

The Randall Witch Hunt

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WASHINGTON—Deportation proceedings against the writer Margaret Randall have become a political witch hunt. According to Immigration and Naturalization Service attorneys, the writer is determined to "spread international communism," is "against the happiness and good order of the U.S.," and has "opposed the U.S. constitution." In the eyes of the government, Margaret Randall is too "un-American" to live here.

At a March hearing in El Paso, the government dissected Randall's politics. (For a full account of the case, see the *Voice*, December, 31, 1985.) The transcript of the hearing, which was produced only recently, reads like the Inquisition. The extraordinary political character of the trial has raised questions not only about the fairness of the proceeding, but about the frivolous nature of the prosecution. Whatever else it may be, the Randall case represents a clear, deliberate warning on political dissent.

For 23 years Randall lived in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua, traveled in Vietnam and elsewhere, and came home to the U.S. in 1984. She went back to Albuquerque, where she grew up, to be near her elderly parents and relatives. Randall continued to write and taught poetry and photography at the University of New Mexico. She gave up her citizenship in 1967 to get higher-paying work in Mexico. So when Randall reentered the U.S. in 1984, it was on a visitor's visa. When she sought to change that status to permanent resident alien, the INS denied the request and ordered her deported. Randall appealed the decision, and in March, Immigration Judge Martin F. Spiegel conducted a hearing on the matter in El Paso. Judge Spiegel is expected to issue a decision within a month or two. Any attempt to deport Randall will tie up the courts for years.

Randall's attorneys argue the government wants to deport her because of her sharp criticism of domestic racial policies and the U.S. role in Vietnam and Latin America. The government says this is not the case and insists that its ruling is based on Randall's inability to prove her status deserves to be changed to permanent resident alien.

But the INS makes it clear the reasons Randall allegedly does not deserve permanent resident status are political: In his March decision ordering Randall's deportation, INS district director A. H. Giugni relied heavily on her political activities and views: "Her writings go far beyond mere dissent, disagreement with, or criticism of the United States or its policies," Giugni wrote. "Her associations with, and her activities and writings in support of the communist-dominated governments of Cuba, North Vietnam, and Nicaragua; and her advocacy and support of revolutionary activity in Mexico, as well as her affiliation with and participation in Communist Party activities, warrant the denial of her application for adjustment of status as a matter of discretion."

Randall's inquisitors at the hearing were two INS prosecutors, Guadalupe R. Gonzales and Penny Smith. Day after day they hammered away at Randall's political views and sought to demonstrate that she was virtually a communist agent. Here in brief are excerpts:

"Isn't it true that you wrote... that Fidel Castro was in your opinion the most brilliant, the most courageous, and the most humane leader of that time or any time? Isn't that correct?" Gonzales asks Randall.

"Objection, your honor," says Michael Maggio, Randall's attorney. "It's irrelevant as to whom she thinks is a great



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leader... We might as well ask Miss Randall what her favorite foods are."

"Your honor," says Gonzales. "I think the Court can take notice that Fidel Castro was the leader of Communist Cuba at that time."

"So what," says Maggio.

Gonzales continues: "Is it true that you wrote in *Spirit of the People* that you considered American fighter pilots who flew over Vietnam war criminals?"

RANDALL: No it is not... I was not referring in any way to the pilots. I was referring to the policy made by politicians who were...

GONZALES: ... Your testimony is that you were writing that the American politicians who were advocating the bombing of North Vietnam were war criminals? Is that how we're supposed to interpret that?

RANDALL: Yes, that's how you're supposed to interpret it because there was a statement made by, I believe, it was Johnson...

GONZALES: ... Miss Randall, do you still wear the ring that you procured from the North Vietnam official back in 1974, made from the metal of the downed U.S. aircraft...

RANDALL: No. I do not.

GONZALES: Why did you ever wear it in the first place?

RANDALL: It was given to me by a peasant woman whose family had been killed by bombs from the plane that the ring was made of. And I wore that ring, as I have said many times, as a way of mourning the deaths of both sides in that war.

GONZALES: In your mind, did it ever indicate that you [were] commemorating the death of our American boys in Vietnam?

An objection is sustained and Gonzales continues:

"I interpreted the jist of your book *Spirit of the People* as a commentary that the withdrawal of the American forces from Vietnam was a triumph. Is that correct?"

There are more objections. Gonzales keeps at it:

"Miss Randall, my question was specifically to whether you wrote that you consider the victory of the Vietnam revolution the greatest defeat of U.S. imperialism?"

RANDALL: Yes, I did write that.

GONZALES: And we can take it literally?

RANDALL: You can take it any way you want.

GONZALES: It's not metaphorical or allegorical is it?

Gonzales and Smith continue to badger Randall:

GONZALES: Were your children developing as communist in Cuba, Miss Randall?

RANDALL: They were developing a very collective and cooperative mentality, which I, at that time described as communist with a lower case c.

GONZALES: Lower case c?

RANDALL: ... if it had been a capital c, I would have been referring to a party concept of communism, but as I used a lower case c, I was referring to a cooperative spirit that I was very pleased to see in my kids.

GONZALES: So you consider communism a cooperative spirit?

RANDALL: Well, primitive communism

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... that is the meaning of it, yes... It's not necessarily even a political statement. It's more a social statement...

GONZALES: Miss Randall, your son Gregory in fact was developing a definite communist sentiment. Wouldn't you agree with me?

At this point, the judge sustains Maggio's objection. But that doesn't stop Gonzales.

GONZALES: All right. Miss Randall, you wrote in your June 19, 1971, entry to your diary in *Part of the Solution*, and I quote, "Gregory is pioneer leader of the school... Gave the report on the year's activities." His report ended with "As communist conscience of our ideal, we will, and all students joined him in responding, be like Che." I assume they were referring to Che Guevara. Is that correct?

RANDALL: That's correct.

GONZALES: Now, I assume you love your children. You've testified to that effect. Would your words be that... good parents generally want to instill our values, what we consider good values in our children?

RANDALL: Absolutely.

GONZALES: Am I to take that entry as, or would you say that particular entry indicates your agreement with his upbringing as someone who advocates the

doctrines of Che Guevara?

Smith attempts to elucidate Randall's communist ties by showing her to be a contributor to a 1979 issue of *Casa de Las Americas*, the Cuban literary magazine, on the 20th anniversary of the revolution. Among contributions from many other writers was one by Margaret Randall. The U.S. government arranged for a translation of her work, and Smith asked about it at the hearing:

GONZALES: The magazine issue that we're talking about in 1979—that did the salute to the Cuban revolution after a period of 20 years—did it recognize that Cuba is the country of workers, orienting itself to communism through the postulations of Marti, Marx, Engels, and Lenin?

RANDALL: I don't know, Miss Smith, because I have not read all of the things that are in that issue... I'm just going through my own submission to that issue... and I see the most incredible errors in the translation.

SMITH: ... Do you recall ever looking through the magazine at the introduction and seeing that it commented upon the assistance the USSR had given towards liberation of Angola and Ethiopia?

RANDALL: I don't remember the introduction. I've already said that...

SMITH: You will notice that in the translation that has been provided by the government there is a comment about Cuba being a country of workers that built up under socialism the opportune conditions of communism... Then there is a list of writers. Are you familiar with those writers?

RANDALL: Yes. I am familiar with those writers.

SMITH: ... I believe you have admitted to the court that you have described yourself as a Marxist. Is that correct?

RANDALL: At that time, yes. It was correct, and I explained in what context. But this is being taken totally out of context...

SMITH: As a person who has espoused an agreement with the philosophy of Marx, you are familiar with some of his writings?

RANDALL: I am familiar with some of his writings, yes.

SMITH: Could you comment upon the fact that the *Casa de Las Americas* saw fit to have an introduction in this particular volume, and in it discussed the writings of these particular people, in particular Marx?

RANDALL: This was a group of writers and artists and people who had been to Cuba or for one reason or another wanted to send a message of commemoration to the 20th anniversary of the Cuban revolution... We all said different things. I was one of those people and we all said different things. For example, one of the things I say in mine is that we learn as much from Cuba's mistakes as from its successes... I would also like to go on record as saying that this translation of my particular piece is in many, many places absolutely inaccurate and even incomprehensible. In the very first line it [discusses] my encounter with Rubin Dario, a poet who has been dead for a hundred years. The original Spanish is "my appearance at the meeting commemorating Rubin Dario"—which would have been the correct English translation...

Another round of objections, and Smith says: "You were explaining your dissatisfaction with the translation... Would you agree, Professor Randall, that language at its best is sometimes confusing and encompasses ambiguities in any statement?"

RANDALL: If it is correctly translated it is not confusing.

SMITH: And isn't it true then in Webster's one word can have multiple meanings?

RANDALL: Well, you can't say you met with someone who has been dead for a hundred years...

SMITH: Oh, I think I've read of encounters where people have attributed meetings with ghosts that have been dead for some two thousand years. Perhaps you were having one of those experiences.