

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



"Moral mothers" – Silly?

■ Shannon Selin's treatment of the question: "Could women really do a better job?" (*Peace & Security*, Spring 1988) makes some long assumptions and comes to unfortunate conclusions.

Selin names a number of activist women's groups in Canada and elsewhere to attest to the involvement of the women's movement in the field of peace and security. Unfortunately, she goes on to address unsubstantiated demands of feminists in general, caricaturizing them as the "moral mothers." It's a pity to see trivialized, a field which has a long historical tradition.

Selin correctly suggests that the issue for feminists is much more broad than mere equality of representation and opportunities. It centres, rather, on the claim "that women have something unique to offer to the policy process." However, she concludes that much of this claim to uniqueness is misguided if not dangerous, by supposedly creating as she puts it, a dichotomy between women/peace and men/war, by ignoring the seriousness of male security dilemmas, by creating false expectations of what women can do and by provoking a confrontation with men and with other women.

These conclusions are an unfortunate misreading of the feminist agenda for peace. Where is the evidence that individuals within this broad movement or groups like Voice of Women make claims only for their own sake, as against men, or against non-feminist women? In fact, most feminists describe the agenda for peace in inclusive terms, seeking social justice for all and shared decision-making, not the substitution of a new breed of female "heroes."

A key to a feminist approach is to look at systemic discrimination of women, not individual discrimination. Filmmaker Bonnie Sherr Klein, whose film *Speaking Our Peace* deals with women, and the twin goals of peace and empowerment, has described well the feminist agenda using sociological not individualistic terms. Selin fails to include such a sociopolitical analysis which goes beyond the "nature" and "nurture" discussion.

While Selin is within her prerogative as a researcher trained and professionally employed within the more traditionally defined field of arms control to accept the patriarchal security paradigm, it is indeed ironic that she blames feminists for increasing,

the likelihood that women ... will be sidelined into investigating 'soft' topics such as peace education or the social consequences on increased military spending ...

Selin makes no shattering disclosures to the feminist constituency in bemoaning "the old boy's club" in the arms control business. It would be more useful if she pursued the feminist agenda to challenge existing social structures of domination at every level, including one's place of work.

While feeling great sympathy for Shannon Selin's dilemma in the jaws of the male establishment, we also feel it is ultimately the responsibility of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security to deal with this issue more seriously than by publishing an essay that invokes a silly image of "moral mothers." *Janis Alton, Hania M. Fedorowicz, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, Ottawa*

Distortions For The Unwary

■ Regarding the "Letter from Jerusalem" by Véra Murray (*Peace & Security* Summer 1988): On the surface, it appears to be an objective report from a Jerusalem

resident. For the unversed and unwary, though, it contains many distortions:

The Old City was stated to have been in the hands of the Palestinians before the Six Day War of 1967. It was, in fact, in the hands of the Jordanians, who invaded and captured it in 1948. (Admittedly, a very large number of Jordanians are Palestinians, conventional usage, however, is not to refer to them as "Palestinians").

In dealing with the Old City of Jerusalem, Ms. Murray makes the staggering two statements that most Israelis have not been there for years, and that only Orthodox Jews still visit the Wailing Wall! Not only is there a heavily populated, rebuilt Jewish Quarter there but the Old City has been for twenty-one years a bustling area where many Israeli Jerusalemites shop and Israelis from all over the country visit. (There certainly has been some falling off of this since the recent "uprising, but I assume that the author was not referring to the past few months). As for the visits to the Wailing Wall, it is either ignorance or deliberate distortion to assert that only the Orthodox visit it. Jews from around the world and from Israel itself are constant visitors.

Ms. Murray alleges that many Israelis have never set foot in the occupied territories. It has been the daily habit of thousands of Israelis to travel regularly all through the occupied territories.

The author mistakenly states that half the Israelis, represented by Prime Minister Shamir, refuse to negotiate with the Palestinians. He has refused to negotiate with the PLO – a major distinction. The "other half" of the Israelis, represented by Foreign Minister Peres also refuse to negotiate with the PLO. Both of the "halves" referred to by Ms. Murray are ready and willing to negotiate with Palestinians and/or any other Arabs (apart from the PLO) who are willing to negotiate with them. Alas, except for the Egyptians, all have refused.

Finally, it is sad to read that Ms. Murray finds that "encounters" with her Israeli friends are no longer enjoyable. Sad, but considering her outlook, understandable!

Donald Carr, Toronto

Sanger's Scary Proposal

■ Clyde Sanger's idea (*Peace & Security*, Summer 1988) of giving ownership in the Arctic archipelago to the United Nations really scares me. The other UN trust territories are Namibia, which he concedes did not work out as planned, and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. In the latter case, the Americans assumed responsibility for looking after these Pacific people for the UN. In the process they deliberately tested the effects of radiation on them, and kept them in poverty.

The Americans would, I believe, jump at the chance to administer the Arctic for the UN. Think of all the problems it would solve for them, including not having to worry about negotiating a plutonium flight pathway from Europe to Japan.

Canada has already given notice that sovereign base lines have been drawn around the Arctic archipelago. Presumably, this was the first step in asserting that these are Canadian archipelagic waters. This would seem to be the reasonable approach to take. This would mean that Canada would define a sea lane through the North West Passage, and other states would have the right to use that sea lane providing they passed through it in an expeditious, non-polluting way.

Their submarines could pass through submerged providing Canada was notified of their presence and they were kept within the sea lane.

I do not believe that a more peaceful, secure world would result from acting on Sanger's Gift of the North imaginings.

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