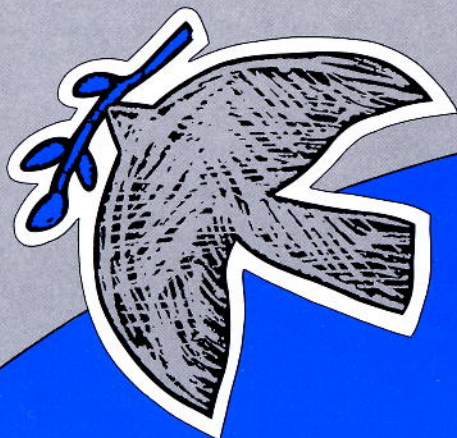


# A LOVE AFFAIR WITH POLITICS: A PORTRAIT OF MARION DEWAR



President of the federal New Democratic Party, former mayor of Ottawa (1979-1985), sponsored the first Canadian municipal referendum on global disarmament.



*Speaking  
Our Peace  
series*

*"So often, power is taken as something that somebody has, to use to control another. I think that's when power becomes dangerous ... Power to me is something that you have (when you are) in a position of being able to share information and knowledge. So that you arrive at conclusions that make sense. And it seems to me that it's something that women do fairly well ... make decisions — informed decisions — together."*

Mayor of Ottawa from 1979 to 1985 and currently president of the New Democratic Party, Marion Dewar never planned on entering politics. In her student days she dreamed of becoming a scientist, but ended up a nurse, married, with four children, and living a traditional life, "doing what was expected of me." While she kept house, cooked, and changed diapers, the political arena was the furthest thing from her mind.

But after she'd resumed a "grass roots" career in the public-health unit, the notion of politics began to nudge her. One night, after a particularly frustrating day trying to find a temporary home for a teenager, she said to her husband, "For two cents I'd run for council in this town!" A few months later, Ralph Sutherland, retiring alderman for the area, suggested she run for the position he was vacating. Dewar refused. She'd never even been to a council meeting and "knew nothing about politics." Sutherland persisted until, finally, Dewar agreed to run, convinced she would not win. But she did win. She remained a city councillor for six years, then went on to become Ottawa's mayor.

In her seven years in the mayor's office, Marion Dewar left a mark on Ottawa and on municipal politics across the country. She eloquently demonstrated what might be considered her personal motto, "Think globally, act locally." She was instrumental in the acclaimed Rideau Centre project, repeatedly affirmed that vital community services were not negotiable, and introduced referendums for disarmament into municipal politics. When Canada agreed to accept 8,000 Vietnamese refugees, she roused sufficient community support in Ottawa for that city to absorb 4,000 of them, then challenged other municipalities to follow suit. The response was amazing. The mayor of Calgary, for example, proclaimed Calgary would take 8,000, and Canada's official quota was changed to 50,000.



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Filmed while Marion Dewar was still mayor of Ottawa, this documentary is a candid portrait of a political leader who excels in demonstrating social responsibility and common sense. She talks about her political career as a natural extension of her roles of wife, mother, public-health nurse and ordinary citizen. In each role she is concerned with health and prevention, and with helping people come together for communal decision-making and action. She explores issues of power and peace, as well as women's conflicts about multiple roles in the context of these concerns. Women, she suggests, have vital contributions to make in areas of decision-making, planning, and conflict-resolution. She urges women not to underestimate their strengths in contemplating political leadership and, as a "simple" human being herself, she is convinced that it is ordinary people who make the difference, on both community and global scales.

## Audiences:

General audiences; Education (grade 10 through university); Special-interest groups (peace and development groups, women's networks)

## Subject Areas:

Political Science; Social Studies; Women's Studies; Ethics; Values Education; Peace Studies; History and Contemporary Studies; Family Studies.

## Themes:

Politics; Leadership styles and concerns; Social responsibility; Ethics of care; Conflict resolution; Juggling home and career; Feminine/masculine principles/styles/stereotypes; Images of the feminine; Role models; Women and peace-making; Parenting; Citizen action; Women and political action.

## Sample Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you find most striking in this film? What questions does the film raise for you?
2. Marion Dewar states that her main goal in life was to be a good wife and a good mother, and discusses the feelings of guilt women experience in trying to balance career with home life. How has she handled her guilt feelings? Do men experience similar inner conflicts? In your community, what does it mean to be a good wife and mother? A good husband and father?

3. Can you see yourself as a political leader, or any other kind of leader? What does leadership mean to you?
4. How does Marion Dewar conceptualize power? What connotations does the word *power* have for you? What is the difference between "power over" and "power for"?
5. In your opinion, do women have something unique to offer in terms of peacemaking? Give some examples.
6. We don't have to hold political office in order to make peace a part of our daily lives. What can the ordinary person do?
7. What are similarities/differences in the structures and processes of men's and women's formal and informal support systems? What values are implied in each case?

4. Research the history of women's activities in the past couple of centuries. Compare these activities and the main issues and implicit values to what you find in traditional history books on this period.
5. Write an essay describing an authoritarian/patriarchal system of government (or of relationships at any level), and a dialectical one. Consider the pros and cons of each system, for the leader and for the people. In your opinion, which system would be more valuable and more realistic in today's world?

*Note:* This film is one of the *Speaking Our Peace* series. The series also includes *Speaking Our Peace*, a longer, overview film; *Nuclear Addiction: Dr. Rosalie Bertell On The Cost of Deterrence*; and *A Writer In the Nuclear Age: A Conversation With Margaret Laurence*. Viewers may also wish to screen, *If You Love This Planet*, a 1983 Academy Award-winner featuring Dr. Helen Caldicott.

## Activities:

1. Draw your world in terms of power relationships. Draw a second picture illustrating how you would like to change these relationships. Then, form small groups in which to discuss your drawings. Share your general learnings in the larger group.
2. In small groups, discuss the connotations of "supermom" and "superdad." Have one person in the group record your discussion. Then, examine your lists. Extract the underlying belief systems and values of each role. If there is time, repeat this process for the phrases "a good wife and mother" and "a good husband and father." Share your general learnings in the larger group.
3. Using role-play or socio-drama, explore an issue facing your community. For example, issues might be whether to support the building of a new commercial plaza, the tearing down of historic buildings to build a parking lot, the taking in of refugees, or the formalizing of a "peace day." Once each group has chosen an issue, have its members role-play a town council trying to make a decision. Include unions, business representatives, mothers, teachers, students, etc. Then, ask individuals to share their experience of the political process.

*Directed and Edited by*  
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Terri Nash

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*Location Sound*  
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*Executive Producer*  
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