



Merrimack Valley People For Peace

Serving the communities of the Merrimack Valley

Merrimack Valley People for Peace, Inc. works for a sustainable future for all life on our planet. Our members commit themselves to the interrelated activities of education for peace and justice, the prevention of war, an end to arms sales, the abolition of nuclear weapons, and protection of the environment.

December 2009 -- March 2010

Merrimack Valley People for Peace joins the United Nations and peacemakers around the world in proclaiming the years 2001-2010 to be the "International Decade for the Culture of Peace."

GOOD NEWS

Vermont Senate votes to close Vermont Yankee

On February 25, The Vermont State Senate voted 26-4 to close the Vermont Yankee reactor when its license expires in 2012. This is a monumental victory for the Citizens Awareness Network and for all the activists - including MVPP member Hattie Nestel - who have been working hard and long for it. As the reports about leaks of poisonous radioactive Tritium from the reactor into the groundwater and from there into the Concord River increased, hundreds and hundreds of Vermonters contacted their Senators to insist that the nuclear plant needs to stop operating. The historic vote of the Vermont State Senate shows that the will of the people can triumph over a multinational corporation.

It would be naive, of course, to expect that the Entergy Corporation is just going to accept the vote and go away. Right now, it denies the importance of this historic vote and still wants the Vermont legislature to give it another chance to operate in the state. The Citizens Awareness Network is bracing to focus their efforts on the Vermont House. As they say in their statement issued after the Vermont Senate vote: "Entergy will not give up, neither can we."

Costa Rica sets a global precedent by banning the manufacture of uranium weapons in its Free Trade Zones

As a sign of growing political opposition to uranium weapons, Costa Rica has passed legislation banning their production in its Free Trade Zones. Zonas Francas or Free Ports are common throughout Latin America and are seen as a means of boosting employment in deprived areas by offering favorable operating conditions to foreign companies. This usually means lower taxes and other duties.

The move is not without precedent in the country, three years ago similar steps were taken to restrict the manufacturing of infrared military ranging equipment on Costa Rican territory. According to legislators, Costa Rica is proud of its peaceful domestic and foreign policy and believes these policies should be extended to other areas of life - such as commerce and manufacturing.

Active nonviolence in Palestine and Israel

In the midst of the grim reality of the Israel-Palestine situation, we also hear reports about active nonviolent resistance. David Hartough, Director of PEACEWORKERS and co-founder of the nonviolent Peaceforce, who recently spent a month in Palestine and Israel with an interfaith peace-building delegation, writes: "The interfaith delegation I co-led to this region witnessed, first and foremost, many Palestinians who are engaged in active nonviolent

resistance to the occupation of their lands in the West Bank.

Weekly nonviolent demonstrations have been held in many villages, including Bil'in, Nil'in, Al Ma'sara, Walaja, as well as in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, some for more than five years. Israelis (including Combatants for Peace and Anarchists Against the Wall), and Internationals, (including Christian Peacemaker Teams, Ecumenical Accompaniment Program and Michigan Peace Teams) actively participate in these weekly actions. There is a deeply inspiring commitment by Palestinians throughout the region to keep struggling nonviolently even when Israeli soldiers shoot powerful tear-gas canisters and grenades, rubber-coated steel bullets, concussion bombs and even live ammunition at the unarmed villagers."

After reporting in detail about the experiences the group had in each of those villages, he writes about the Palestinians and Israelis who have formed Bereaved Families for Peace (www.cjre.net/bereavedfamilies.htm), and Combatants for Peace (www.combatantsforpeace.org/). Recognizing that their shared pain unites them, they are speaking together in schools and community groups. The delegation also met groups of Israelis working for peace and justice such as New Profile (www.newprofile.org/english/), Rabbis for Human Rights (www.rhr.org), The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (www.icahd.org) and Women in Black (coalitionofwomen.org/home/english) who have been demonstrating every week for twenty-two years.

MVPP Meeting – March 23, 7:30 PM North Parish Church, Unitarian, N Andover

<http://www.merrimackvalleypeopleforpeace.org/>

You can view newsletters on line (where most links work) at <http://www.merrimackvalleypeopleforpeace.org/oldmins.htm>

Printed on recycled paper

See the whole article at: www.tikkun.org/article.php/20100316100704359 Although far from an instant success, it shows the possibility of a peace process coming not from above, but from below.

Pat Scanlon elected Coordinator of Veterans for Peace, Chapter 9, Smedley Butler Brigade

In local news, our own bard, Pat Scanlon, member of the board of directors for MVPP, has been elected Coordinator of Veterans for Peace, Chapter 9, Smedley Butler Brigade. Congratulations and best wishes, Pat!

New Zealand peace activists free of all charges

Three New Zealand Ploughshares activists walked free on March 17 even though they admitted breaking into a Government spy base and slashing an inflatable plastic dome covering a satellite dish. A jury in Wellington District Court took just under two hours to find the three activists not guilty of all charges against them.

Dominican friar Peter Murnane, schoolteacher Adrian Leason, and farmer Sam Land were charged with intentional damage and burglary after they were arrested in April 2008 at the Waihopai satellite communications monitoring facility. They had cut through two fences and used sickles to deflate the plastic dome covering the satellite dish.

At the trial, the three activists readily admitted attacking the base, but said they were driven by a belief that the satellite caused human suffering and their actions to shut it down, if only temporary, were lawful.

"Our actions in disabling the spy base and stopping the flow of information helped save lives in Iraq", said Adrian Leason.

The jury heard that the Waihopai Echelon spy base is New Zealand's largest contribution to the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. The ongoing war has resulted in horrific war crimes, including more than one million dead Iraqi civilians, torture, and permanent poisoning of parts of Iraq by the use of depleted uranium munitions.

At the non-guilty verdict, there was a general euphoria in the packed courtroom. Many activists, some of them from far away, had come to support the three Ploughshares members.

Their media spokesman Graham Bidois Cameron commented: "The practice of non-violent resistance and direct action in the cause of peace has a long history in this country - the peaceful resistance to the invasion of Parihaka, and non-violent direct action against nuclear armed warships entering our harbours being just two examples."

Australian non-violence activist Brian Law said the jury's decision accorded with those made by other jurors in similar cases in other countries. "Of all the millions of people that marched in 2003 to protest the Iraq war", he said, "had only one percent of them taken this sort of action, the war would not have been possible."

Victory against discrimination

Debbie Almontaser has won a victory in her battle against discrimination. She was the founding principal of the first Arabic-language public school in the United States, the Khalil Gibran

International Academy, until a campaign of hate forced her out. She is well known for her success in bridging cultural divides, bringing together Muslims, Christians and Jews. In the summer of 2007, Almontaser became the target of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab attacks. Last week, the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ruled that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) discriminated against her "on account of her race, religion and national origin."

Remembering Howard Zinn and Granny D

This winter the peace movement and New England lost two dear people, who in their different ways inspired us like no one else, whom we immensely admired, loved and learned from. We dedicate this issue to the memory of Howard Zinn and Doris Granny D Haddock.

Well-known peace activist John Schuchardt wrote the following piece about his longtime friend Howard Zinn especially for the MVPP newsletter. Jo Ann Carlotto kindly gave us permission to publish her e-mail exchange with Howard Zinn about her amazing teaching experience using *A People's History of the United States*. To both of them, we express our deep gratitude. There is no better way to remember Howard Zinn than with one of his own writings. We reprint "The Optimism of Uncertainty" from one of his last books, *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress* (2007).



Howard Zinn August 24, 1922 – January 27, 2010

John Schuchardt

We all feel the keenest sense of loss, a parting without a farewell, a humble giant gone, leaving us with a sharp pain of loneliness, emptiness. Speaking with total personal subjectivity, I believe Howard felt within his soul that heaven with Roslyn was now better than, without her, the glorious life of earth. Of one thing I am entirely certain --- Howard's heart did not fail him, despite the news report of "heart attack." Howard's warm heart was his vibrant center, his well-spring of soul-force, his radiating sun warmth, which we were privileged for a time to absorb, by which to be nurtured and strengthened.

Howard was a natural, gifted teacher and speaker. He could explain the seeming complexities of the law, or war, or prisons in such a way that the truths revealed by him seemed simple, unasailable, even for widely diverse audiences. And yet Howard's passion was not teaching or speaking; it was learning and listening. Whenever you were in his presence, you could feel his

Weekly Vigils

Andover: Sunday, noon-1 pm; Shawsheen Square, Junction of Routes 133 and 28; Lawrence Friends Meeting/Shawsheen Peace Witness; Allan Sifferlen, asifferlen@sbra.com.

Andover: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 7-8 pm; Saturday, 10:45 am-noon (in good weather, 10-noon); Old Town Hall, 20 Main St.; Merrimack Valley People for Peace; Lou Bernieri, lbernieri@andover.edu.

Andover: Tuesday, 6:30-7:30 am; in front of Raytheon plant near Routes 133 and 93; Raytheon Peacemakers; Arthur Brien, 978-686-4418.

Gloucester: Saturday, noon-1 pm; Grant Circle.

Marblehead: Tuesday, 6:30-7:19pm in front of the high school and Community Center at the lights at the intersection of Humphrey-Pleasant and Lafayette Sts.; Tom Gale, 781-631-1218.

Nashua, NH in front of Nashua City Hall from 11 to Noon every Sat. www.nashuapeace.org

Newburyport: Sunday, noon-1 pm; Market Square; Niki Rosen, 978-463-3208.

Reading: 2nd Saturday/each month, 11 am-noon; Reading Square; Reading People for Peace; Bob Connor, bobconnor1@yahoo.com.

Rockport: Wednesday, noon-1 pm; First Congregational Church (silent for peace).

Salem, MA: Saturday, 11-noon; Riley Plaza (by the Post Office).

receptivity, the powerful presence of his silence, his eager, attentive listening.

When the Plowshares Eight were locked up in Montgomery County Prison in 1980, Howard came to visit us, the beginning of one of the most important friendships of my life. What could explain his making the time to go through the painful obstacles to achieve a far-away prison visit, except the value he placed on relationships and on experience, on seeing with his own eyes, listening with his own ears?

Howard spoke and wrote so as to give voice to the voiceless. He spoke and wrote so that all those marginalized and silenced by stereotypes, propaganda, myths, and the self-serving distortions of the dominant structures of violence and materialism could be heard. Howard Zinn made himself a servant of the people.

Howard's life was a life dedicated to learning and speaking the truth, in personal disregard for his own safety and the huge risks living the truth entailed. Howard was part of the rising freedom movement in a dangerously white supremacist Georgia, was beaten by police in Boston, was bombed by the United States in Hanoi, was threatened and targeted in unseen ways that he seldom spoke about, and was prepared to pay the enormous price likely to be exacted for helping Daniel Ellsberg release the Pentagon Papers. (Be certain to make full use of the great treasure just bequeathed us, "The Most Dangerous Man in America," the superb documentary of Daniel Ellsberg.)

One precious reality is that every word written by Howard was edited, purified, refined by Roslyn. Howard's voice integrated Sophia, divine wisdom, and came through a woman's listening heart, as well as from the sufferings and sorrows of Howard's life experiences of poverty, racism, capitalist exploitation, war.

Howard loved life, loved Roslyn, loved his family and friends. He knew that life was good and that people were good, every human being born with a conscience. Howard always had that faith in us, the ordinary people. He knew how easily the masses were manipulated, how easily any of us might become discouraged and dispirited. He knew the Holocaust and Hiroshima. He dropped napalm in World War II and was under B-52 carpet bombing in Hanoi. His was faith born out of fire, and he was able in his own life to turn lead into gold, the greatest deed of alchemy that any combat veteran can achieve. And so, Howard knew we had to keep breathing, keep opening our lungs to take in the fresh air of renewed courage. And he had a way to guarantee that we would do that, and that was his genius for humor. I

never heard Howard tell a joke, but I was never with him when he didn't make us all laugh.

I had asked Howard, and his brother servant to the truth, Daniel Ellsberg, to be the keynote speakers for our Veterans for Peace National Convention in Boston in 2004. A packed audience in Faneuil Hall was silent as Howard ambled to the podium, looked out and smiled, and said, "You know, the problem is, these people think it's their country. Theirs, to do what they want with it; and do what they want with us. But it's not. No, it's not theirs. No. It's our country. It's for all of us."

We laughed and we cheered. We knew the truth. It set us free, renewed our courage, and inspired each of us to do more, despite the seeming futility and hopeless odds.

Every thought and word of Howard Zinn came from and through the warmth of his loving heart. Many there are in public office and all around us with cold hearts of stone. But Howard had a powerful heart of compassion. His heart will never fail.

A teacher recommends Zinn

Dear Howard Zinn;

[A friend] asked that I write to you and tell the story of how I used your book, [A People's History of the United States](#), in an alternative school setting during the 1990's. The following is some information about the school and some of what I remember of using [The Book](#) (This is what the students called your book.)

When I was teaching there, the Collaborative Alternative School was a middle and high school for students who were unable to function in a "normal" school setting. Most of the students were labeled as Emotionally Disturbed, Behavior Disordered teens. The students came from ten or more sending communities. Most of the students were abused and abusive, involved in drugs and alcohol, had some connection with the court system, and were of average to above average intelligence. Most of them had no trust in anything, including themselves, as well as no hope.

They lived day to day, just "trying to make it through." In this educational setting, all authority needed to earn the students' respect. It was hard work building a positive relationship with these students, but once you had their loyalty, it made teaching a little easier. I taught U.S. History, math, and an eight-week class

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on tolerance (using the Anti Defamation League's World of Difference material).

U.S. History is mandatory and a subject that they did not enjoy since they saw it as a "lot of stupid information about dead people" having no relevance in their lives. After reading your book during the summer, I knew that they would get hooked in if I could slip The Book in some how. I started the year by asking one class to pick a word that they would like to study in U.S. History. One student said "Conspiracy!" and we were off! The other two classes, of course, decided to do the same.

I took the People's History and said that I had discovered a conspiracy over the summer and proceeded to compare what they had been taught and what was written in typical history books with this newly-discovered information. I must confess that acting and stretching the truth are only two of my teaching skills. We used "compare and contrast" to "discuss" the differences. I read pages 1-3 replacing some words with more familiar words; day one and we already had ourselves a conspiracy! They were engaged, outraged at the lies (They knew they couldn't trust authority!) and ready to take on the rest of the books to find the conspiracies throughout U.S.'s history.

The class saw the American Revolution through different eyes; the eyes of the oppressed. We looked at the rich being able to buy substitutes to fight for them and compared it to today, to gangs, and to the role of "power and possession" in the lives of humanity. This came up throughout the year, looking at it from different parts of history, and identifying it through various labels such as: abuse, racism, cast systems, gangs, and political geography.

Your book allowed me to bring history into today, to help the students look at human behavior and relationships. To encourage them to look at their history, the impact it had on them and how it could influence their future. The powerless were able to identify with those in history, to rage against the authority who should have made better choices, and to explore alternatives.

Chapter 17, "Or Does It Explode?" impacted the entire school as we tried to stay calm and study racism and human rights. By this time, the staff was very aware of The Book and copies could be found in other classes. Students wrote raps and poems, did art work with art therapists, and involved their therapists in this extremely sensitive topic. We also viewed movies, historical video clips, photos, and used materials from Southern Poverty Law Center's "Teaching Tolerance".

I used a timeline to keep some memory of sequence and progression and referred to it frequently since they thought that they had

the ability to lead me off track and talk about something other than what we were going to discuss. At times, I needed to grab The Book to search out information. The students used The Book to show to other teachers and students. This is all very unusual behavior for our students. The beauty of the school was that when they were searching out information or immersed in a topic, we had the flexibility to allow them time and space to continue in their pursuit for knowledge, understanding, and self expression.

The students did not study the complete history of the U.S. Instead, some learned to listen closely, ask questions in a calmer voice, research, analyze, look to the past for information about today (learn from your and other's experiences), and claim your right and responsibility to live as a full citizen in this country. You will never know what impact The Book had on these students, nor will I. But it was great fun, sometimes a little dangerous, and an honor to be able to share the truth with people who rarely heard, nor wanted to hear, the truth. My classroom was loud, disorderly, and at times filled with staff to help get them from rage to understanding. We never did use an "official" history book, except for reference. I did not give tests or quizzes. I did not teach to meet the state's standards. The People's History of the United States gave the students, and myself the gift of being able to build a better identity of themselves and others.

I thought that I would only write a few words! It made me wish I could teach the same way in public schools with all students. But, now it is my daughter's turn and she has the same passion for "social studies" as I do. Her "Howard Zinn" books will be looking as ragged as mine, I'm sure!
Bless you for the work you do.

Sincerely,
JoAnn Carlotto

Howard Zinn's reply to Ms Carlotto

Dear JoAnn:
I'm glad that [a friend] encouraged you to write to me. What a wonderful story you tell about this remarkable school and the creative way you have used my book. I am so happy to hear the reaction of your students. It is experiences like this that make me glad I wrote the book.

How we need teachers like you all over the country!
Best wishes in the good work that you do.

Howard Zinn

Editor's note Long before I heard Howard Zinn's name, I was aware of his influence on the study of History in the US. As an undergrad and graduate student in History, in the 1970s, I saw many exploring history from angles other than from who was president. We were not just looking for a thesis topic not previously covered. We were angry that what we considered history was not in the text books. By the 1980s and 90s more of that material has gotten in the text books and largely due to Howard Zinn. He not only researched and lived history, but he pushed historians to do likewise. Then he published "*A People's History ...*" which I have seen on the desks of many public school teachers. It was succinct, had a great bibliography and index, and was fun to read.
Brian Quirk

The prestigious American Historical Association (AHA) honored Howard Zinn:

As Eric Foner, the Dewitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University and a former president of the AHA, put it in an e-mail message today, "Over the years I have been struck by how many excellent students of history had their interest in studying the past sparked by reading Howard Zinn. That's the highest compliment one can offer to a historian."
<http://blog.historians.org/news/973/howard-zinn-paradigmatic-peoples-historian-dies-at-87>

THE OPTIMISM OF UNCERTAINTY

Howard Zinn

In this world of war and injustice, how does a person manage to stay socially engaged, committed to the struggle, and remain healthy without burning out or becoming resigned or cynical?

I am totally confident not that the world will get better, but that we should not give up the game before all the cards have been played. The metaphor is deliberate; life is a gamble. Not to play is to foreclose any chance of winning. To play, to act, is to create at least a possibility of changing the world.

There is a tendency to think that what we see in the present moment will continue. We forget how often we have been astonished by the sudden crumbling of institutions, by extraordinary changes in people's thoughts, by unexpected eruptions of rebellion against tyrannies, by the quick collapse of systems of power that seemed invincible.

What leaps out from the history of the past hundred years is its utter unpredictability. A revolution to overthrow the czar of Russia in that most sluggish of semifeudal empires not only startled the most advanced imperial powers but took Lenin himself by surprise and sent him rushing by train to Petrograd. Who would have predicted the bizarre shifts of World War II - the Nazi-Soviet pact (those embarrassing photos of von Ribbentrop and Molotov shaking hands), and the German army rolling through Russia, apparently invincible, causing colossal casualties, being turned back at the gates of Leningrad, on the western edge of Moscow, in the streets of Stalingrad, followed by the defeat of the German army, with Hitler huddled in his Berlin bunker, waiting to die?

And then the postwar world, taking a shape no one could have drawn in advance: The Chinese Communist Revolution, the tumultuous and violent Cultural Revolution, and then another turnabout, with post-Mao China renouncing its most fervently held ideas and institutions, making overtures to the West, cuddling up to capitalist enterprise, perplexing everyone.

No one foresaw the disintegration of the old Western empires happening so quickly after the war, or the odd array of societies that would be created in the newly independent nations, from the benign village socialism of Nyerere's Tanzania to the madness of Idi Amin's adjacent Uganda. Spain became an astonishment. I recall a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade telling me that he could not imagine Spanish Fascism being overthrown without another bloody war. But after Franco was gone, a parliamentary democracy came into being, open to Socialists, Communists, anarchists, everyone.

The end of World War II left two superpowers with their respective spheres of influence and control, vying for military and political power. Yet they were unable to control events, even in those parts of the world considered to be their respective spheres of influence. The failure of the Soviet Union to have its way in Afghanistan, its decision to withdraw after almost a decade of ugly intervention, was the most striking evidence that even the possession of thermonuclear weapons does not guarantee domination over a determined population.

The United States has faced the same reality. It waged a full-scale war in Indochina, conducting the most brutal bombardment of a tiny peninsula in world history, and yet was forced to withdraw. In the headlines every day we see other instances of the failure of the presumably powerful over the presumably powerless, as in Bolivia and Brazil, where grassroots movements of workers and the poor have elected new presidents pledged to fight destructive corporate power.

Looking at this catalogue of huge surprises, it's clear that the struggle for justice should never be abandoned because of the apparent overwhelming power of those who have the guns and the money and who seem invincible in their determination to hold onto it. That apparent power has, again and again, proved vulnerable to human qualities less measurable than bombs and dollars: moral fervor, determination, unity, organization, sacrifice, wit, ingenuity, courage, patience - whether by blacks in Alabama and South Africa, peasants in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Vietnam, or workers and intellectuals in Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union itself. No cold calculation of the balance of power need deter people who are persuaded that their cause is just.

I have tried hard to match my friends in their pessimism about the world (is it just my friends?), but I keep encountering people who, in spite of all evidence of terrible things happening everywhere, give me hope. Wherever I go, I find such people, especially young people, in whom the future rests. And beyond the handful of activists, there seem to be hundreds, thousands, more who are open to unorthodox ideas. But they tend not to know of one another's existence, and so, while they persist, they do so with the desperate patience of Sisyphus endlessly pushing the boulder up the mountain. I try to tell each group that they are not alone, and that the very people who are disheartened by the absence of a national movement are themselves proof of the potential of such a movement.

Revolutionary change does not come as one cataclysmic moment (beware of such moments!) but as an endless succession of surprises, moving zigzag toward a more decent society. We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can quietly become a power no government can suppress, a power that can transform the world.

Even when we don't "win", there is fun and fulfillment in the fact that we have been involved, with other good people, in something worthwhile. We need hope. An optimist isn't necessarily a blithe, slightly sappy whistler in the dark of our time. To be hopeful in bad times is not being foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of competition and cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places - and there are so many - where people have behaved magnificently, it energizes us to act, and raises at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.



Statement from Doris Granny D Haddock in response to the Supreme Court's decision to kill campaign finance reform.

Ten years ago, I walked from California to Washington, D.C. to help gather support for campaign finance reform. I used the novelty of my age (I was 90), to garner attention to the fact that our democracy, for which so many people have given their lives, is being subverted to the needs of wealthy interests, and that we must do something about it. I talked to thousands of people and gave hundreds of speeches and interviews, and, in every section of the nation, I was deeply moved by how heartsick Americans are by the current state of our politics.

Well, we got some reform bills passed, but things seem worse now than ever. Our good government reform groups are trying to staunch the flow of special-interest money into our political campaigns, but they are mostly whistling in a wind that has become a gale force of corrupting cash. Conditions are so bad that people now assume that nothing useful can pass Congress due to the vote-buying power of powerful financial interests. The health care reform debacle is but the most recent example.

The Supreme Court, representing a radical fringe that does not share the despair of the grand majority of Americans, has today made things considerably worse by undoing the modest reforms I walked for and went to jail for, and that tens of thousands of

other Americans fought very hard to see enacted. So now, thanks to this Court, corporations can fund their candidates without limits and they can run mudslinging campaigns against everyone else, right up to and including election day.

The Supreme Court now opens the floodgates to usher in a new tsunami of corporate money into politics. If we are to retain our democracy, we must go a new direction until a more reasonable Supreme Court is in place. I would propose a one-two punch of the following nature:

A few states have adopted programs where candidates who agree to not accept special-interest donations receive, instead, advertising funds from their state. The programs work, and I would guess that they save their states more money than they cost by reducing corruption. Moving these reforms in the states has been very slow and difficult, but we must keep at it.

But we also need a new approach—something of a roundhouse punch. I would like to propose a flanking move that will help such reforms move faster: We need to dramatically expand the definition of what constitutes an illegal conflict of interest in politics.

If your brother-in-law has a road paving company, it is clear that you, as an elected official, must not vote to give him a contract, as you have a conflict of interest. Do you have any less of an ethical conflict if you are voting for that contract not because he is a brother-in-law, but because he is a major donor to your campaign? Should you ethically vote on health issues if health companies fund a large chunk of your campaign? The success of your campaign, after all, determines your future career and financial condition. You have a conflict.

Let us say, through the enactment of new laws, that a politician can no longer take any action, or arrange any action by another official, if the action, in the opinion of that legislative body's civil service ethics officer, would cause special gain to a major donor of that official's campaign. The details of such a program will be daunting, but we need to figure them out and get them into law.

Remarkably, many better corporations have an ethical review process to prevent their executives from making political contributions to officials who decide issues critical to that corporation. Should corporations have a higher standard than the United States Congress? And many state governments have tighter standards, too. Should not Congress be the flagship of our ethical standards? Where is the leadership to make this happen this year?

This kind of reform should also be pushed in the 14 states where citizens have full power to place proposed statutes on the ballot and enact them into law. About 70% of voters would go for a ballot measure to "toughen our conflict of interest law," I estimate. In the scramble that would follow, either free campaign advertising would be required as a condition of every community's contract with cable providers (long overdue), or else there would be a mad dash for public campaign financing programs on the model of Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut. Maybe both things would happen, which would be good.

I urge the large reform organizations to consider this strategy. They have never listened to me in the past, but they also have not gotten the job done and need to come alive or now get out of the way.

And to the Supreme Court, you force us to defend our democracy—a democracy of people and not corporations—by going in breathtaking new directions. And so we shall.

Doris Granny D Haddock

Dublin, New Hampshire, January 21, 2010

--Our neighbor, nationally recognized reformer, and centenarian, Granny D, made this convincing statement three days before her 100th birthday. She died March 9, 2010. Thanks to Dennis Burke's blog for publicizing the statement, and giving us rights to print it.

myinsurgency.wordpress.com/2010/01/21/supreme-court-sends-doris-a-birthday-greeting/

Recent Events

Iraq Refugees at Dinner On January 8 St. Anne Episcopal Church in Lowell hosted a wonderful potluck. It was MVPP's annual potluck, and this year we invited the Iraq refugees who mostly live near downtown Lowell. They and we and the group from the Bedford MA Unitarian church brought lots of great food and conversation. The crowd of at least 150 was too big to hear speakers, but the tables were buzzing.

Howard Zinn on National TV. Many of us crowded into Jim and Mary Todd's House to view *The People Speak* is on the History Channel. Dramatic readings from his history reminded us of the heroism of many. The snacks were great too.

On the seventh anniversary of the invasion of Bagdad, March 19, eleven people stood in the Friday night vigil in front of Andover's Old Town Hall. Visiting from college, Charlotte added her mother and an Andover classmate to the sad reunion.

Coming Events

Vigil: Citizens Against the Death Penalty. Friday, April 2, 4-6 P.M. Reading town common (Rts. 28 & 129) Contact: H. Selton, 781-245-5789

Walk for a Nuclear Free Future. The Buddhist Peace Walkers will be in the area. This year they are walking all the way to New York, intending to be there during the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review at the United Nations and to participate at the big demonstration at the U.N. on May 2. www.nptwalk.org We will host a potluck supper for them at the North Parish Church, 190 Academy Rd., North Andover on Tuesday **April 6 at 6 p.m.** Author, **Bruce Gagnon**, from Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space, www.space4peace.org/ will be the speaker. Please check our website for updates.

Dr. Joseph Gerson will bring a group of more than fifty **Hibakusha (survivors of the atomic bomb)** from Hiroshima and Nagasaki for an evening program. This major event is being organized by the House of Peace at First Church in Ipswich on **May 5 or 6** (exact date and time to be decided). This is an historic gathering, as the Hibakusha are aging and will be traveling to the United Nations to make perhaps their last passionate appeal to the world to enforce the Non-Proliferation Treaty on the nuclear powers.

Actions

Peace Grannies Invaded a Brooklyn Target Store with Song and Regarding War Toys

from Joan Wile, author of, "Grandmothers Against the War: Getting Off Our Fannies And Standing Up For Peace" (Citadel Press '08)

Approximately 20 Granny Peace Brigade members and Raging Grannies sang revised Christmas carols condemning war toys at the TARGET Store in Flatbush's Atlantic Shopping Center. took place on December 4 at the Times Square Toys "R" Us store.

Grannies went to the toy department where they filled up four carts and some baskets with war toys. They then rode them down the escalator while unfurling many bright yellow banners imprinted with the black letters, "WAR IS NOT A GAME" and "NO MORE WAR TOYS." They sang the famous John Lennon refrain, "Give Peace a Chance."

They intended to leave the toy-filled carts and baskets at the check-out counter, but by the time the elderly crusaders and the carts reached the bottom of the escalator, a bevy of policemen was awaiting them and requested that they leave the store. They did, singing and displaying their banners.

Outside, on Flatbush Avenue, the grandmothers opened their special songbooks and sang a number of Christmas carols revised with lyrics pleading that people not buy war toys. For, instance:

HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING
NOW, AT LAST, LET FREEDOM RING.
PEACE ON EARTH AND MERCY MILD,
NATIONS MUST BE RECONCILED.

LET US PUT THE BOMBS AWA-A-Y!
BRING OUR TROOPS HOME, NOW, TODA-A-Y
WARS ARE NOT FOR TOYS, OR A GAME.
DON'T TEACH OUR KIDS TO KILL AND MAIM!
GIVE THE CHILDREN TOYS OF PEACE,
HELP THEM TO LEARN THAT WARS MUST CEASE.

Passersby stopped to enjoy the concert, and many told the grandmothers that they agreed with them. The protesters gave out hundreds of leaflets listing appropriate toys.

Other members of the grannies' audience included the police, who stood across from the women throughout their entire song-fest trying, without success, to hide their delight at the grandmas' vocal offerings.

Iraqi Refugees

In January 2009 Merrimack Valley People for Peace was informed that Iraqi families were living in Lowell. We learned that the Iraqi families were political refugees who had been resettled here and we invited the seven families to a pot luck dinner. We shared a meal together and had table conversations as well as whole group introductions.

Following the dinner MVPP members met some of the Iraqi families in their apartments and offered assistance with preparing their resumes. In the course of conversation, it was apparent that many of the families did not have the kind of household furnishings they needed. A list of needed items was circulated to MVPP members and friends, and thus the search began for donated items. We held a second pot luck dinner in June 2009. By that time there were twelve families who attended and additional friendships were made. The Iraqi families gave MVPP a "Certificate of Appreciation" signed by each family.

We began looking for interested individuals and families to "partner" with an Iraqi family to help in their adjustment to life in the U.S., to be a family friend, to help with questions they have about American culture, interpret letters they may receive and not know what to do about, etc.

Links were made with First Parish Church in Bedford and some of the members helped find needed items for the families and some became a "partner" with an Iraqi family. In December 2009, First Parish in Bedford invited some of the Iraqi families to a Lyceum. It was well attended and the church became more involved, setting up committees and offering both emotional and financial support.

The partners and volunteers come from a variety of Christian, Jewish, Unitarian and Muslim secular and religious backgrounds. Members of the Muslim community, both locally and from the greater Boston area, are also involved as "partners" and volunteers, assisting in a variety of ways.

As of March 2010, there are twenty-six individuals/families living in Lowell and many "partners" and volunteers who are committed to welcoming the stranger in their midst.

Volunteers who are partnering with an Iraqi family should be willing to have a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) and a SORI (Sexual Offender Record Information) check to protect the Iraqi families and their children.

If interested, contact Mary Todd at 978-687-7864



Teens at high school international day

Meeting Summaries

January 26

We had discussion about a new meeting space. Pat Scanlon would contact North Parish church

Mary reported from the Iraqi Friends sub group. She distributed a page of activities since the last meeting. Several other organizations are now involved and the number of families has grown to 23. She has met with Niki Tsongas with one of the Iraqi families, and with some of the staff and volunteers at the International Institute of Lowell to learn more about their programs and services. She is putting together a booklet of partner families experiences. There may be more media attention in the near future. People are being very generous with both financial contributions and items for the Iraqi families.

We had a lengthy discussion about whether to sign the "Cairo Declaration." Brian read the whole declaration aloud. The decision was not to support the declaration but to write letters to the editor or other statements supporting Palestinian rights.

The DVD "Rethinking Afghanistan" is available and people were asked to view it to determine if we wanted to send it to public access TV stations in the area. Michael has authorization to make copies. Members are asked to look at the DVD and make recommendations for use at the next meeting.

Brian, Dee and Richard will meet to make recommendations next month for a variety of requests for funding.

We discussed the purpose of the MVPP list serve. It was recommended that the Board of Directors not use the list serve for anything except time-urgent requests. It was also recommended that we refrain from forwarding interesting articles/e-mails. If members have a long article they think is urgent, please summarize the article in one paragraph and send a link to the article. The primary purpose of the list serve is MVPP business.

February 23

Our guest, Said AbuZarra spoke with the group for the first part of the evening about the plight of the Palestinians. His presentation was informative and sparked lively conversation.

An MVPP subcommittee met recently and identified a list of organizations that they recommend we consider making donations to. There were minor changes made to their recommendation. The prioritized items include: \$100 to Adopt a Minefield; \$75 AFSC; \$50 Amnesty International; \$100 Citizens Awareness Network (against VT nuclear power plant); \$50 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows; \$50 Lanterns Project; \$100 House of Peace; \$50 International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons; \$100 IVAW; \$100 Mass Peace Action; \$100 MFSO; \$100 Palestinian Children's Relief Fund; \$100 UFPJ; \$100 US Campaign to End Israeli Occupation; \$100 VFP; \$100 Voices for Creative Nonviolence. Total \$1375. This amount was approved.

The group had a lengthy discussion about accepting car donations and giving a tax write-off to the donors. There was considerable conversation and the group felt that there were too many issues unresolved to accept cars for a tax donation at this time. Mary and Kathie agreed to call the prospective donors, thank them for their generosity and express our regret.

Boryana will coordinate the Peace Walkers this year. They should be in the area on Tuesday, April 6th.

The next meeting will be held March 23 at North Parish Unitarian Church at 7:30 PM.

Letters

Confronting Fear

Article published in Gloucester Daily Times
by Cynthia Fisk, Feb. 10, 2010

When we're afraid, we don't think clearly. Breathing is more constricted, bodily movements more labored, thought processes disordered. If you mentioned Scrooge to a child during the holiday season, you saw alarm on his or her face. Speak about terrorists, Al Qaeda, 9/11, to adults and it's like impaling consciousness on barbed wire.

Our government became distinctly fear-based after the events of 9/11. Surveillance of everyday people, secret renditions, torture, the Patriot Act all came to the fore in answer to the threat of "terrorism." Previously, the word "communist" aroused tensions and the willingness to commit vast sums of money to the military-industrial complex was the rule. We almost have to wonder now whether our economy depends on there being a terrifying specter, a "visible, disembodied spirit." Does that mean we can see its effects but can't really know what it represents?

What do we actually know about Al Qaeda? Analysts have said that there are one hundred members in Afghanistan. Their philosophy is murderous and their presence, wherever they are, has to be dreaded. However, they don't make up a standing army and can migrate to various countries like Yemen and Somalia to set up a base of operations at will. They can do this as a lightly armed, ragtag group. Can a massive number of troops track them and deal effectively with them anymore than they can track random extremists whose bombs are delivered at the side of the road or via suicidal attacks?

Terrorism is a technique designed to terrify. Terror is an emotion that strips us of common sense, the ability to stand back and analyze a situation and decide on a workable response. Being subject to this emotion is a disservice to what we do best.

Instead of letting words like "the Taliban" become another catch-all term for any number of presumed threats, we have agencies that are prepared to determine who and what we might confront. We need to assure, above all, that they're well-coordinated and not subject to turf battles. Also, we're learning that alert, savvy citizens are ready to intervene. In addition, instead of using drones that can't detect who is an extremist down below in an unfamiliar population and who could be neutral, we have to examine circumstances before dropping bombs and inflaming emotions.

Should we consider whether Al Qaeda would lay claim to developing a plan to blow up a plane? This provides them with an act they could appropriate that is designed to frighten us and create turmoil in our government.

How much clearer could it be than this that we need to pay attention to outward warning signs through existing well-crafted intelligence and focused police action? These are designed to

ferret out the facts in this and every event and are ready to do so. Only with the facts in our possession, can we proceed in sure footed ways.

A multinational examination of perceived problems would benefit neighboring countries and the U.S., too. Being fearful doesn't serve us, our families, or our nations well.

We can set out to learn what makes others into extremists and deal with them in balanced, realistic ways. We won't appease them. Instead, we should focus on what has radicalized them and confront that with straightforward talk and ameliorative actions. We'll walk along paths that have signposts indicating the need for suitable courage and resolve along with a continuing sensible plan of operations that can unearth the facts.

This would bring us to a crossroads where contending groups can begin to take a long look at one another and possibly come up with different approaches. Rather than using bullets and bombs, we could believe in winning hearts and minds, our own included. Common ground based on analysis of carefully examined facts would yield up agreements, not noxious weeds that choke and kill.

Following through with this would be a truly patriotic act.

Defense Budget Is Wasteful

Eagle Tribune "Send-off" March 05, 2010

This is in response to a reply to my prior letter on cutting the military budget.

"Need Defense" seems to believe that there is no waste, bloat, or fraud in our over \$700 billion military budget. The fact is, there are plenty of places we could cut without hurting our nation's security. Indeed, such cuts would increase our security by making us that much less dependent on having our deficits bankrolled by countries like China and the huge amounts of foreign oil consumed to fuel our military activities.

Do we really still need nuclear-armed submarines cruising all over the world or a \$100 billion missile defense system that doesn't even work or to keep developing newer and higher-tech weapons that military leaders say we don't need or to have hundreds of thousands of troops stationed all over the world? Shouldn't we crack down on abuses like \$600 hammers and contractors like Halliburton stealing billions of dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan without delivering the services they contracted for?

We spend more on the military than every other country in the world put together and twice as much as the next highest country. Is this really necessary to protect our security?

Sincerely,
Michael Bleiweiss
Methuen, MA