LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Disparaging the peace movement?

Charlotte Gray, in "Home Grown Skirmishes" (Autumn 1991), presents her disparaging assessment of Canadian peace movements, especially their responses to the Persian Gulf crisis. Canadian Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (CPPNW) is one of the groups she criticizes. Our position on the Gulf war stems from our 1988 Mission Statement which says, "because of our concern for global health, we are committed to the prevention of war and to the promotion of non-violent means to resolve conflict." CPPNW's opposition to military action by the US-led coalition was founded upon reliable evidence that sanctions were working very effectively and likely would achieve Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait without resort to bombardment and invasion.

After the fighting, our firm conviction is that the human and material costs of modern warfare, both nuclear and "conventional," are so enormous that this world cannot continue to tolerate or support such methods for solving international problems any longer. CPPNW's clear, forthright statements were anything but "a mushy middle road," as suggested in the article.

Charlotte Gray misunderstands Canada's peace movement if she thinks it was in disarray during the crisis. The differences among the various groups are trivial in comparison to the many areas of agreement, especially their shared opposition to our country becoming an aggressive partner in the vicious and unnecessary Gulf War.

Public opinion was clearly opposed to the war before Canada joined the coalition. After the decision was made to send Canadian troops, however, public opinion shifted to support the coalition, because many people felt that it would be an act of national disloyalty to oppose a war in which Canada was engaged. For many peace workers it never was incongruous to be supportive of our armed forces who were in a war zone, under orders, and there through no fault of their own, and at the same time to oppose the Persian Gulf war.

Undoubtedly, the peace movement was short on alternatives to that war, as suggested by the author. Now the time is ripe for consideration of alternatives to all wars.

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"Home Grown Skirmishes" Found Wanting

A critical analysis, in *Peace&Security*, of policies advocated by groups and individuals in the peace movement, particularly in the context of the Gulf crisis, would be most welcome. It strikes me as central to the CIIPS mandate to carry out such critical challenges. Unfortunately, Charlotte Gray's piece, in my view, didn't come close to fulfilling the requirements of critical analysis. In fact, I regard it as an affront.

First, the article seriously misrepresents the status or condition of the peace movement. It is variously described as in "crisis," "disarray," "running out of power," "galvanized" by the war, and in a "brief frenzy." That there are difficulties, reassessments, debates and so on within the peace movement is certainly true, and welcome, but Ms. Gray's characterizations are simply caricatures that do not have even the remotest link to something that could be described as factual. They certainly have nothing to do with the peace group I'm most familiar with.

In Project Ploughshares, our membership is undiminished, fundraising is on track, our influence on policy issues such as arms transfers is substantial and growing in Canada and at the United Nations, we have a joint project with CIIPS on monitoring the arms industry, etc. Perhaps you would like to supplement Ms. Gray's venting with some real information in future issues.

Second, readers are told that "peace activists did not produce solutions." And just who was it that did produce the solutions? In the same issue, the article by Janice Gross Stein makes it clear that neither the war nor those who supported it produced any solutions: the physical and economic damage to the region will take a very long time to overcome, which means that "the prospects for redistribution of wealth between the rich and the poor, and the management of conflict that grows out of inequities of resource ownership, are hardly bright"; it is "also unlikely in the foreseeable future [that] political participation and democratization in the heartland of the Arab Middle East" will be expanded; and, it turns out, "the war has also made it more, not less, difficult to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." On top of all that, Saddam Hussein remains. Are these the solutions that "peace activists" failed to produce?

We advocated reliance on sanctions. There is, it is true, no guarantee that sanctions would have solved anything in the short or even long run. But I think it turns out that we were right to warn that direct military action would not solve the fundamental conflict issues, and that the quick expulsion of Saddam's forces from Kuwait would impose a level of human and physical damage that could not be justified.

Third, is Ms. Gray's characterization of Project Ploughshares as reflecting "turn-the-other-cheek