Science for Peace

May 26, 2021

President's Column

Dear Members,

It was an active month. Discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian violent conflict dominated our debate forum (sfpdiscuss). Naturally, members expressed strong views on this issue. Many of us who followed the debate came away from it much wiser, Most of the discussion was conducted with civility, despite the emotional charge.

Science for Peace issued a statement on the conflict (see Articles section) that met with wide approval, both within and outsde the membership. We converted the statement into a letter to the Prime Minister and the Minster of Foregn Affairs. We have not received a reply.

The webinar on "Militarism and Climate Change: Disaster in Progress" on April 29th, co-hosted with World Beyond War, was deemed by many a major success. The registrations and enrolment increased with each successive webinar in the climate crisis series, The final one registered almost 700 people from 46 countries. We provide below, under Recent Events, a link to view the final webinar

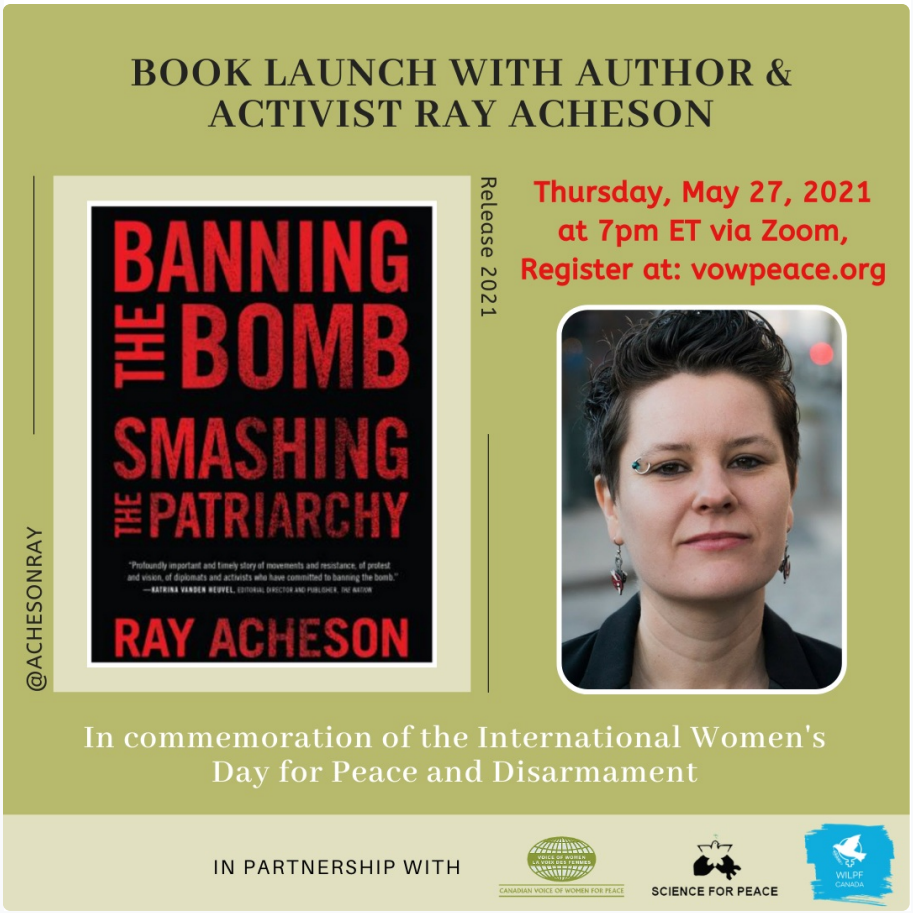
Ellie Kirzsner.who is doing a fabulous job as Secretary of the association, offers us a vivid perspective on Science for Peace in the Focus section. This perspective derives from decades of her reportage in NOW magazine on political events and social movements in Toronto. A joy to read.

Finally, don't forget to view the webinar on "Ban the Bomb, Smash the Patriarchy" this Thursday. It will be lively.

Richard Sandbrook
President, Science for Peace
Professor Emeritus of Political Science
University of Toronto

Upcoming

Register Here



Recent Activities

Both anti-war and climate movements are fighting for justice and life for all people on a livable planet. It's increasingly clear that we can't have one without the other. No climate justice, no peace, no planet. Please click below to access the recording.

Full Recording

Focus on Members: Ellie Kirzner

Secretary, Science for Peace

When I stepped down after three decades editorially directing NOW Magazine over the period when it served a huge readership, unlike its current scaled-back version, my first post-journalism move was to timidly ask Science for Peace for membership. I was well aware that as a PhD drop-out, I was far from preferred SfP material, but lucky me, that didn’t seem to matter.
I had reported on hundreds of peace and justice organizations over the years, watching them come and go, and succeed and fail. But the group that

attracted me above all others was SfP, because of its educational mandate, and decades-long commitment. And after seven years of membership, I confess I'm still a bit in gaga-land sharing meetings with the most incredible experts in their field, learning from SfP's astonishing elders, and watching important SfP events taking shape before my eyes.

I know we are in discussion – perhaps persistently – about what we should be and do. That seems just about typical for groups like ours. Right now, there are urgings to generate more research and promote the stellar credentials of our Board and broader membership. I fully support that. I think, we are in the unique position by virtue of our disparate membership and interests, as well as our heritage, of being able to do many things at once: engage in popular education, develop alliances with grass-roots organizations – and be the source of the research and expertise other movements need.

I personally come from a deep immersion in grassroots politics – not, sadly, as an activist and organizer (my student days excepted), but mainly as an observer. In my career, I reported on so many causes and campaigns it makes me weary to think of it now: three decades worth of meetings, marches, conferences, protests, blockades, sieges, military stand-offs, and internal movement debates and conflicts.

Interviewing and watching participants and key players, I always puzzled over the question of what allows some social change efforts to make gains, and sends others to oblivion. Of course I'm still puzzling (is there a "science" of change-making?) But over the years, what became clear to me as witness to grand and sometimes misdirected efforts to heal the world, was the critical necessity of non-violence, both as movement practice and as foreign policy.

My SfP entry point was through the Non-Violence and Civil Society Working Group, where a small team of us spent a few years studying the exciting new research on strategic non-violence – (Erica Chenoweth, Hardy Merriman, Maciej Bartkowski, etc,) and drawing on the insights of our own practitioners (Lyn Adamson, LeeAnn McKenna, Jill Carr-Harris, and after a time, the analytical skills of Richard Sandbrook). Eventually the working group morphed into an organizing body for developing educational forums on campus and gently faded. Out of a committed few of us came a super-intelligent forum on activist best practices, and an exciting 250-strong climate emergency gathering.

Since then, I've been watching the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Disarmament campaign with amazement – it seems the very model of what a campaign ought to be – and feeling energized by our bold entrance into the climate movement, and by the talent we have in this area. Our superb Join Forces to Overcome the Climate Crisis panel examined movement-building strategies, demonstrating so well SfP's ongoing potential as the animator of essential discussions.

At some point, I want to return to a study of strategic non-violence as a mode both for overthrowing authoritarianism and achieving short-term goals, but for now I look forward to SfP tackling foreign policy violence, chiefly embodied in Canada's NATO membership. This seems an essential part of the big project of demilitarizing Canada, our true mission, which has many components to it, from exiting the nuclear system and the arms trade (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, etc), to separation from U.S. interests (Venezuela, etc.), to aligning with global movements for democracy, and against militarism and dictatorship (Myanmar, Hong Kong, etc.)

Anti-NATO advocacy is not an easy task in this country and engaging in it calls on us to sketch out what a non-violent foreign policy would actually look like. What exactly does it mean to offer unarmed solutions to the world's conflicts as government policy, or to defend a country through non-violent civilian defense? Smart minds in Science for Peace have been working on alt foreign policy long before I appeared, but I think it's time to feature it again as part of post-NATO imaginings, put it into form, and throw it out into the thought winds. Few groups have more to offer on this matter than Science for Peace and its collective experience and understandings.

Recent Articles

Canada must condemn the violence in Gaza and the West Bank and cease all arms exports to Israel

It is with deep sadness and growing concern that we at Science for Peace are watching the rising violence in the Levant and call on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and return to negotiations leading to a peaceful settlement of the conflict..

Continue reading

Richard Sandbrook: Futureproof? Artificial Intelligence and the Human Prospect

The New York Times technology reporter Kevin Roose begins his new book with some good news. Futureproof: Nine Rules for Humans in the Age of Automation, (2021) adopts an upbeat tone in proposing how we might live well in this age of automation. “Artificial intelligence could be unbelievably good for humankind, if we do it right.

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