

What Can Women Do for Peace?

"As socialist women, we are especially engaged for a peaceful world, not because we are of a more peaceful nature than men but because of our own struggle for liberation arising from our special disadvantages in society. We recognize very clearly the need for basic values such as liberty, social justice and solidarity, which can only become a reality in a more peaceful world."

(Socialist International Women Bulletin No. 1/81, p.2-3)

The idea that women will be able to make a special contribution for peace may be a matter of doubt to many people, but to many others it is a matter of conviction because of the qualities and attributes which have been traditionally cultivated in women and often denied to men such as those of loving, caring and nurturing.

The campaign which the U.N.O. started in 1975 for women's integration in development had as a principal objective not only to utilize women's potential for productive work but also to give them the opportunity for administrative work in which they might prove to be more successful than men in securing peace and general welfare.

In the "Socialist International Women", Bulletin 2/81, two articles on education for peace are worth mentioning because they give practical recommendations regarding this topic. The first article, by Helvi Saarinen and Jean Tansey (pp. 16-17), recommends the following:

1. Developing a spirit of cooperation and solidarity in sports, instead of one of competition and nationalism.
2. Freeing school curricula from all racism, sexual discrimination and religious fanaticism.
3. Banishing violence from films and television programs.
4. Giving more factual information about war, its causes and results.
5. Establishing relations between the sexes, as well as between peoples, based on friendship and cooperation rather than dominance and aggression, since no true friendship can exist between a dominant person and a dominated one.

The second article by Alva Myrdal (pp. 22-23), warns against the idealization of motherhood and the fostering of what has been called "womb mysticism", which, when taken to its extreme, is a reverse form of sex discrimination in favor of women. "We must subject these tendencies", says the author, "to a

thorough going criticism, for the idealization of women leads only too easily to the isolation of women".

A similar danger comes from limiting women's lives, as though "motherhood" were all that counted as meaningful purpose — ideas that are sometimes preached as a doctrine.

"For all their blissfulness, the years with children can be troublesome too... Many young women today are imprisoned in child minding against their own will. But no matter how enriching these experiences are for a period of time, the lack of change of experience of outside interests and opportunities for further education, should never lead to an idealization of this role. There is a very real risk that it could lead to a standstill for women in the long term."

Other important points recommended by Alva Myrdal are:

1. A restructuring of the defence system should mean placing more emphasis on what is really important, namely a more secure protection of our population, i.e. civil defence and local cooperation for survival. For this purpose, a short service period would be required of both young men and young women as a form of defence force to protect our policy of neutrality.
2. Encouraging and generalizing a condemnation of the corrupting and destructive cult of tough manliness, which is fostered within the military forces.

In Lebanon, the horrors endured by the population during the 8-year-war should have created by now a general attitude of abhorrence to war, particularly because it evolved into terrorism in its varied atrocious forms: assassinations, kidnappings, sniping, wholesale massacres, the use of booby-trapped cars and other explosive weapons, destruction, and the burning and plundering of property.

Here as elsewhere we have to fight the destructive cult of tough manliness which persists in the traditional hero-worship of the "abadaye", the tough, aggressive, pugnacious fellow.

More destructive still has been the influence of terrorist political systems and parties which persuade people, through bribery and luring promises, to take terrorism and guerrilla warfare as a profession. To these parties, destruction and assassination become the shortest way to world power and domination. Their adherents may forget that the violence they practice may also result in their own destruction.

The above discussion, though presented by women and meant to awaken women's awareness on the risks of war, does not fail to show that the protest movement is not just an issue for women. Everybody must participate, not least of all men with their heritage of military traditions and thinking.