

Mayor tells Island women to go for power

By Carolyn Ryan

Maybe Ottawa mayor Marion Dewar's latest Charlottetown appearance wasn't as exciting as her recent dancing debut in the rock video "Apocalypse Now."

But her audience didn't think so Thursday night.

Sixty people, most of them women, sat silent except for frequent appreciative murmurs as the 56-year old former Public Health Nurse told them there was "not a person in this room incapable of running for public office."

"You do have the skills (to govern)," she said, "It's just that society doesn't recognize them as skills."

Dewar was in town through the sponsorship of the UPEI Women's Studies Group, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, and the Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women, and spoke in the Coles Building on the topic of "Women and Politics: Women in Power".

"It's not a case of waiting for the power to make decisions, but of taking the responsibility to respond to problems."

The woman with the animated face continued, "If we don't accept the responsibility, then yes, this planet will disappear. If we do, it will be a better and happier world."

Dewar entered politics in 1972 after 15 years of being a "traditional" stay-at-home wife and mother. She believes the qualities needed to run a household, such as common sense, empathy, and the ability to juggle a limited budget to accommodate essential needs, are exactly what's needed to run a government.

"We have to have more confidence in our own ability," she stressed, saying drily, "After all, look how well the men are doing!"

Dewar is a feminist, and eagerly defined it in answer to a question: "If being a feminist is caring about social justice, then we should all be feminists."

She regrets the fact that society has judged feminism to be domineering and a rejection of maleness. "All it is is being proud of being a woman."

The mayor of Ottawa, for six years, thinks that while the election of 28 women to the House of Commons is a giant step forward, Canada shouldn't be smug about its progressivism.

"The Conservative Party didn't realize it was going to sweep Quebec," she explains, "so they allowed women to get the nominations there. And come September 4 ... Whoopie!"

Still, Dewar says Canadian

women have power. She relates how she, Flora MacDonald, Margaret Mitchell, Judy Erola, and others, after realizing the politicians hadn't included women in the first draft of the new Charter of Rights, held meetings and lobbied. Two weeks later, women had a place in the constitution.

"American women have been trying to get an amendment like that for years!" she says.

In the Ottawa municipality, six of the sixteen Councillors are now women. After the last election, when reporters converged on Dewar for her reaction to the number, she recalls saying, "I'll be satisfied when 51% of this Council is female."

Now, after a pause, she realizes, "That's eight and a half Councillors."

Recently Dewar's Council has been discussing pornography and prostitution, looking for a solution to an "increasingly unacceptable problem."

"These women are not the problem," she protests, "they are the victims, and the symptoms of a problem." She tells her male colleagues they should be looking at eliminating causes rather than strengthening the Criminal Code to crack down on 'offenders'.

Over the last three or four years, the woman who danced with a son-in-law in her backyard while a neighbour shot footage for a video promoting peace (says she, "I'd do anything for peace") has been doing her homework on the disarmament movement.

She says that, while women have a biologically stronger desire to nurture and protect the next generation, men act from a different sociological level. She points out that little boys are taught to play competitive war games, while girls are not.

"Yet somehow we know that sooner or later men are going to use (the weapons) they've been building up; history has shown us that."

To antagonists who tell her she's 'naive' to fight for peace, Dewar replies, "Maybe the countries saying that equal strength will bring world security are being naive. I'm a little old to be called that myself."

Dewar knows it's hard to jump into office, unprepared are most women unfortunately. For her first three months as a Councillor, a seat she won in three weeks of campaigning by a 60-vote margin, she admits she was

terrified. The panic stopped when her husband suggested she act as she did at home, and speak up.

After that period of adjustment, she never looked back, and is now in her sixth year as mayor.

Still, Dewar doesn't think anyone, mayor or not, has the right to impose beliefs on others, and refuses to become embroiled in emotional

discussion involving discrimination. Instead, she will "bow out and reenter at a different level".

"My aim is not to win every argument, but to stimulate thought," she says.

She seems to have done just that. During her mayoralty she's set up a position in Ottawa City Hall for Affirmative Action, covering three divisions: women, the

handicapped, and visible minorities.

She led a move to encourage private-sector development in downtown Ottawa after federal decentralization left huge amounts of office space empty, and vigorously promotes health and education programs.

In another capacity, she's also supporting a document written by Catholic women

asking Church officials to discuss women's role in Catholicism. Although the plea was turned down last week, she looks forward to the day when women will be let in on decision-making process in religion.

But even more than that, she hopes the time will come when women don't "have to be 'let in'" on anything.

Soviet visitors ask UPEI to "help stop the madness"

By Carolyn Ryan

When asked to say "Cheese" for a photograph on Monday Ildar Akhtamzian smiled and said, "We would rather say 'Freeze'. It is only by Freeze that we will have cheese in the future."

That was a rather cryptic start to the visit to UPEI of two Soviet historians discussing the arms race and Soviet-Canada relations on the occasion of World Disarmament Week.

Akhtamzian and his colleague Victor Mal'kov are part of a five-member delegation of Soviet academics who were invited to the region by the Association of Atlantic Universities.

The pioneer experience started a week ago with a weekend seminar in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, which Mal'kov hopes

week previously in Moscow, and commented on how alike the two groups of students seemed, "especially the girls in the second row."

This turned out to be one of the themes of the visit — that Canadians and Russians are merely "neighbours over the pole" and should join together along with the other world powers, to fight a common enemy. The enemy, says Mal'kov, is nuclear annihilation.

The common enemy image was used again when a student asked about the USSR's commitment to the Communist Manifesto, which calls for a communist world, and wanted an explanation of how this would fit in with a Soviet desire for peace.

Akhtamzian thought the issues of disarmament and ideology should be separated entirely, saying that an acquaintance from New York had once told him that "Communism and capitalism are simply a matter of book-keeping".

"Disarmament is a matter of life and death. It should be above these differences," he asserted.

The academics offered a seemingly uncomplicated three-step program for a halt to the arms race. The first step is a complete freeze in production. The second is a pledge on the part of all powers never to be the first to use nuclear weapons, and the third is an immediate stop to the modernization and testing of nuclear weaponry.

Participants in an evening panel discussion in the Duffy Amphitheatre concluded that this was far from being an easy task, though.

One problem, said Akhtamzian, is that the current level of technology is no way corresponds to the level of political understanding between nations.

"Viewing peace in one way which is commonly accepted, as reducing tensions between the United States and the USSR," said UPEI History prof Reg Stuart, "talks would be difficult because of the mutual distrust that has been built up over the years."

Student panel representative Randy Gass agreed, saying both countries have the "urge to bargain from a position of strength."

Even then, he said, "We could get rid of the weapons, but the technology would still be around for someone else to use."

Still, there is hope, according to Island historian Harry Baglole, the third UPEI member of the panel.

"It's possible for even ancient enmities to change," he said, giving the example of our current allies of Japan and Germany.

"We have to wage the war on the arms race the same way the war on slave trade was waged early in American history," said the organizer of last year's Island Peace March.

"Both concepts are great evils."

The panel discussion had a few hostile moments, as when Akhtamzian listed the US's "allowing talks on chemical weaponry, Anti-satellite weapons, military activity in the Indian Ocean, and Conventional Arms Transfers to die" as "soldiers of peace and detente now listed as Missing in Action."

Stuart objected to this, saying, "Professor Akhtamzian has been giving us a litany of reasons why we can't trust the United States. The American government has been saying the same things about the Soviets."

Many of the 130 members of the audience applauded this, but not Political Studies chair Gary Webster.

"During the Reagan administration at least," he said, "the Soviet Union has proven to be more honourable in disarmament issues."

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Professors Mal'kov and Akhtamzian. (Photo: Guardian)

will be "the first swallow in an approaching spring" of concern over disarmament in the Atlantic provinces.

Both historians have a background in International relations. Mal'kov is a researcher and part-time teacher at the Institute of General History in Moscow, specializing in the history of American social and labour movements. Akhtamzian lectures in the history of international relations at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, but his "personal cup of tea" is the disarmament question.

The two spoke to about 100 students Monday morning, Mal'kov about his book, the *History of Canada 1918-1945*, just published in Russia and Akhtamzian about disarmament.

Before beginning, Akhtamzian looked around the room, which he said was about the size of one he had lectured to a

The Netted Gem will not be published next week. We are writing midterms and organising a conference of the Atlantic Region Canadian University Press.

We apologize for any inconvenience this causes.