

Randall Forsberg, a Pioneer of Peace

By Jonathan Dean

Any survey of the modern peace and disarmament scene has to begin with the pioneering work of Randall Forsberg, who passed away in 2007 after a long fight with cancer.

From her youth, Randy tackled every aspect of arms control and disarmament: Research, writing, public agitation, organization of pressure groups, politics, travel and barnstorming lectures. Her first job was at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, which prides itself on taking a comprehensive approach to disarmament. Later, this woman did everything conceivable to fight war. She spent all her own money and that of her family. She was a Renaissance person of peace studies—the polar opposite of a one-theme fanatic.

In everything she did, Randall tried to concentrate and make concrete all thinking, writing, and debate on arms and their use. She thought this a way to move from generalities and abstractions, and toward hard, distilled findings. Like Karl Marx, whom she resembled in this, she moved away from competition over the ideals of peace, which were everywhere similar, to numbers, whose message was clearer and less disputable. She recruited idealistic young students and made them crunch numbers about aircraft range, weight, armaments, and production, until the last shred of romance was squeezed out of the topic. Together, she and her students converted their unusual work into thick handbooks, packed with data on combat aircraft of all nations, their engines, combat performance, fuel consumption, costs, life expectancy, production date and numbers of

aircraft produced. The expensive handbooks were bought and read by very few, but the few included the defense establishments of every major power.

To the derision of many professional colleagues, Randall ran for the local town council, coming in near last. She did it because she knew that some experience was necessary in all aspects of knowledge and activity connected with war. With this objective in mind, Randall went into the field of creating organizational support for peace action. She was the moving spirit and chief organizer in the campaign to freeze nuclear armaments in the United States, which finally succeeded in achieving a majority congressional vote against increasing nuclear armaments, a unique achievement in the history of the American war-oriented polity.

Under her guidance, Saul Mendlovitz and I took the many steps needed to form a non-governmental organization, Global Action to Prevent War. She took every necessary from registering the name in the list of Internet names, compiled the long list of invitees for the founding meeting of the organization in New Brunswick, and dragooned already very busy organization executives into going and taking an active role in the new organization. Randy organized our participation in the Hague Peace Appeal, everything from printing leaflets and carrying them overseas in her personal luggage, everything from elbowing a spot in the organizational structure under Cora Weiss, to arranging for plenary appearances.

Meanwhile, at home, Randy was organizing an intense research program for successive groups of graduate students. Here, she created an accurate, usable product and generations of trained, committed arms control experts, young people who had had to demonstrate flexibility and capacity to cope with changed physical surroundings—ever

smaller suites of offices, reminding me of the Edgar Allen Poe story of the man who was confined in a room whose walls continuously contracted. This was not a pedagogical device on Randy's part, but the result of increasing shortage of funds. Randy was highly regarded by the arms control community and attracted distinguished board members. But she lost as many as she attracted. They stomped away in frustrated anger when Randy failed time after time to draft a funding proposal. She simply refused to take time away from substantive work to write grand proposals.

Instead, she subsisted on unemployment insurance. She mortgaged and remortgaged her mother's home, and went into new negotiations with the owner of her building to find an even smaller office. All the while, she ran her arms control organization with a board of distinguished members and creatively met their frequent questions as to program and finances. She regularly issued a publication, *The Arms Control Reporter*, with a staff of one, and made it the most accurate and useful periodic report of arms and arms control in Western countries.

Randall Forsberg was a prodigy and, as we who worked with her have slowly realized, an authentic genius. Many of us have the scars of her vitriolic disapproval to prove it when we failed to meet demanding requirements.

Randall was unique in the wide scope of her knowledge and activity. She grasped the myriad details of arms control and disarmament, knew the position of each international player and what should be done about it. There was no aspect of arms and arms control that she had not investigated. She was familiar with the numberless details of the arms control universe, from combat aircraft to naval vessels, artillery, missiles,

conventional and nuclear weapons and small arms, and how each aspect interacted with most other aspects of modern life.

Randy's message to us from her life and teaching is that it is right and necessary to work on specific aspects of arms and armaments, but that serious arms control progress, when it finally comes, arises only from hard work along the entire front, and will change the entire direction of human society. She is sorely missed. There is no one today with her combination of qualities.