the potential for armed conflict.

. . . the United Nations always creating gender-balanced teams for negotiations of conflicts.

. . . all schools in all countries to offer peace studies and conflict resolution in primary grades along with reading, writing and arithmetic.

. . . a series of "cease fire" conferences and use of electronic communication to promote the elimination of all arms, including guns, and to locate and prevent nuclear dumping.

. . . nation states to embrace

multiculturalism and reject nationalism which is a cause of violence and war.

. . . a Women's Watch, an international civilian volunteer peace service to our countries and to the United Nations, trained in preventing conflict and in promoting human rights, peacemaking, reconstruction and reconciliation.

. . . reconstruction beyond war and violence by fostering cooperation between former combatants. We must empower former victims, dismantle institutions that create or perpetuate social injustice, collect and eliminate weapons, resolve problems of refugees, family reunification and forced migrations.

. . . the world's resources to be used for human and environmentally sustainable development, not for arms or guns. Money spent on weapons is money denied society.

. . . women recognize humanity as one family and the Earth, with its beauty and diversity, as our fragile home. Indigenous initiatives and processes, especially those initiated by women, for conflict resolution, must be supported and integrated in the peace process.

### WHAT WE CAN DO NOW

Using all the means in our power- individually and in groups- let the leaders of our countries know that we women are strong and serious when we demand that actions be taken to provide for our needs. Because our needs are society's needs.

• When human beings are secure our world will be secure.

• We call for human security to take precedence over national security.

• "The full and complete development of a country; the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields."

• Preamble, Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

• "Lethal weaponry has no place in a culture of peace. . . not in its entertainment media, or in the toys that help to socialize children. . ."

-Gender and the Agenda for Peace, GAP/1994/1 United Nations 9 Dec 94

• "The core of all peace processes is disarmament and demilitarization."

-Gender and the Agenda for Peace, GAP/1994/1 United Nations 9 Dec 94.

## Pride

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to be someone they are not, and all this fosters is resentment. Last, but not least, the association of homosexuality/bisexuality with child-molesters is perhaps one of the largest misperceptions in society. Pedophilia has received a tremendous amount of coverage in recent years, and its existence belies the hidden nature of child abuse. Unfortunately, gay and bisexual men and women have received plenty of unwanted and unjustified feedback due to a few pedophiles who were also homosexual/bisexual. In

point of fact, 95% of child molesters are heterosexual, but one does not see a lot of uproar over heterosexual adults and children in contact with each other. Yet some homophobia arises due to this social misperception.

Self-hatred (that can be rooted in a fear reaction) can also lead to homophobic reactions. What I mean by this, is that sometimes a person who is gay or bisexual, is taught that homosexuality and bisexuality are wrong, immoral, and a host of other negative perceptions at an early age.

This negative "education" may cause the individual to strike back at what he/she perceives as a "bad" group of people. In effect, this person desires to extinguish her/his sexual orientation, by being homophobic. Exposure to the positive aspects of homosexuality/bisexuality, such as leading productive lives or positive role models, may help lessen self-hatred.

These are just a few possible reasons for the persistence of homophobia. There are numerous others that would require extensive research and volumes of paper. Highlighting a few cases, will hopefully lead people to think about the subject.