

Who We Are:

Carolyn Forsman: Changing from Within

A still-young veteran of the Congress for Change and the 1969 library "revolution," Carolyn Forsman is the type of revolutionary who follows commitments, not trends; who does the homework necessary to fight the good-if-unglamorous causes; and who applies carefully designed strategies where they will make a difference.

As a result, she has been visible at almost all the major scenes of library change over the last decade—and largely unheralded. But she has indeed made a difference. An ALA member since 1969, she was a leader or co-leader in successful campaigns to: "democratize" the Council; open up meetings; safeguard membership referendums and nominations by petition; place "liberal" reformists on Council; require candidate platform statements; and mandate roll calls on key votes.

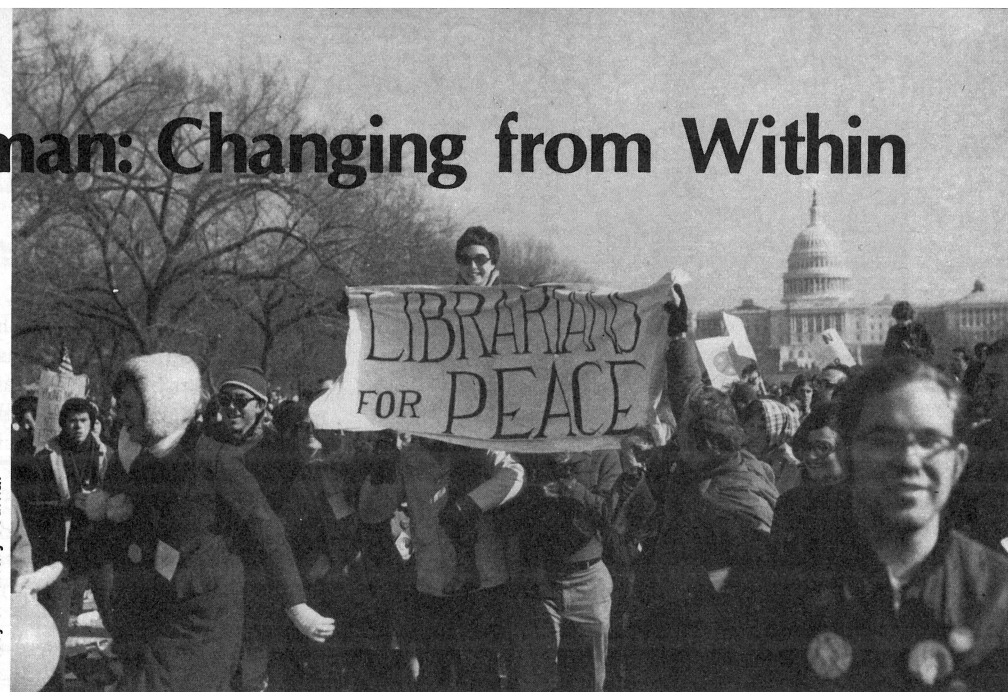
As social issues came along, she generally took the liberal side, she told *AL* in a recent interview, "but I was always concerned with the *process* of making changes. The radicals called me a 'structure freak,' but somebody had to look at the fine print."

In the heyday of the Movement, Forsman did more than scrutinize footnotes. Beginning in 1967, when she picketed with other ALA conferees in San Francisco to protest a hawkish Maxwell Taylor speech, she marched, sat in, and stood up to be counted along with the best of the activists. And in those same years, she was very much a librarian.

With a 1965 MLS from Berkeley and her driving New York City intensity, she went from California to Baltimore and back to California, gathering experience in the thick of reference and YA services. As the '60s ended, she found herself head of reference at the Vallejo, Calif., Public Library.

"I was living librarianship in those days," she recalled. "I was married to a librarian, reading all the literature, eating it up."

She came back East to pursue a doctorate and teach as an assistant at the University of Maryland library school. During this period, the early seventies, she published two notable articles: "Up Against the Stacks: The Liberated Librarian's Guide to Activism" (*Synergy*, July/Aug. 1970), an excellent roundup



1969: Forsman bears the standard.

1979: "Information Resources Specialist" in her New York City home/office.

of Movement activity, and "Crisis Information Services to Youth: A Lesson for Libraries?" (*School Library Journal*, March 1972).

"People used to ask me what crisis information has to do with libraries," she noted. "A few are still asking."

In 1974-76, she was on the front lines again as head of telephone reference, DC Public Library. For the next two years she lectured at Maryland, where "I felt I could open up some minds to the potential of librarianship."

She enjoyed teaching, kept a hand in information services, fought for her commitments in ALA and a half dozen other associations, and, a decade after the Congress for Change, landed back in her native New York to "decide what I want to be when I grow up."

While deciding, she is operating a busy, one-person "information-resource" service out of her Manhattan home, digging up info for clients ranging from a quilt-maker to a drug firm. She consults for the Neal-Schuman *Sources* reference series and writes a health-consumer resources column.

I, Information Source

"Yes, you might say I'm de-institutionalized," she replied to an *AL* suggestion. "I am the information source. Some people come to me rather than to a library."

"Perhaps I should devote my energies to the diffusion, the application, of information innovations. We've always promoted library skills for social services;



the new technologies can multiply the impact of these skills. I'm talking about computer-based I&R files, updated subject headings, accessible alternative literature, and so on."

Forsman fired off a dozen more goals and causes of current interest to her. Her chief involvements in ALA are with "truly representative" structure, YA services, and intellectual freedom. She is developing tactics for ERA support. She wants a user's bill of rights in every library and better user education—"Let them know there is life beyond *Readers' Guide!*"

Forsman looks for reform in almost every area of the information field, but not from the 1969 perspective. "We're older, and time is shorter. We have families; we've risen in the profession. Now we want to *plan* change, not simply protest."

And, *AL* asked, did the Movement make a difference?

"For some, yes," said Forsman. "The forward-looking libraries took advantage of the forward-looking ideas and tools we generated. The poor libraries run by socially apathetic administrators are still rotten."

Art Plotnik