

ORGANISING MEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (2000)

Dianne Hubbard of the Legal Assistance Centre tells about how men around the world are organising against violence against women, and about the birth of such a men's initiative in Namibia.

On 6 December 1989 a 25-year-old man walked into an engineering classroom at a polytechnic in the city of Montreal, Canada. He shouted "I want the women", ordered the men to leave the classroom, and lined the women up along one wall. "You are all feminists!" he yelled as he began shooting. Before the massacre was over he had killed fourteen young women. The rampage came to an end only when he turned the gun on himself and committed suicide. According to a note found on his body, his anger was directed at "the feminists who have ruined my life". Some say that he believed that women had taken his rightful place at the polytechnic, where he had failed to gain admission. A "hit list" included in the suicide note showed that he had been planning to target other women who were prominent in traditionally male fields, such as police work, firefighting, sportscasting and accountancy.

This bloody shooting spree shocked Canada and focussed public attention on the larger problem of violence against women. A handful of Canadian men were inspired to speak out against crimes committed by men against women, and this movement grew into the White Ribbon Campaign which is now the largest effort of its kind in the world. Every year, on the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, more than a million men all across Canada wear a white ribbon as a personal pledge never to commit, condone nor remain silent about violence against women. Individual men give talks about violence at schools, churches and workplaces, to raise public awareness about the issue.

The White Ribbon Campaign also conducts year-round activities. It distributes educational kits to schools on the role of men in working against violence against women. Local chapters organise Father's Day events to talk about positive roles for men, and about the importance of men as caregivers and nurturers. Valentine's Day events are used to spread messages about building healthy relationships between men and women. White Ribbon Campaign members also raise funds for women's shelters and counselling programmes, and encourage the media to give more prominence to women's issues.

The White Ribbon Campaign is concerned about all forms of violence. Its central focus is on men's violence against women, but it also recognizes that most violence among adults is committed by men. (This is true in Namibia just as it is in Canada. A recent study of violent crime in Namibia found that more than 83% of all violent crime is committed by men.)

According to the White Ribbon Campaign, the problem is not that men are naturally violent or bad. The majority of men are *not* violent. But many men have learned to express their anger or insecurity through violence. Many men have come to believe that violence against a woman, child or another man is an acceptable way to control another person. And when non-violent men remain silent, they are allowing violent men to poison our communities. It is not only the violence itself which must be challenged, it is the male attitudes and behaviours which can lead to violence.

The White Ribbon Campaign is not the only one of its kind. Men in Norway, Australia, El Salvador, Russia, the USA, South Africa and Zimbabwe are setting up similar initiatives.

A programme in Zimbabwe called PADARE (Men's Forum on Gender) brings men together in informal groups to identify areas where they feel that men must take responsibility for change in themselves and in society at large. According to Jonah Gokova, a founder member of PADARE, "men have conveniently become spectators when they should be partners in working towards new gender roles for both men and women which are based on values of justice, equality and human dignity".

A South African group called "Men for Change" similarly believes that men need to be "partners in identifying the root causes of violence", instead of becoming involved only when they are prosecuted for violent crimes and then sent to gaol -- a violent environment which ultimately spawns even more violence. Men for Change educates men on gender issues, provides counselling and support for violent men who want to change their behaviour, and gives gender-sensitivity training to men in leadership positions.

Namibia has certainly had its share of galvanising instances of violence against women. In 1998, 30-year-old Monika Florin was murdered and dismembered by her husband, who cooked her remains and hid the bones in the ceiling of the couple's Swakopmund home. In August last year, 24-year-old Polytechnic student Louisa Shikongo was murdered by her former boyfriend, who stabbed her 13 times as she walked out the door of her campus flat. In September, a man in Katima Mulilo beat his wife to death after catching her with another man, then returned from seeking help to find another man raping the corpse. In November, a 23-year-old woman from Gibeon died of burn wounds after her boyfriend allegedly threw petrol over her and set her alight. These incidents are just a small sample of the horrific kinds of male-female violence which has become increasingly common in Namibia.

Namibian men are already seeking ways to work together against such violence. Last year the Legal Assistance Centre was approached by several local men's groups seeking advice on what men can do to help stop men's violence against women.

In response to this developing concern, the Legal Assistance Centre is hosting a national conference on "Organising Men against Violence Against Women". This conference, which will take place on 23-25 February, will bring together 250 invited guests from all parts of Namibia to discuss men's involvement with representatives of successful men's groups in other countries -- Dr Michael Kaufman, co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign in Canada; Zimbabweans Jonah Gokova of PADARE, and Augustine Mututu of The Musasa Project; and South Africans Thulani Nkosi of Men for Change and Samukelo Madonsela from ADAPT (Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training). The goal will be to provide a forum for Namibian men to discuss male concerns about violence. It will also give Namibian men an opportunity to organise themselves to play a positive role in transforming Namibia into a non-violent nation.

According to Dr Kaufman, men's organisations such as the White Ribbon Campaign are replacing the collective silence by men with a new ingredient -- hope. "It is a hope that boys will grow up knowing that real men are caring men who speak out against the abuse of others and are not abusive themselves. It is the hope that all men will be able to look women in the eye and say, 'I have tried to do something to end the epidemic of violence against women.' It is a hope that women will no longer have to stand alone, and to fight alone, to end the violence."

Anyone who would like to know more about the White Ribbon Campaign can find them on the Internet at <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/wrchome.htm>.

Educational packages for men interested in organising against violence against women are available from the Legal Assistance Centre in Windhoek and from its advice offices in Keetmanshoop, Mariental, Ongwediva, Rundu and Walvis Bay. To find out more about the forthcoming national conference, contact Norman Tjombe, Willem Odendaal or Milly Jafta at the Legal Assistance Centre in Windhoek (tel: 061-223356).

NOTES FROM INTERNET

Some facts about the 1989 massacre that left 14 women dead:

WHERE: Ecole polytechnique, the University of Montreal's engineering school.

WHEN: The afternoon of Dec. 6, 1989.

WHO: Marc Lepine, age 25.

HOW: Lepine was armed with a Sturm Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle, knives and bandoliers of ammunitions.

WHY: Rejected when he applied for admission to the school, he blamed feminists for ruining his life.

VICTIMS: Fourteen women killed; 13 others, most women, wounded.

NAMES OF THE DEAD: Genevieve Bergeron, 21; Helene Colgan, 23; Nathalie Croteau, 23; Barbara Daigneault, 22; Anne-Marie Edward, 21; Maud Haviernick, 29; Barbara Maria Klucznik, 31; Maryse Leclair, 23; Annie St-Arneault, 23; Michele Richard, 21; Maryse Laganriere, 25; Anne-Marie Lemay, 22; Sonia Pelletier, 28; Annie Turcotte, 21. Montreal, Quebec, Canada-

Armed with a Sturm Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle, knives and bandoliers of ammunitions, Marc Lepine (25), while making anti-woman statements walks through Ecole (french for 'school') Polytechnique in Montreal, shooting and killing 14 women (wounding 13 others, mostly women). Lepine ends the rampage by shooting and killing himself. The attack sparks cries for greater gun control in Canada. Lepine had been rejected when he applied for admission to the school and blamed feminists for ruining his life.

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On Wednesday, December 6, 1989 a young man, 25 years old, product of a violent home, failed military candidate and lover of war films, entered the University of Montréal's School of Engineering building. He was not a student, although he had once studied for admission to the school. He was carrying a .223 calibre semi-automatic rifle [1]. It was a little after 5:00 p.m.

Walking into a classroom, he shouted I want the women (Kuitenbrouwer, Scott, Lamey & Heinrich, 1989). He separated the men from the women, ordered the men to leave the classroom, and lined the women up along one wall. You are all feminists! he yelled and began shooting to kill (Kuitenbrouwer et al., 1989). According to the professor, all nine women in his class were either killed or wounded (Shepherd, 1989). There were approximately 48 men in the classroom (Came, Burke, Ferzoco, O'Farrell & Wallace, 1989; The gunman's trail, 1989).

The young man continued his hunt, stalking his victims without obstruction. He had already murdered one woman near the copying room prior to entering that first classroom. He killed six more in the classroom, left, walked through the corridors firing randomly, entered the cafeteria, killed three more women, then went into a second classroom, where he murdered four more women and killed himself. By the end of his spree, he had murdered fourteen women and injured thirteen others: nine women and four men.

The following letter was found on the gunman's body after he shot 27 people in Montreal: murdering 14 women, wounding nine more women and 4 men December 6, 1989. Police have not officially released the letter; this was leaked to a Montreal journalist, Francine Pelletier:

The notes in CAPS are those of martin dufresne from Montreal Men Against Sexism.

"Forgive the mistakes, I only had 15 minutes to write this. See also Annex. Please note that if I am committing suicide today 89/12/06 it is not for economic reasons (for I have waited until I exhausted all my financial means, even refusing jobs) but for political reasons. For I have decided to send Ad Patres (LATIN FOR "TO THE FATHERS") **the feminists who have ruined my life**. It has been seven years that life does not bring me any joy and being totally blase, I have decided to put an end to those viragos. I had already tried as a youth to enlist in the (CANADIAN ARMED) Forces as an officer cadet, which would have allowed me to enter the arsenal and precede Lortie in a rampage (REFERENCE TO AN EARLIER MASS KILLING IN QUEBEC, IN 1984). They refused me because of asociality. So I waited until this day to carry out all my projects. In between, I continued my studies in a haphazard way for they never really interested me, knowing in advance my fate. Which did not prevent me from obtaining very good marks despite not handing in my theory assignments and studying little before exams. Even though the Mad Killer epithet will be attributed to me by the media, I consider myself a rational and erudite person that only the arrival of the Grim Reaper has forced to undertake extreme acts. For why persevere in existing if it is only to please the government? Being rather retrograde by nature (except for science), **the feminists always have a talent for enraging me. They want to retain the advantages of being women (e.g. cheaper insurance, extended maternity leave preceded by a preventive leave) while trying to grab those of the men**. Thus, it is self-evident that if the Olympic Games removed the Men/Women distinction, there would be only be women in the graceful events. So the feminists are not fighting to remove that barrier. They are so opportunistic that they neglect to profit from the knowledge accumulated by men throughout the ages. They always try to misrepresent them every time they can. Thus, the other day, people were honoring the Canadian men and women who fought at the frontlines during the world wars. How does this sit with the fact that women were not authorized to go to the frontline at the time??? Will we hear of Caesar's female legions and female galley slaves who of course took up 50 per cent of history's ranks, although they never existed? A real Casus Belli.
Sorry for this too brief letter."

(This was followed by a 19-name hit list of various Quebec women having achieved some advances in traditionally male professions: accountancy, journalism, labor organizing, sportscasting, firefighting, police work, etc., with the following note at the bottom:)

"Nearly died today. The lack of time (because I started too late) has allowed those radical feminists to survive." Alea Jacta EST." (LATIN FOR: THE DIE ARE CAST.)

The named are: a feminist journalist; the president of a teachers' union (the CEQ); the vice-president of the CSN; the Canadian champion of the 1988 Chartered Accountant exams; the first woman firefighter in Quebec; the first woman police captain in Quebec; a sportscaster; a bank manager; a TV host and a transition-house worker."