

## URSULA GELIS

WILPF Norway. Board member and editorial staff of our magazine: '*peace and freedom*'.

### Evaluation of the workshop and the Anti-Nato demonstration in Strasbourg

#### A. "Diary". My activities (a), most memorable impressions (+ (b) /- (c)).

My activities (ad a):

- 1.) (2<sup>nd</sup> of April 09). Convenient trip to Strasbourg by plane and train. Positive: good time to read through the latest received files (WILPF workshop) and NATO publications. [I had the offer to join a bus ride from Oslo, organized by the Norwegian Peace council; yet this implied a 2-days bus tour and no opportunity to join the conference at all. (The Norwegian busses were already blocked ten kilometers away from Kehl and had to tackle the frustrations of not being able to enter Strasbourg).
- 2.) (3<sup>rd</sup>) Tram ride to the conference. At the station Erika and I made the acquaintance of Allen Jasson, London, and Michael (her partner). Informative chat on Zbigniew Brzezinski's book: "The Grand Chessboard" (which was later also mentioned by the lecturer Joseph Gerson<sup>1</sup> Director of the American Friends Service Committee. Gerson quoted Mr. Deutsch (former CIA chief): "The US had never plans to fulfill its treaty obligations (Non-proliferation treaty, NPT) under Article VI<sup>2</sup>".  
  
- This nice conversation had as additional result that Allen introduced me to David Webb who is dealing with Space war programs. – I will meet him soon at the 'Prep Com' for the NPT conference at the UN in New York. May 2009. (= memorable impressions).
- 3.) In the afternoon I joined a workshop on "Reviewing NATO Nuclear Strategy". Beside D. Webb important US contact: Jacqueline Cabasso, Executive Director of Western States Legal Foundation. Working for Peace & Justice in a Nuclear Free World.

Cabasso:

"Obama/Biden will maintain a strong deterrent. What does this mean? Deterrence is the threat of annihilation. - The current defense budget is slightly higher than under Bush".

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Gerson. Empire and the bomb. How the U.S. uses nuclear weapons to dominate the world. (easy reading).

<sup>2</sup> Article VI (of the NPT). The states undertake to pursue "negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament", and towards a "Treaty on and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control".

4.) The WILPF workshop: 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, 6-8 p.m.

In principle: positive (+)

- Very well organized by Cynthia. I had a very easy task: to read an excellent text written by Cynthia.
- Good networking opportunities during group work.
- Interested and multi-lingual audience participated.

In principle: negative (-)

- Location: acoustics, sitting facilities
- Time: too late in the evening (6-8 p.m.). We stayed until 8:30 p.m. and some of us had serious problems to return to the city centre due to stop of public transport.
- I am looking forward to get the e-mail list of the participants of the workshop.

Special aspects of the WILPF workshop:

The outcome of the 'German speaking' working group revealed a pretty grim picture of the current discussion on gender issues in German daily political life. Sidelining, 'gender issues' are drowning in general discussions. "It's not a central issue".

I was the facilitator of the group and to my surprise the male participant only was ready for taking the presentation part. So in the end he gave the report and I wrote the notes on the board.

By looking back, the 'guy' really learned something. For instance he had never heard of UN Res 1325 or 1820. Yet I would say that I would have preferred being without a male presence in the working group. I will not say that he took over completely but the scene would have looked differently without his involvement and in addition to that 'his' cameraman was always around us. So in the end we women could just acknowledge that we are still far from meeting acceptance on equal terms. Of course, with more time we would elaborate more on strategies to strengthen the women/feminist course. (I hope so).

The events of the demonstration will be discussed separately.

B. We aimed to contribute feminist anti militarist thinking to the Conference. Did we succeed? Or not? What were the difficulties?

The German working group did not touch the issue at all. We were caught up in principal points.

Feminist antimilitarism is more than the 'experience' of the consequences of a military presence (i.e. a military base) in the neighborhood. Militarism resp. male dominance in politics (and IR) starts in the minds and in the families (cultural background) a person is brought up in. In patriarchy the space for equal treatment of women does not exist.

I myself have to admit that I feel a great need for enlarging my horizon on feminist theories and its practical implementation. In a way I feel brainwashed that 'we achieved already so much'. I doubt it more and more. Women are allowed to 'be there' but the game still takes place behind the scenes.

- I would like to suggest that we (WiB/WILPF) engage in regular meetings/lectures/workshops on question about 'feminism in practice'.

C. We aimed to have an effective women's vigil and to participate as visible feminists in the demonstration. Did we succeed? Or not? What were the difficulties?

Preparation face:

- 1.) We failed to discuss the potential dangers of such a demonstration. For example: violent incidences, potential tear gas attacks, the lack of supplies (water, food, medicine, first aid). And potential police tactics to disturb the crowd or to frighten us. A pre-demonstration day 'role play' would have been useful.
- 2.) No clear understanding of the 'chain of command' (sorry for using this militaristic term). Who would take the leader role? We didn't divide the roles of responsibility. For example: Small groups, everybody in this group of max. 3-4 has to ensure that the other members are near and safe.

We forgot to exchange mobile numbers (I came without a phone at all!). The biggest mistake was not to stay together as a group. Again, this requires strong leadership.

We strongly underestimated the mismanagement of the organizers: when the demonstrators started moving towards – what? All the ways had been closed and to 'follow' the words by Rainer Braun was unwise.

We have to increase our knowledge about 'war tactics' in this case executed by the police and potential other (against us) units.

A good understanding of the surroundings (geographical knowledge) is absolutely crucial. (Estimation of distances, short cuts etc.)

A principal question occurred to me whether we as feminists and active members of a women organization should create our own platform of peace, disconnecting us from a general movement which we cannot control. Nobody of us is keen to be identified with violent trouble makers!

And: according to my observation, male dominance seems to be persistent even while the common purpose is struggling for peace and disarmament.

Alternative suggestion: a peaceful demonstration at the European Parliament, together with for example the women from Japan Council against A & H Bombs<sup>3</sup>. We could invite the French and other press organs (with the help of the French peace movement). By being interviewed we could have an impact. During the demonstration 4<sup>th</sup> April) we had no chance to be visible and to argue for our course and in addition to that we put ourselves in danger.

D. How do you evaluate the performance of (a) the authorities and police, (b) the demonstrators of different tendencies, and (c) the organizers of No-to-Nato. Who did what, right or wrong.

Ad (a): authorities deprived demonstrators of their right to move freely. This was a legal demonstration executed by the authorities by – to say the least – irregular means. As mentioned above the Norwegian peace activists were stopped 10 km before Kehl.

I became a personal witness to the following. Some buildings started to burn and for two hours (!!!) not one fire brigade was even visible. Those buildings burned out deliberately. The pictures of the burning ruins became the headlines of the next day papers. I myself could approach the burning scene and nobody, no fire men of police, tried to stop me from taking pictures or was interested to protect me from the burning materials.

Conclusion: a deliberate act, executed by either the labeled 'black block' or other (backed by the authorities?) groups. In any case, beside the burning IBIS hotel, the other places put to flames, seemed to be out of use for long.

The neighborhood is considered to be poor. By assuming that the destruction of the houses should serve a specific purpose, a poor neighborhood counts less

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<sup>3</sup> Japan Council against A & H Bombs (Gensuikyō). Contact: Tsuchida Yayoi. Assistant General Secretary, Tokyo. [jojoi@antiatom.org](mailto:jojoi@antiatom.org)

than rich quarters. As we all know the centre of Strasbourg was totally blocked. - One of the 'guards' function is to protect the property of the haves.

Out of a sudden teargas was thrown into the marching crowds – the burning sides were separated from us by a stone wall. So why had the peaceful marching demonstrators to be exposed to teargas? If teargas was used to 'punish' the people who set fire on the buildings, this response from the police should have taken place earlier. Yet the buildings were burning for quite some time. So again the throwing of teargas into the marching demonstrators served also other purposes: to distract the group and to cause disorientation.

The tactics later on – as I was told – had been to stop the demonstrators by blocking several ways. There was no access to the bridge of Europe at all. When I saw the teargas attacks starting, I decided to stay back together with Helga Berg and Annelise Ebbe. My idea was to wait how things evolve. I spoke to some local people from Strasbourg to ensure an alternative way back to town.

Ad (c) As mentioned above the 'order' of the German organizers to pursue the demonstration seemed to me already stupid because I knew that several ways had been closed off. It seemed to me that the demonstrators were send into 'a no where' just to do something with them. (Let the crowd move!). This was unacceptable in my view. At this moment we three women were totally depending on our own.

Ad (b) I do not want to be caught up in the different agendas of other demonstrators, violent or representing ideas I disagree with. Therefore (see point C 2) I would like to have a principal discussion about how to develop a more sufficient platform and independent strategies for us.

E. Our own group was about 40 feminist antimilitarist pacifist nonviolent women from several organizations. Did we make wise choices? Mistakes? What could we have done better?

About our mistakes I wrote already enough.

English is the international language most of us are depending on. Anyway, fluency in another foreign language is on my agenda.

Something simple could help. Why not to wear a name tack with our first name? And again, a clear understanding of the small 'responsible groups' is necessary.

F. We all should learn more languages!

Final remark about the most memorable moments:

Helga, Annelise and I hitchhiked back to Strasbourg. A French couple invited us home where we were introduced to their three daughters. We had a nice chat, people got interested in WILPF (websites search) and the father said to his children that the girls should follow in our footsteps. We were perceived as brave and courageous peace activists. We enjoyed excellent cake and refreshments. In the end the couple drove us back to our hotel. No wishes left.

After returning home I got an e-mail from them asking whether I am safe back.

**18<sup>th</sup> April 2009**