



WOMEN AND WARS

Feminists wish for justice and peace, two of the values in the Women's Global Charter for Humanity. However, even if there is not a "world war" as in the last century, there are multiple conflicts which cause just as much devastation, if not more. Thus, the members of the Status of Women Committee decided it was important to tackle this theme at the Réseau.

The Network - briefly

The Réseau des femmes met in Montreal on November 11 and 12 under the theme *Women and Wars*. On the first day, which was Remembrance Day, symbolized by wearing a red poppy, the participants shared a lesser known tradition, that of the white poppy. This tradition, which symbolizes a commitment to work towards a world free of violence where peace would reign, goes back to November 1933. At that time, with mounting international tensions, a group of women in England, the *Women's Cooperative Guild*, composed of mothers, widows and lovers of the men killed in World War I, worried that a war was about to start. So, they created the white poppy to demonstrate their wish for peace. Several hundred wars later, while the red poppy brings in funds for veterans, the goal of the white poppy is to demonstrate a determination to end armed conflicts.

"Since 2001, we have participated in the intensification of military action within the framework of a permanent war. Conflicts continue in about 50 countries or territories throughout the world and American military bases continue to multiply across the planet. Today, there are 702 bases in 130 countries and military budgets continue to expand. In Canada, while the budget was 14,8 billion dollars in 2005, it will reach 19 billion in 2009, an increase of 34%. War has taken on new forms. It has traveled from the battlefields to invade all forms of life, with a resulting increase in the number of civilian casualties particularly women, literally taken hostage or targeted during attacks, in the name of their freedom!

Since the year 2000, the World Women's March has demanded peace and demilitarization. In 2005, the women's movement included peace as a fundamental value in the Women's Global Charter for Humanity. Then, last October, at the international meeting of the World March of Women in Galice, the delegates retained as one of the four priority themes of the 2010 World March of Women, peace and demilitarization. Thus, the FIQ Status of Women Committee deemed it important to present the members of the Réseau with a feminist approach to war." Michèle Boisclair, 1st Vice President and Executive officer in charge of the Status of Women Sector, opened the Réseau des femmes with these words. ■

WAR BABIES... BORN FROM HATRED*



After watching this documentary, the participants at the Réseau des femmes meeting were speechless. There are no words to express the feelings that these accounts provoke. It is a reality too often ignored, rarely seen on the small screen, too horrifying to describe.

In this documentary made by Raymonde Provencher, the spectator accompanies Ryan, a young Canadian from Bangladesh, who returns to his country of origin in order to clarify the circumstances surrounding his birth. He finds out that he was a "war baby" and that his father was in fact a Pakistani soldier who raped his mother. Raymonde Provencher presents deeply moving accounts of women who have been raped and children born of hatred. Whether it is in Nicaragua, South Korea, Rwanda, Bangladesh or in Bosnia, the tragedy remains the same.

Throughout history, women have been considered alternately as a "spoils of war", "bargaining chip", "warrior's prize" and "battlefield". Rape is used to humiliate, dishonour and demoralize the enemy. It is also a means of military propaganda. It is part of the genocide carried out in Rwanda and an instrument of terror in Haiti. More recently, it was part of a deliberate policy of purification and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It was only in 1993, then in 1994, in the bylaws of the two international criminal tribunals created to judge the crimes committed in ex-Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, that rape in time of war is explicitly mentioned in the definition of crimes against humanity.

* Raymonde Provencher, *War babies... Nés de la haine*, Macumba International inc., 2002, <www.macumbainternational.com/2_4.php> (Last consultation : November 23, 2008).

NEWS FROM THE STATUS OF WOMEN SECTOR

No more Bill C-484's The right to an abortion is threatened again!

In July 1989, a first historical demonstration took place in Montreal in support of Chantal Daigle who wanted to end her pregnancy while her ex-husband had asked for an injunction to prevent her from having an abortion. Nineteen years later, Quebecers gathered in the same spot to once again defend the right of women to end a pregnancy. Thus, on September 28, more than 5 000 people participated in the demonstration "Don't play with women's rights - No more Bill C-484's" to remind the future government that women did not intend to regress 20 years in the past. Young and old, women and men clearly confirmed their opposition to any bill that threatens the right to an abortion.

The next day, Stephen Harper, during his electoral campaign, made a firm commitment "not to re-open, or allow anyone to re-open the debate on abortion" which testifies to the impact of the citizens' mobilization.

Nevertheless, a few weeks later, the delegates at the Conservative Party Convention adopted resolution P-207 which is a re-make of Bill C-484. Aware that the threat is real, the participants at the Réseau des femmes promised to remain vigilant in the coming weeks.

In addition, another threat looms for abortion and reproductive health services for women. Indeed, the Quebec government adopted a regulation according to which abortions could only be performed in public institutions and in specialized medical clinics (CMS).

Women's centres could therefore no longer perform abortions unless they were converted to CMS, centres which, by definition, are made for profit centres and must meet the criteria of profitability. Therefore, it must be ensured that the offer of services in public institutions throughout Quebec be sufficient for women to have access to quality and free abortions. ■



Provincial coalition against sexist advertisements

The Coalition nationale contre les publicités sexistes, a coalition of more than 120 organizations and provincial and regional groups, was launched on October 9. Indeed, the union representatives on the Status of Women committees from various unions, including the FIQ, concerned with the flagrant increase in the use of women's bodies in all kinds of advertising, decided to create an organization that could react quickly and publicly to denounce sexist advertising and demand its removal.

The first campaign targeted the 2008-2009 fall and winter Browns catalog as well as its publicity boards in bus shelters on which are often found oversexed women. In one particular case, a woman appeared with feet and hands tied to a target in front of a man preparing to throw a weapon. The coalition circulated a standard letter, encouraging all those who disagree with the marketing of women's bodies to send it to Browns. The women of the Réseau have sent nearly 100 letters. Since, Browns announced that it was removing the advertising boards, probably considering that the bad publicity was not to their advantage. This first campaign has therefore been a success.

The next time that an advertisement offends you, contact the coalition to let them know. In addition, you can join the CNCPS as an individual or your union can become an associate member. Soon you will be able to consult the web site of the coalition at <www.cncps.org> for more information. In the mean time, you can consult the Federation's web site at <www.fiqsante.qc.ca>. ■

A FIQ union representative made a poster summarizing quite well the demonstration's message: "Not the pope, nor a judge, nor a physician, nor a cardinal, it's for women to decide."





Photo: FFQ

“ For us, the link between militarization and patriarchy has become so obvious that our refusal as women and feminists of everything that war and militarization represents in our private and political lives. [...] Our refusal of wars that have been and are carried out on the backs and stomach of women, is a refusal to be used as mass producers of cannon fodder, sent en masse to work in arms-producing factories, and then sent home once the war is over. We want to break the silence of prostitutes, violated as we violate a territory, cry out with the women whose children are deformed by chemical weapons or radiation. [...] It is not missiles, bombs, assault tanks, military jobs, nor all the rest of their death machine which will give people social services, daycare services, lodging, decent and useful jobs, living and working conditions for which we have been fighting for a long time.” (our translation)

Collectif féministe anti-militariste de Québec (1984), cité dans Dumont et Toupin, *La pensée féministe au Québec*, Anthologie 1900-1985.



Nancy Burrows, coordinator and member of the comité Femmes et mondialisation de la Fédération des femmes du Québec.

IMPACT OF WARS ON WOMEN

Nancy Burrows, Liason Agent at the International Secretariat of the World Women's March from 1998 to 2006, and currently coordinator and member of the comité Femmes et mondialisation de la Fédération des femmes du Québec, presented the current state of the feminist reflection on the management of war to the participants at the Réseau des femmes.

Beyond the statistics and numbers, war is the foremost cause of millions of human tragedies. Entering the fray, the Status of Women Committee asked the participants the following question : “What are the specific impacts of war for women?” All the identified impacts were confirmed during the conference given by Nancy Burrows, who described them as follows :

- In what is commonly referred to as “modern” wars the number of civilian casualties is higher than that of military casualties and the civilian casualties are mostly women and children. According to an Amnesty International report, the number of female casualties from armed conflicts has increased from 5% during World War I to 50% during World War II and nearly 80% during the wars of the 1990's.
- Women are systematically victims of sexual violence and rape, a means used by soldiers as a war weapon.
- There is an increase in :
 - from the draft to sexual ends, accompanied by the propagation of AIDS and the various diseases associated with prostitution;
 - prostitution surrounding military bases or encampments during armed conflicts. We are helping to regulate “official” houses of prostitution serving... the rest periods of warriors!
- Women must take care of everyday living activities, children, food... and during a war these tasks become very difficult and often dangerous.
- Women are becoming refugees in great numbers (large numbers of displacements in difficult conditions, life in camps, etc.).
- Women find themselves single parents after a war and often have to deal with the loss of a loved one (husband, son, children or parents, etc.).
- Domestic violence increases during armed conflicts.
- Fundamentalisms (of all kinds) increase during war time weakening the situation of women (denial of fundamental human rights, etc.).

The speaker explained that it is important to situate war within a social system that dominates and excludes women, a patriarchal system. The feminist movement joins in forgery against war as a solution to conflicts and favours alternative proposals to war.

According to the Fédération des femmes du Québec, if those who aspire to justice and peace, two strong values in the Women's Global Charter for Humanity, they cannot help but ask themselves and collectively reflect on the war and the militarization of the world. This is what the women of the Réseau have undertaken to do. ■

A LITTLE HISTORY

Nathalie Wallman and Annie Pinard, members of the Status of Women Committee were animators for an historical quiz on women's struggles. Here are some of the questions that were asked followed by the answers which allow us to remember together the battles fought not so long ago.!

In what year did Quebec women obtain the right to vote in a provincial election?

In 1940. Here is an example of the type of objection raised by Cardinal Villeneuve against the right of women to vote

"We are not in favour of women having a political vote :

- 1) because it goes against family unity and the familial hierarchy;
- 2) because the right to vote exposes a women to all the passions and adventures of electioneering..."

In what year were the first shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence set up?

In 1975. It was also International Women's Year, the adoption of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the official banning of all discrimination based on sex.

In 1974, a large coalition introduced a Quebec tradition of a special date for women. What is the date?

International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time in Quebec by a large coalition of women and union groups on March 8, 1974.

Which female MNA put an end to legal incapacity for women in 1964?

Claire Kirkland Casgrain presented Bill 16, adopted in 1964, which abolished a woman's obligation to obey her husband, recognizing her role as a partner in the material and moral direction of the family and recognizing full capacity of her civil rights.

In what year did abortion cease to be considered a crime in Canada?

In 1988, the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion by declaring article 251, which made abortion illegal, unconstitutional. Indeed, as of 1969, only therapeutic abortions approved by a committee of three physicians were authorized.

When was the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ) formed?

In 1966, the Fédération des femmes du Québec was created. In 1973, the Council on the Status of Women was

created, which some people, like Mrs. Ravary, editorial writer for *Chatelaine* magazine would like to see disappear.

Which groups were restricted from joining a union following the Professional Syndicats Act in 1924?

Minors and married women. The father or the husband of a woman had to sign the membership application. One woman even remembers needing her husband's signature to join a union in 1972.

In what year did the word "person" written in the British North American Act start to also apply to women?

In 1929, following a decision from the Privacy Council of London.

What is the name of the woman who opposed Maurice Duplessis and demanded that family allowances be addressed to women?

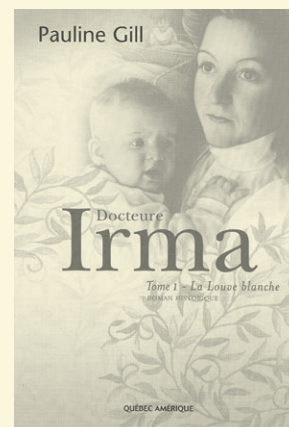
Thérèse Casgrain in 1945. Duplessis had previously declared this law unconstitutional "because it infringes on the rights of the father, head of the family and sole administrator of community property for married couples."

In what year did the concept of parental authority replace that of paternal authority in the Civil Code?

In 1977. Before this date, the mother's signature was not legally required for all decisions regarding children.

In what year were women no longer obliged to take their husband's name?

In 1981, after the announcement of Bill 89 which established equality between spouses in the management of family property and the education of children. Women keep their name when married, can choose their place of residence, are jointly responsible for debts during the marriage. The law allows children to have their mother's name. ■



AT THE HEART OF THE RÉSEAU

Claire Alarie, member of the Status of Women Committee, shared with the participants her deep feelings for *Docteure Irma*, an historical novel written by Pauline Gill on the life of Irma Levasseur (1878-1964), the first female physician to obtain the right to practice in Quebec.

At the turn of the 20th century, children under two years of age were not admitted to hospitals and physicians who made house calls were too expensive. One out of three children died before the age of two of dysentery, pneumonia and malnutrition. Irma Levasseur saw three of her brothers die in this way.

This biography tells the story of a fighter whose project was to open a free pediatric hospital for children, rich or poor, catholic or not, white or of colour, who would receive care. She fought in a world where women had no rights, not even the right to speak. She was forced to go to the United States to get her medical degree, because at the turn of the 20th century, women did not have access to the medical profession in Quebec, under the pretext that they were too sensitive to practice medicine. On returning to Quebec in 1900, she had to wait three years before getting the right to practice.

Her courage is an inspiration for everyone who believes that it is possible to change the world in which we live. Irma Levasseur's fight is part of the fight to end injustice and inequality.

Enjoy the book! ■

