

Maud Vant Calls For Nuclear Free Zone

by Ken Burke

"There is a threat--a death threat--hanging over all our heads." Maud Vant left the small Green Room audience with no doubts as to her intentions during her September 17 talk on disarmament. "I want peace," she said in concluding, and repeated the words thrice for emphasis.

Vant, described by the Chronicle-Herald as "almost a friendly bully for peace," looks indeed like a woman resolved to end war. There is a great strength in the tremor which rises in her voice when she talks of children she met in Eastern Europe or says, "Canada will become a nuclear-free zone!"

Vant's commitment against war began with her painful experiences as an eight-year old during the London Blitz. She recently published a novel about these experiences, *The Year Begins With Winter*, and has donated all proceeds from the book to several Canadian peace groups. At 15, she joined the ban-the-bomb movement and worked for Bertrand Russell's World Peace Council. Now, during a leave of absence for her B.C. high school teaching job, she is criss-crossing the country to share her experiences with others.

Vant focussed on two main points during her talk--the need for Canada to declare itself a nuclear-free zone, and the genuine good she felt in the Czechoslovak people she met at this June's "World Assembly for Peace and Life Against Nuclear War" in Prague. She also spoke of the possible feelings of paranoia western countries surrounding the U.S.S.R. could be provoking in the soviet people and leaders.

During her visit to Prague as a Canadian delegate to the Assembly, Vant says she was given complete freedom of the city during her stay. She used this extensively as she roamed the city to talk to as many people as she could. "I found out what Czechoslovakia is really like," she said. "I found they are a very gentle, very loving, very kind people."

Vant was particularly struck with the children of the country, and their telling behaviour towards each other. "As I sat on a park bench, these children were playing non-aggressively, non-competitively around me," she said, obviously moved by the experience. "It was so beautiful."

"The Chzech people call their children flowers," she stated, "and they treat them like that--they guide them with gentleness and kindness."

Along with the positive desire for peace she felt in the Czechoslovaks she met, Vant returned with a heightened awareness of the paranoid nature of the cold war. "The Soviet Union," she said, "is totally surrounded--economically as well. It's a seige." In her talk she used a world map to show the almost-complete (except for Iran and Afghanistan) border of hostile states surrounding the U.S.S.R. "If someone was to surround my house, I'd be paranoid as well," she noted.

Vant steered clear of criticizing Russia or its satellites for human rights violations when asked a

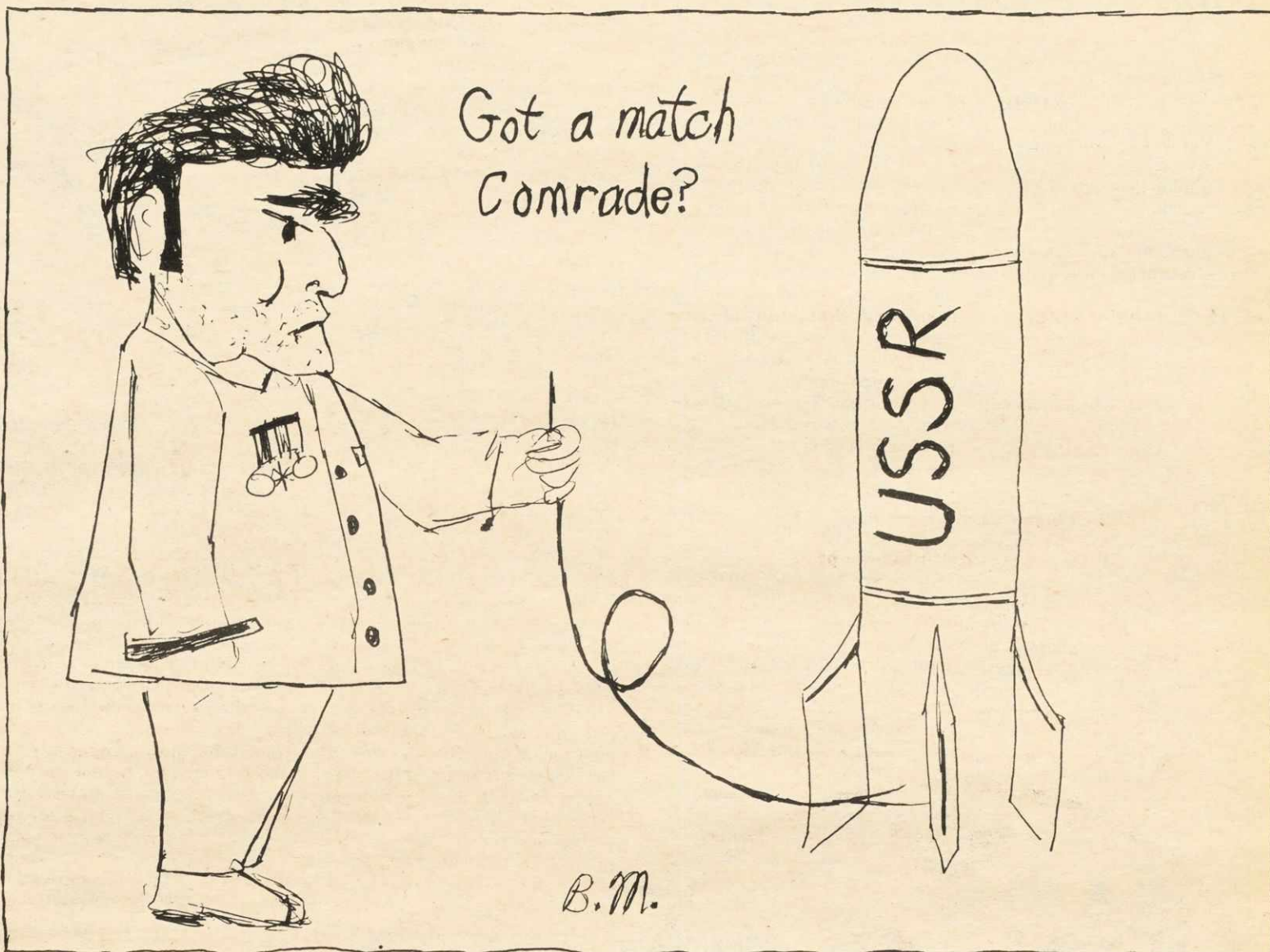
question on that matter, stating that her message was one of hope. "I can't say anything about it (the rights violations) because I don't know anything about it," she said, adding, "I said before I went, if I saw anything negative, I'd not repeat it; I'd only mention the positive."

The edginess of Russia and the pressure which she feels the "American Empire" is placing on them has convinced Vant more than ever that Canada must work toward becoming a nuclear-free zone. To this end she is heavily involved in the Peace Petition Caravan, a new peace network that aims to make a nuclear-free zone for the country a winning cause in the next federal election.

Vant gave several examples of large existing nuclear-free zones such as the Caribbean and Latin America (whose status is routinely violated by American bombers and submarines, said

Vant) as well as Antarctica. "We must do this," she urged, remarking that Canada would likely face pressure if a zone was declared. "The controlling interests will make us do something to toe the line," she said.

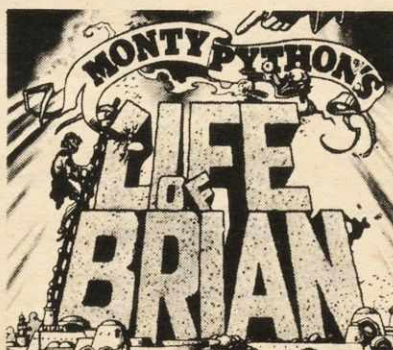
"We will have to be strong--very, very strong to be a nuclear-free zone," she said passionately. "But we will be one. We must."



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