

Berit As speaks on women in politics

by Gretchen Pohlkamp

Canadian electoral laws make it extremely difficult for women to gain equal representation at all levels of government in Canada, says Berit As, alternate member of the parliament of Norway. Canadian women are badly off, she says, and the only way to change this would be to change the system itself.

Speaking on Women in Politics at a special law hour, As said that the only way to get parliament to respond to the needs of women is to get more women involved in the decision making process. She related how the women of Norway have increased the percentage of women representatives from five percent in 1963 to 22.5 percent in 1979.

In the early sixties it became mod to join a political party and she was asked to represent three different parties running in the election. She found it difficult to decide which party to join because none of their platforms included all the policies she supported.

In 1967 in Montreal she was called arrogant for expecting a party to "fit her soul," and was advised to become a member of one of the parties she could tolerate and change it from within.

"You join the party in which you can get the farthest the fastest," says As. "And when you are offered a position on a committee, you take the committee with the fewest

members and the most money — you then have more power."

In the 1967 election in Norway, the women went to the heads of parties and told them that five percent representation was not enough. The men agreed and issued a declaration stating that more women should be nominated.

The result was an increase to 10 percent women elected.

When the women asked for a further endorsement in 1971, the leaders said that 10 percent representation was enough. But the women had a taste of politics and got mad. They used the Norwegian electoral laws to their benefit and increased the members to 15 percent women.

The men called the women undemocratic and changed the electoral laws to stop them. But the women maintained the 15 percent representation in the 1975 election. Since the new laws were equally restrictive for men, pressure was applied to have the laws changed back. The government did so without warning or debate and as secretly as possible.

When the women became aware of the reversal, they planned a massive campaign to educate women and to get them interested in politics. As a result they elected an unprecedented 22.5 percent women representatives.

Since that time, many men have said that there will never be democracy until 50 percent of the seats are held by women. Two of the major

political parties have set quotas of 40 percent women representatives.

She says the parties that set a quota for women will attract more women voters and more women members. Their platforms don't necessarily reflect the interests of women at first, but as more and more women join, more women's issues are addressed.

As says there are problems getting women involved in politics because they do not have enough time. She says women are expected to work, become educated, keep house, and join unions, for less money and rewards than men, and as a result they have no energy left to organize and gain equality.

"You can't do everything," says As. "You must learn to use the system and the rules to your advantage." It's hard to change the system from within, she says, but it is equally hard to start a new party and create change in that way.



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Dal disarmament referendum on way

by Paul Clark

In the spring of 1982 Dalhousie students will be asked to consider the colossal and horrifying issue of the worldwide buildup of nuclear arms and to decide in a referendum whether they support disarmament.

Student Council moved to hold the referendum Sunday night after a far reaching discussion which covered everything from the feasibility and meaningfulness of holding such a vote to Canadian attitudes towards war and the arms race.

The referendum's results will be sent to the three federal party leaders and the Secretary General of the United Nations. Next year's council will determine the wording of the ballot.

President Gord Owen introduced the motion which noted that the members of the U.N. had unanimously agreed to the concept of "general and complete disarmament" since 1961, but the arms race has since continued unabated at an estimated cost of \$450 billion a year.

The motion further said that a referendum seems to be the "logical, democratic and non-confrontational method for a mobilization of public opinion on the Dalhousie campus."

Dalhousie student Cathie MacDonald, a member of Project Ploughshares, a working group on Canadian military policy, spoke to the motion, emphasizing the gravity of the issue by pointing out that 20 times as much money is spent on arms than on world development needs. Forty percent of world research and development expenditures go into developing the military, she added. The combined foreign policies of the world's nations, she said, now point to an "unprecedented level of fear, tension and self-arming."

MacDonald said efforts toward arms control, banning of the testing of nuclear weapons, and peace treaties are all part of a multi-staged disarmament process which seeks to attain security not through increased weapons but international communication and agreements.

She said a referendum at Dalhousie would encourage students to think about different points of view of disarmament, as well as indicating to the Canadian government that people are considering and questioning their foreign policy.

Owen said that while 104 MPs have been recorded as supporting disarmament, no progress will be made unless

someone initiates action. Since this won't happen behind the Iron or Bamboo Curtains, he said Canada should be a leader in bringing it about.

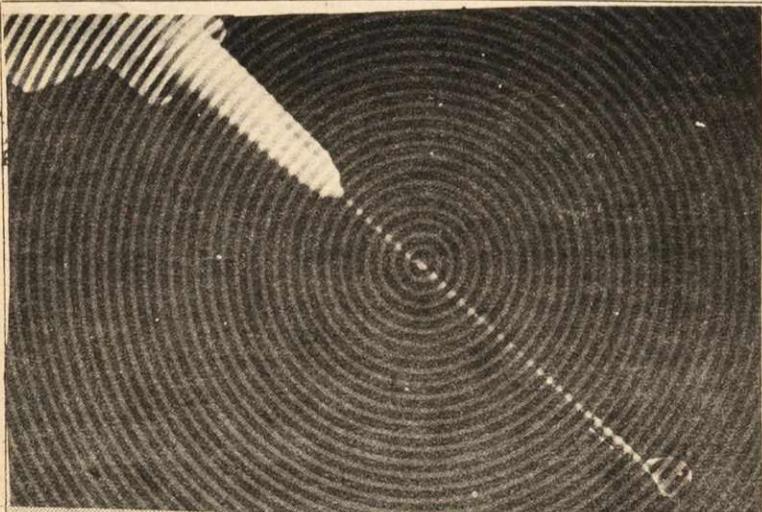
Vice-President Jeff Champion criticized the idea of a referendum as a frivolous way of treating a very serious problem.

Commerce rep Bruce McGowan also did not think students would take the question seriously and attacked the concept of disarmament as being unrealistic.

"You can't have disarmament. Natural aggression is in our blood," he said.

"Maybe it's in your blood," retorted someone in the crowd.

As the last person to speak before the vote was taken, Owen observed that though the National Union of Students is unanimously in favour of disarmament, "as president I don't know whether the majority of students at Dalhousie support disarmament or not." Having a referendum would be a way to find this out, he said. In order to ensure enough time to publicize the issue and make the referendum meaningful, he then moved it be held in the spring of 1982.



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