

Hanna Newcombe: A Canadian Pioneer for Peace

by Rose Csicsai

In the early 1960s, Hanna Newcombe made an important decision. She decided to dedicate the rest of her life to the study of peace. For the last twenty-five years she had been reviewing articles relevant to peace studies, editing and writing in peace research journals, talking and teaching about peace, and participating in peace-oriented organizations. She has become recognized internationally as a Canadian pioneer for peace.

Background

Hanna was born in Czechoslovakia in 1922. She came to Canada with her parents in 1939, at the age of sixteen. Hanna says, "Coming from that part of the world I was intensely interested in international affairs." She and her parents had left Czechoslovakia on the eve of World War II. Hanna describes her father's foresight:

We were Jewish and Hitler was coming in and my father figured the thing to do was to get out. Unfortunately, most of our relations didn't think so. They all died in camps.¹

Hanna adds that relatives were so attached to homes or friends "or even dogs" that they were unwilling to give up these attachments and leave Czechoslovakia.

Hanna's father, however, had recognized the need to leave Czechoslovakia. With five other families they emigrated to Canada in March, 1939, six months after the signing of the Munich Pact and three days after Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia. The occupation threatened the family's move, but Hanna's father bribed his way out. He gave officials cash and his car in exchange for permission to leave the country on ordinary trains, following pre-arranged plans. Hanna remembers

most especially the difficulty of leaving her friends.

International relations in Central Europe before World War II, her experiences in leaving Czechoslovakia, and her immigration to Canada left a life-long impression on Hanna: "You can't help but be politically aware if you were from Central Europe in those times," she explains.

Hanna's education also had a strong influence on her decision to enter the field of peace research. In 1945, she graduated from McMaster University, Hamilton with a Bachelor of Arts degree in chemistry. Her Bachelor thesis, reviewing the fractionation of polymers (synthetic rubber), was a definitive work in the field for many years. In this work she surveyed the existing literature on this topic and identified the survey approach, which she would continue to favour for peace research, as highly useful.

Another educational experience that was to influence Hanna's interest in peace research occurred during her work on an M.A. at the University of Toronto. She worked with Professor Beamish, who invited her to work on a project that was marginally connected with the A-bomb project. He would not tell her anything about the project, until she had gone through security clearance. She suspected that the research was connected to the A-bomb but only found out for sure much later. Hanna got her M.A. in 1946.

During her university years, her interests were firmly established. She was interested in international relations; she had belonged to the International Relations Club at the University of Toronto. She was interested in chemistry; she had, as she says, "all this investment in years of education" and felt it was "unreasonable to drop it totally." Yet she also wanted to

have children, although people had told her "you can't do both (do chemistry and have children), you have to choose." She concedes:

In actual fact I didn't do much chemistry. At that time it wasn't really possible to do both. Consciousness among women wasn't developed to the point it is today, and day care facilities were limited.

She decided to work part-time, since full-time mother and full-time work was then incompatible. These interests, nevertheless, constituted Hanna's early experiences and were to carry over into her work in peace research.

Hanna's interests and concerns were shared with her husband, Alan Newcombe. Hanna and Alan had met at McMaster University and were married in 1946. In 1947 they joined the Toronto branch of World Federalists. Hanna names World Federalists as Canada's first peace group.² She also describes her entry into that organization:

I'd sort of always believed in world government; it was just a matter of finding a group that believed what I believed. I learned about World Federalists through a letter to the editor. I'd finally found an organization that believed the same thing.

The Newcombes' entry into World Federalists was to mark the beginning of an intense involvement with that organization.

The Decision to Enter Peace Research

World War II had come to a shocking end with the use of atomic bombs. After

the war it took several years for scientists, philosophers, thinkers and members of the peace movement to begin voicing their concerns and writing about their anger. During the '50s the peace movement around the world experienced a dramatic rejuvenation.

The Newcombes made their decision to enter peace research during this era of revitalization. As scientists, they were more aware than most of the effects of atomic bombs. This — and their



Alan and Hanna Newcombe

Quaker faith — were the motivating forces behind their peace work. Joining the Quakers' meeting and getting involved with Norman and Patricia Alcock, combined with their own experiences and interests, motivated the Newcombes to make a strong commitment to peace research.

Hanna and Alan joined the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers, in 1961 with Hanna leading the way. Hanna had been at the Unitarian church the day a professor of German, Albert Martin from McMaster, spoke there. They had talked together afterwards and the next Sunday Hanna went to a Quaker meeting.

As a Quaker, Hanna was exposed to ideas that prompted her to reexamine her life. Quakers are expected to be at the right place, at the right time, saying the right things. Furthermore, Quakers believe that there is something of God in every person and that everybody on earth has some action God wants her or him to do.

The Newcombes came in touch with the Alcocks in the same year they joined the Quakers. Hanna and Alan first met Norman Alcock at a meeting of the Hamilton United Nations Association. Then Hanna met Patricia Alcock at a Toronto meeting of the Voice of Women.

Norman Alcock was campaigning for funds for the Canadian Peace Research Institute. He had contacted five organizations: Voice of Women, World Federalists, Quaker meeting, Unitarians, and the Canadian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Alcock was convinced that scientific research could be applied to peace.

According to Hanna, "he got the idea from reading Ted Lentz, an American peace researcher." Hanna also mentions that Alan saw the merits of this approach more quickly than she did. In any case, both of the Newcombes were drawn into the Alcock project. Hanna tells of her own beginnings with the Canadian Peace Research Institute (CPRI):

As a chemist, I had been involved with doing abstracts. I thought it might be useful to peace research. When the Institute had collected some funds I was hired to do that.

Hanna began work for CPRI in June, 1962.

Working as a Peace Researcher

The Canadian Peace Research Institute had several interrelated goals. First, it was interested in research. William Eckhardt's findings that the less religious are more altruistic, surprised many and were recorded in his book, *Compassion*, published by the Institute.³ The Institute was also interested in sharing information through publications, talks and lectures, journals, and public education. CPRI files at the Ontario Archives contain many copies of letters sent out to people who had requested information. The copies of the letters demonstrate the care with which requests were answered.

The Newcombes concentrated their CPRI activities on *Peace Research Abstracts Journal*. At first they had to buy their own paper and pay for their own

mimeographing. By Volume Three of the Journal, however, they were able to report to Alcock that they could take one of the salaries out of the journal's income. The *Peace Research Abstracts Journal* was begun in 1964 and the *Peace Research Reviews Journal* in 1967.

In addition to publishing these journals, the Newcombes were also involved with peace education. The Canadian Peace Research and Education Association was

founded in 1965. This Association was to hold conferences for educators and provide an arena for sharing ideas and enthusiasm.

In 1979, the Newcombes separated from CPRI. They organized the Peace Research Institute-Dundas. Hanna says, "It somehow seemed neater to separate." In a leaflet titled, "Peace Research Reviews: History," PRI-D provides a precise description of itself:

Peace Research Institute-Dundas is a non-profit research and publishing organization devoted to investigating the problems of war and peace, publishing the results of our research and the work of other scholars, and distributing as widely and inexpensively as possible these results to the scholarly community, the diplomatic and political community, and the general public.

PRI-D has offices and work-space in the basement of the Newcombe home, in a residential area of Ancaster. Hanna's office is a bedroom on the ground floor. The basement walls are lined with many boxes of indexed reference files. Several staff members are usually working in the basement every day.

The PRI-D directors are Hanna and Alan Newcombe and Mrs. Ruth Klaassen. These three meet annually and communicate informally during the year, discussing the operation of the organization. They never have formal meetings, reflecting the relaxed atmosphere that exists at PRI-D at any time; during work breaks everyone gathers for tea at the dining

room or kitchen table. The institute is run very democratically with each person earning the same amount of money.

Hanna and Alan do not work at PRI-D isolated from the world's community of peace researchers. The postal service and the telephone keep them in touch with a wide variety of individuals and organizations throughout the globe.

Hanna has done quantitative work studying voting patterns in the UN. In 1983 her book, *Design for a Better World*, was published.⁴ It combines her work on voting patterns within the United Nations Assembly with futuristic recommendations for international relations.

Each year Hanna is involved in several peace-related activities. In 1983 she held memberships in the United Nations Association; Voice of Women; Hamilton Disarmament Coalition; Dundas Citizens for Peace and Disarmament; Operation Dismantle; Hamilton Mundialization Committee; and Dundas Mundialization Committee. She gives an annual paper at CPREA's conference, and is very active in the People's Congress, a non-governmental world body that was started in the mid-'70s by the World Citizen Registry in Paris, France. In August 1984 she attended that gathering as an Alternate Delegate.

In 1974 the Newcombes received the Lentz International Peace Research Award and became judges for that award. In the same year Hanna received the World Federalists of Canada Peace Award. In 1982 the Newcombes were awarded honorary degrees of Doctors of Law for their work in the field of peace research. They were pleased to be so honored by their alma mater, McMaster University.

When asked about her future, Hanna Newcombe answers:

I'd like to continue doing what I'm doing. I hope I can keep working at the present level. That is my ambition. I feel I'm better off concentrating on Peace Research Abstracts.

The Newcombes see peace as a "long-range job." They feel that the Peace Research Abstracts expose another side to arguments, another side that might otherwise be missed. Alan described the Journals as silent witnesses for peace; they "stand on the shelf of libraries around the

world year after year."

When the federal government set up the Canadian Peace and Security Research Institute, the Newcombes met with Geoffrey Pearson on several occasions and asked that there be room on the new institute's board of directors for peace researchers.

Conclusion

The Newcombes express an immediate urgency when they speak of peace. They believe that the nature of modern warfare technology, the level of arms build-up throughout the world, the threats of short warning times, and the dangers of nuclear accidents bring the possibility of a nuclear holocaust closer with each year.

Hanna is not concerned about there being too many peace groups. Her recommendations centre on maintaining contact and communication between groups. She advocates a wide variety of groups forming at the grass roots level.

Hanna's work must be examined in relation to her partnership with Alan. Together they form what is described by Alan as a "collective personality" that shares strengths and weaknesses for the benefit of both. He adds, "We differ on a lot of things, we reinforce each other on other things and we even agree on some things."

Hanna Newcombe supports the peace movement with her wealth of information, her dedication, and her extensive participation. Both her life and work are intertwined with many aspects of the International and Canadian peace movement. As a Canadian pioneer for peace she has worked for an end to wars and through the sharing of knowledge and through political activism.

¹These quotations are from an interview with Hanna Newcombe, April 17, 1984.

²The history of such groups as World Federalists is recorded in Gary Moffat's unpublished manuscript, "A History of the Peace Movement in Canada."

³William Eckhardt, *Compassion: Toward a Science of Value* (Oakville: CPRI Press, 1972).

⁴Hanna Newcombe, *Design for a Better*

World (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1983).

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