

## THE PEACE EXHIBIT

On Thursday 30 May 2013, the Canadian War Museum, Canada's national museum of military history in Ottawa, opened Peace – the exhibition. Only a capital E was missing to further puff up a title so naively definitive that it will be hard to conceive of an encore. "Visitors will be moved and inspired by the courage and strength shown by individuals, families, and Canadian communities," Amber Lloydlangston, PhD, the assistant historian at the museum who was responsible for the exhibit, nonetheless told the audience. She specified: "they will thus learn the story of Setsuko Thurlow, who rescued a clock from the ruins of her home in Hiroshima and who eventually emigrated here. Years later she was invested with the Order of Canada for her steadfast commitment to nuclear disarmament. There is also that of Chief Adjutant H.F. Stevens of Calgary, who wears the symbolic blue beret as a member of the first Emergency Force of the United Nations, the first UN peacekeeping contingent.

Attending this opening, the president of Artistes pour la Paix (a body never contacted to offer suggestions) suffered from the very beginning of the press conference, which was held in a large foyer lined with an unlikely jumble of numerous tanks and military vehicles, with a small stage perched over the crowd occupied by a booming DJ and a stiffly formal MC, the museum's director. Two ostentatiously decorated veterans were introduced by Roxanne Bouchard (whose dialogue, *En terrain miné*, with Corporal Patrick Kègle was published by VLB) and by historian Lloydlangston, both acting embarrassingly as military groupies. Awkward opening.

By contrast, entering the exhibition, one is seduced by the impeccable quality of the French used and by many other positive aspects:

-- first, the possibility of **diverse interactions**, with the invitation to add one's opinion on coloured stickers on numerous pictures, as well as votes, for example, for the best peace song: selections ranged from John Lennon and Yoko Ono to Raymond Lévesque, Paul Piché, Jean Leloup, Marie Jo Thério, Zachary Richard, Boris Vian, and Bruce Cockburn (*my job is an attention getter. That's the skill I can offer*). No mention of our honorary president, Richard Séguin, Sylvain Lelièvre, Chloé Sainte-Marie, Mes Aïeux, or the Cowboys Fringants (add your own list!);

-- excellent pictures, for example on **the Suez crisis** showing Canadian Nobel Peace Prize winner Lester B. Pearson;

-- a display of **wampum** along with native agreements, unfortunately listed in such a random manner that it was hard to find the 1701 Grande Paix de Montreal, or any coherence in the description of the military intervention at Kanesatake in 1990, with General De Chastelain not adequately singled out for his determination not to spill a drop of native blood.

-- the **Voice of Women** had its place, along with a photo of the Raging Grannies, but where were Louise Fréchette, Louise Arbour, and Michaëlle Jean, all unknown to the exhibit? Where were the Russian Pussy Riot, the Egypt and Tunisia Femen, and the Indian and Pakistani female demonstrators? Where

was the attempt by peace artist Claudia Léger to resuscitate in Montreal the Knitting for Peace introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

-- a moving display on the Blue Berets, in particular on their actions in Haiti, contrasted with two RDI broadcasts from the conservative point of view, which presented them as failures. More space should have been given to the struggles of General Roméo Dallaire against child soldiers, against post-traumatic stress (Rwanda), and against the atomic bomb.

And how many displays were spoiled by incomplete and biased research, truncated by the sterile determination to group presentations under three themes: intervene, engage, and negotiate. But there was no trace of Philippe Kirsch, the Canadian founder of the International Criminal Court at The Hague in these negotiations and no mention of resistance, as the late 99 years-old Stéphane Hessel proposed ("*A nous de jouer*" or "*s'indigner*"). The exhibition often clumsily sought, in pseudo-objectivity, to balance presentations.

The following were omitted or underplayed in the exhibits:

-- the hundreds of thousands of American draft dodgers who came to work and teach in Canada have a right to the same space as the hundred Canadian militarists who enlisted in the American Army to kill Vietnamese communists;

-- the presentation of the Ottawa Treaty negotiated by Chrétien and Axworthy should have been balanced on the one hand by criticizing Prime Minister Harper for having refused to integrate cluster munitions into it, and on the other hand by showing us the anti-personnel mines manufactured by SNC at Le Gardeur in the years 1980-90, which tore the legs and testicles off boys sent to the front by the Iranian army, a Koran in hand, against Canada's then great ally, Saddam Hussein;

-- a few scattered photos of shaggy-haired pacifist demonstrators do not cover the historic Montreal demonstration organized at the height of winter by Échec à la Guerre and Artistes pour la Paix with Luc Picard, a demo that drew a quarter of a million marchers in support of the UN, which denied the existence of weapons of mass destruction asserted by the liars Blair and Bush, a demo that persuaded Jean Chrétien in 2003 to refuse to engage Canada in following the USA and Great Britain into the second Iraq war. That was a stand for peace of which Canada and the War Museum ought indeed to be immensely proud.

To conclude, my very short visit perhaps skewed my judgement, but here it is, very severe: three sections of the exhibit are downright dishonest:

-- the one on **Hiroshima** displays no photo of cadavers burnt by the ravages of radioactivity, but only baby teeth of Canadians examined by Physicians for Global Survival as proof of the international dissemination of radioactivity (a reference to the teeth on display collected by VOW and others in the early 60s which helped get the Partial Test Ban Treaty).

-- the one on **Afghanistan** asserts in capital letters: "Canada intervened in Afghanistan to combat Al-Qaeda, to establish security there and thus contribute to global peace and stability" without mentioning the kamikaze Islamist explosions that followed upon the western interventions or the exorbitant cost of the Canadian intervention. Significant to see side by side in the newspaper displays at Ottawa the coverage of the daily Metro under "Peace is here," and the Business daily praising the drones presented at the same time at the Arms Trade Fair in the presence of Conservative ministers (who were absent from the War Museum);

-- the one on **nuclear weapons** had accompanying propaganda that made it particularly upsetting: "In Canada in 1997 most people believed that nuclear weapons were necessary to maintain peace and security"! And this though the polls showed over the years the unchanging wish of Canadians (between 65 and 92% of the population!) to get rid of them. Dismaying, especially since my visit was made in company with the greatest opponents of nuclear weapons: Bev DeLong, the chair of the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; Ernie Regehr, the vice-president of Canadian Pugwash and executive director for decades of Project Ploughshares; Adele Buckley, the leading spirit behind the Pugwash website and the Arctic Nuclear Weapon Free Zone project; and Douglas Roche, the co-founder of the Middle Powers Initiative. No mention whatsoever in this exhibit of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's five-point plan to eliminate nuclear weapons, or of President Obama's Prague speech, and one searched in vain for the shameful figure of the \$70 billion annual expenditure by the USA on the modernization of nuclear weapons and the billions accorded by NATO, which boasts of their utilization for this purpose. No trace either of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Test Ban Treaty or the Fissile Material Control Treaty, or of the organizations Global Zero, International Coalition for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons. It should have been hard to miss Pugwash in Canada, however, since the Nobel Peace Prize medal, awarded in 1995 to the international organization and its founder, the nuclear physicist Josef Rotblat, is on permanent display in Nova Scotia! It is at Thinkers Lodge, a national historic site.

In conclusion, many peace people gathered that evening after the opening of the exhibit expressed with one accord their intense disappointment.

Pierre Jasmin

*English translation by Phyllis Creighton*