Bonnie Sherr Klein
& Terri Nash's

Speaking Our Peace

Speaking Our Peace, a new hour-long documentary from Studio D of the National Film Board, combines the directorial talents of Bonnie Sherr Klein (*Not A Love Story*) and Terri Nash (*If You Love This Planet*) with the scriptwriting skills of Gloria Demers (*Behind The Veil*). The result is a carefully structured and provocative essay on the current global crisis seen through the eyes of dedicated women working for lasting peace. The strength of the film lies in the range of its analysis and the inspiring personalities of the women featured in it.

The opening images shot at Greenham Common, England, establish not only the decentralized, grass-roots basis for 'a different vision of peace' but also the contrasting iconography and methods by which that vision is expressed. As thousands of women surround the fence that surrounds the U.S. Air Force base (home of 32 nuclear missiles), their songs, flowers, banners, vitality and obvious affection for one another make the enclosed hi-tech hardware and buildings seem sterile, worthless, and completely out of place. We know, of course, that these and other nuclear missiles are stockpiled "to keep the peace" – or so the militarist vision of peace-keeping would have us believe. To counter that perspective, the filmmakers simultaneously unravel the extensive web of militarism while weaving their own network of insights, linkages and human bonds.

Militarism depends on a populace that is both deferential to authority and steeped in fear and distrust of some "other." *Speaking Our Peace* confronts both these psychological tendencies by highlighting women peace activists who challenge existing power structures and concepts, and who effectively establish communication links with women around the world. Dr. Ursula Franklin, a physicist and professor of engineering at the University of Toronto, pinpoints the difference between militarism – a "threat system," "a way of saying do what I say or else" – and feminism, which is "an experience that integrates diversity," "that tries to enhance cooperation and respect differences." As one of the founders of the Canadian peace organization The Voice of Women/La Voix des femmes in 1960, Dr. Franklin goes to the heart of the problem by discussing militarism's need for the concept of enemy. "We have to realize," she says, "how essential the concept of enemy is for those who are mutual enemies. You can see how well it has served both the Soviet Union and the United States, because for both it has provided the excuse for not dealing with a perfectly legitimate dissent and the need for reorganizing their social structures." Given the post-war technological transformations in the Soviet Union and the United States, Dr. Franklin argues that "in both cases, the external enemy was a lovely possibility of not dealing with urgent social problems, and both would find it horrible if the other side would give up. They would have to look for another enemy."

To show us the human face of this "enemy," *Speaking Our Peace* travels to Moscow, following the activities of two Canadian peace-activists who seek to establish communication links with women behind the Iron Curtain. Muriel Duckworth, a community organizer from Halifax and a long-time friend of Dr. Franklin, and Kathleen Wallace-Deering, a Vancouver women who works with Project Ploughshares, talk with Soviet women like Mira Petrovskaya of the USSR Institute for U.S. and Canada Studies, and Olga Lisikova, a pilot in World War Two who flew rescue missions into the besieged Leningrad. Archival footage reveals the terrible suffering of the Soviet people fighting the Nazis – in which more than 22 million Russians died. As narrator Margot Kidder tells us, "War is not an unknown to the Russian people. It is not something that happened to someone else, in some other place." This context underscores the sincerity of Petrovskaya's remark that "the Soviet Union had a very terrible experience with the war and people don't want it, nobody's preparing to fight. People are preparing to defend themselves." Lisikova adds that "the Soviet people are not afraid of American people, or Canadian people, or European people" but there are "certain individuals in the West" who have "a pathological hatred to the socialist countries" and "they are trying to persuade their own people that the Soviet people is different from them, which it's not."

To reveal human similarities, the camera singles out Soviets engaged in those daily activities that link us all : selecting food at the market, the care of children, the joys of Russian couples on holiday. The shots would be cliched were it not for the necessity of countering the notion of a dehumanized "Soviet menace" so well-constructed in the West. Of course, as Dr. Franklin notes : "If people like us talk about the uselessness and senselessness of the arms race, and the senselessness of that concept of an enomy, in this 'win/lose', 'either/or' picture, if you aren't against the enemy you must be for it. You cannot be against the institution of the enemy." Author and peace activist Margaret Laurence adds that "it seems so strange to me that some of the peace groups, and many individuals such as myself, are said by some people to be taken part in subversive activities. If peace is subversive, in God's name what is war ?"

Having established a basis for shifting the terms of the debate – from East-West polarization, to militarism vs. peaceful communication and cooperation, the second half of the film concentrates on the extent to which World War Three has already begun. As narrator Kidder informs us : "In the half-hour since this film began, the military around the world has spent $45 million dollars. In that same length of time, a thousand children have died of starvation, one every two seconds." Solanges Vincent, author of two books on economic policy, examines the links between militarism and economic dependance in the Third World – a relationship by which client states serve to benefit the suppliers of food, equipment and arms. The relative "peace of exploitation", a "peace of domination and repression" can't last. Says Solanges Vincent, "Without a more equal sharing of resources, there'll be no peace, no matter how much we protest against the Cruise or the MX."

But World War Three's victims are not only the starving poor, left to die in order to feed the military machine. Darlene Keju, an activist from the Marshall Islands, tells of the effects on her people of the nuclear testing conducted in the south Pacific by the U.S. military between 1946 and 1958. Besides the multiple tumors, the inedible fruit and fish, and the displacement of the people from islands vaporized by bombing, Keju describes a new phenomenon of foetal abnormalities linked to nuclear pollution : the birth of what are being called "jelly-fish babies" that are "nothing like a human at all." Following her frightening description, the narration reminds us that "we all now carry a small amount of cancer-causing plutonium in our bodies" as a result of worldwide nuclear testing. "World War Three is already claiming its victims."

One of the hallmarks of the work of Studio D is that its films inevitably circle back to focus on the Canadian link to whatever issues are being explored. In this case, Dr. Rosalie Bertell, a biostatistician and Roman Catholic run, raises the issue of uranium mining and milling – a central process in the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Canada, the world's largest exporter of uranium, is thus not only contributing to worldwide nuclear pollution in all its forms, but is also contaminating its own people. *Speaking Our Peace* takes us to Elliott Lake, Ont. where the mining of uranium has so polluted the Serpent River and the surrounding lands that the area will remain radioactive "for much longer than the entire span of

photo : Martin Franklin

● The ladies who speak their peace : directors Terri Nash and Bonnie Klein

recorded history." Similarly, at Port Hope, Ont., home of Eldorado Nuclear Ltd. where uranium is refined for use in nuclear power plants, the nuclear wastes spilled into the lake have ruined a once-vital source of clean drinking water and sports-fishing. Even Scarborough, Ont., is revealed to be a "random victim of the nuclear age" – a subdivision whose residents have recently discovered that their homes are located on radioactive soil contaminated by radium wastes buried there years ago. The sight of Dr. Bertell holding a ticking geiger counter over the soil in a "normal"-looking backyard is both eerie and upsetting. The fear in the residents' eyes as they watch her speaks volumes.

As its title suggests, ***Speaking Our Peace*** is a very verbal film ; the visuals do not transcend the function of illustrating the narration or simply documenting the speakers. While this style is perhaps appropriate to the film's purpose, it does at times make for a preponderance of talking-heads. Nevertheless, it is important what we learn of the work of these dedicated women, and Studio D plans a series of shorter films focusing on each of the women here.

Unfortunately, the weakest section of ***Speaking Our Peace*** appears near its end, with the introduction of Ottawa mayor Marian Dewar, who urges women to take up issues beyond partisan politics and to work toward resolving polarized issues through face-to-face communication. While the inclusion of Dewar is intended to illustrate a different style for using power within the political system – a style which emphasizes real talk and personal respect between adversaries – this section seems somehow misplaced. Following as it does upon the horrific, faceless and unceasing workings of global militarism, Dewar's message appears simplistic.

Moreover, by ending the film with a figure whose political role (no matter what her individual style) is solidly within the political mainstream, the filmmakers go against the grain of their own argument, which (unless I have misunderstood), is, in part, voiced early on by one of the women at Greenham Common – Helen Johns. In describing the women who initiated the now-legendary and on-going demonstration, Johns says : "They were deeply concerned women who couldn't any longer expect politicians or leaders of groups to do things for them, and they decided to do something for themselves."

By examining the insanity of militarism, by documenting the insights and vision of several women who dare to speak their peace, and by revealing the terrible extent to which World War Three is already claiming its victims, ***Speaking Our Peace*** inspires action. And provides an effective argument against the notion that the current nuclear arms build-up is somehow for our "protection."

Joyce Nelson ●

Speaking Our Peace **d.** Bonnie Sherr Klein, Terri Nash **exec. p.** Kathleen Shannon **p.** Bonnie Sherr Klein, Margaret Pettigrew **sc.** Gloria Demers, Gwynne Basen, Klein, Nash **narr.** Margot Kidder **ed.** Janice Brown **cam.** Susan Trow, Sandi Sissel **loc. sd.** Diane Carriere **res. cons.** Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg **asst. cam.** Zoe Dirse **asst. film ed.** Petra Valier **add. cam.** Martin Duckworth, Anne Cottringer **archival res.** Terri Nash **mus.** Judy Henderson **arr. & syn.** Jeff Fisher **mus. rec.** Louis Hone **mus. ed.** Diane Le Floc'h **sd. ed.** Jacqueline Newell, Wojtek Klis **re-rec.** Jean-Pierre Joutal **unit admin.** Gisèle Guilbaut **Col.** 16mm., **running time :** 60 mins. **p.c. & dist.** National Film Board.

Paul Donovan's

Def-Con 4

Here's something nice for a change : a Canadian exploitation movie that isn't dead on its feet. ***Def-Con 4*** is an ultra-low-budget, action flick that moves right along and even displays flashes of intelligence now and then. It isn't way up there with, say, ***Night of the Living Dead***, or even on a par with early Cronenberg. It's got problems all over the place and its strengths aren't really as strong as they should be, but, if you've got a taste for schlock in the first place, ***Def-Con 4*** is good enough to make the problems worth putting up with.

Its greatest strength is its storyline. Basically, it's the science-fiction standard about the post-nuclear-holocaust good guys trying to get to safety and running afoul of the newly-created slave state, which makes it fairly predictable and, if you know science fiction, fairly trite. But ***Def-Con 4*** doesn't arrive at its slave state until it's almost half over and it uses its build-up time well, creating a set of dramatic crises that are enjoyable in themselves and that develop character and reverse our expectations to give weight to what comes later.

We start with three astronauts going quietly mad in an armed satellite. Captain Walker (John Walsch) is the hero-type – cool, calm and conventionally handsome, yet he's the one who doesn't want to push the button when World War III starts. Jordan (Kate Lynch) should be the love interest, but she's written and played (excellently on both counts) with a sardonic comic edge that, early on, makes it clear that she's not going to melt into anybody's arms. The astronauts should be our group hero, but when the ship semi-crashes two months after the bombs have stopped falling, Jordan goes into a coma and Walker gets killed right away. This leaves Howe (Tim Choate), the twitchy techie, to fulfill the role of hero and he's no Mad Max. Faced with the realities of cannibalism and capture by Vinny (Maury Chaykin), a barbarous lout who keeps a private-school girl locked in his basement, he persists in attempts at civilized behavoir.

When Howe, Vinny and J.J. (Lenore Zann), the girl in the basement, set off for the space capsule, they get captured by the minions of J.J.'s ex-boyfriend, Gideon (Kevin King), preppy psychotic and leader of the slave-state. It's here that the story turns predictable, but writer-director Paul Donovan keeps on trying for surprises large and small. The public hanging with Gideon offering to let one of his victims go free if he'll pull the cord on the others is no cliched situation, nor is Howe's response : he agrees to do it to save his skin, not because he sees it as a way to free the others. A fairly standard manhandle-the-female-prisoners shot turns comic when Vinny, bound, stares hungrily at Jordan's breast and the camera holds on her barely-perceptible amazed and disgusted reaction, typical of the quirky humor that runs through the picture. The revolt of the slaves, almost guaranteed to succeed in the world of the B movie, fails utterly. The final showdown : villain with his knife at the heroine's throat telling hero he hasn't the guts to do anything about it, turns out, for the only time in living memory, exactly as the villain predicts. The surprises run all through the movie and they're its second big strength.

The third is enthusiasm. Though ***Def-Con 4*** looks like it was made for next to nothing, that only really works against it a couple of times : in the shots of the too-fake severed hand and the foil-lined, red-lit tunnel meant to be part of the capsule interior. For the rest, Donovan, or somebody, came up with an effective way to show World War III using only simple computer graphics and TV screens going from picture to snow and the art department did good jobs on Vinny's armored house and home-made tank and on Gideon's shantytown. Make-up and costume departments likewise did convincing work and the actors are, for the most part, well-cast (especially Jeff Pustil as the no. 2 thug) and uniformly enthusiastic.

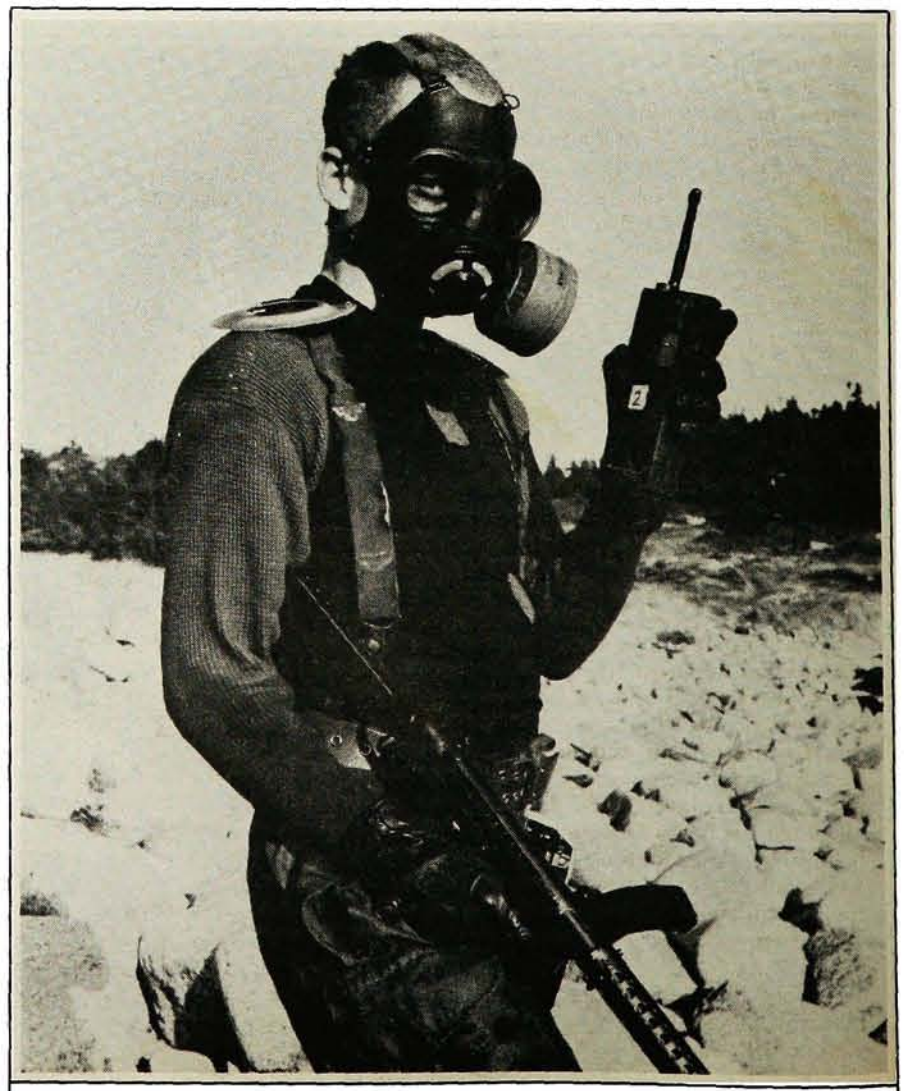
But I said the film has problems and it has. Some of them are endemic to the low-budget movie, like the woodenness of John Walsch and the high-school amateurism of Kevin King, who is so much the posturing little boy you can't imagine how he ever got to be leader, or the miscasting of Lenore Zann who is simply too old for the role. But most of them seem to stem from flaws in both writing and directing. There is a lack of coverage in some sequences, leaving them a bit too flat to work. Some scenes, notably the mob panting for the public hanging, go on too long and reveal that the crowd isn't really as worked up as it's supposed to be. More to the point, some of Donovan's ideas misfire. Venal Vinny steps completely out of character in refusing to save himself by hanging the others and later joins the good guys. We are shown a book he's writing and it's meant to show he has some sort of soul, but it's far too little and far too late. Similarly, we're never shown what changes Howe into a fighter, though we are given a good scene of his first act of personal violence, showing how very hard for him it is to kill.

Occasionally, there's a scene which just doesn't work at all. Jordan's surreptitious attempt to give Gideon a lethal injection might have worked in a movie where she was the trusted physician, but here, with mutual distrust their only emotion, his trap has no point and makes him look as stupid as she does for falling for it. At the end, Donovan's handling of the final confrontation cheats us of the pleasure of a splashy end for the villain (being vaporized in an A-blast is not, in villain terms, a particularly splashy end) and denies the hero his final trial and triumph so that, in retrospect, the movie seems to lack a strong center.

Despite the flaws, ***Def-Con 4*** still manages to be more interesting and original than anything recently churned out by our usual crew of schlockmeisters and, if Donovan keeps this up – ***Def-Con*** is his third feature – then it's very likely he can create, with co-producers B.A. Gillian and Maura O'Connell, something well worth watching next time.

Andrew Dowler ●

DEF-CON 4 **d./sc.** Paul Donovan **exec. p.** P.M. Robinson, J. William Ritchie **p.** B.A. Gillian, Maura O'Connell, Paul Donovan **p. des.** J.W. Walch, Emanuel Jannasch **d.o.p.** Doug Connell, Les Krizsan **assoc. ed.** Michael Spence **mus.** Chris Young **ed.** Todd Ramsay **running time :** 85 mins. **p.c.** Salter Street Films, Halifax **dist.** Pan-Canadian **l.p.** Lenore Zann, Maury Chaykin, Kate Lynch, Kevin King, John Walsch, Tim Choate, Jeff Pustil, Donna King, Allan MacBillivray, Florence Paterson, Karen Kenedy, Ken Ryan, Geoff Harrington, Al Foster, Hugh Orr, Bruce Piercy, Peter Falconer.



● Surviving nu in **Def-Con 4,** good Canadian schlock