



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.

November 2007 - April 2008

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

Spring is finally here! and so is MVPP's long-awaited new supply of rainbow **PEACE flags** from Italy. Special thanks go to Jim Todd for his persistent efforts to make this happen. We hope that all flags find good homes soon. We are looking forward to seeing their inspiring presence in many demonstrations – and in front of more houses through New England neighborhoods.

We will again have a **table in front of the Old Town Hall** in Andover during our Saturday vigil, bringing a fresh crop of buttons, bumper stickers and printed information to the attention of the community.

MVPP began the year with supporting the build-up for the **Winter Soldier** hearings held in the middle of March in Silver Spring, MD (more about this extraordinary gathering in "Recent Events".) We sent a \$100 contribution to Iraq Veterans Against the War, and were among the sponsors and contributors for the production of the CD "Kennebunkport: Songs of Peace", all proceeds of which go to Veterans for Peace.

We were lucky to have a strong link to the event through Pat Scanlon, member of both Veterans for Peace and MVPP, and through his friends from the Smedley Butler Brigade chapter of VFP. The Smedleys had joined us for our traditional potluck in January at which they briefed us on the planning for the Winter Soldier hearings. Pat put in a lot of energy in the build-up for the hearings. He was involved in the organizing of several fundraisers and of course in publishing the Kennebunkport CD which featured performers at the Kennebunkport Peace Rally and March last August (Pat and his band included). Pat worked in security during the hearings and gave us an emotional report at MVPP's March monthly meeting.

North Andover Cable TV broadcast the Saturday hearings after Masood, Jane, and someone else asked them. Lou asked Andover Cable and Mary asked Lawrence. Richard and technical people at U Mass Lowell succeeded in showing it to students and recording it for editing. Thanks to all who got that word out!

MVPP added to the hundreds of events around the country to commemorate the **Fifth anniversary of the US invasion in Iraq.**

On March 19th, in the morning, Arthur Brien, and Mary and Jim Todd spoke on WCCM, 1450 AM.

Then Arthur, Ralph Galen, Richard Hudak, Jim and Mary visited with Christopher Keohan, Deputy District Director of Rep. Niki Tsongas's Lowell office. They presented him with a packet of materials compiled by Mass Peace Action and UJP and spoke for at least half an hour on our concerns about the war and the veterans. See the cover letter online at www.merrimackvalley-peopleforpeace.org/Tsongas031908.doc. They thanked Mrs. Tsongas for introducing H.R. 5499, and urged her to support H.R. 5507 which would require the safe, complete and fully-funded redeployment of U.S. Armed Forces and contractor security forces from Iraq and would prohibit the establishment of any enduring or permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq.

In the evening, despite of the strong rain, we held a vigil to commemorate the beginning of the war, to mourn its victims in Iraq and the U.S. and to express once more our commitment to ending it. The vigil started with a presence of about thirty people and ended with over fifty. It was heartening to see new faces and many young people, and to be together in sharing reflections and silence, music and tears. Many thanks to Mary Kate Small for bringing the MVPP canopy that sheltered a big part of the assembly. Many thanks to Thea Shapiro and David Grober for printing out, laminating and hanging up 4,000 names of U.S. soldiers dead in the war; to Don Abbot for his opening and closing reflections; to Mary Kate Small and Brian Quirk for the music; to Charlotte Purcell for her beautiful poem that we publish in this issue; to Pat Scanlon for sharing his emotions fresh from the Winter Soldier hearings; to Brendan and Annie Hudak for speaking and taking photos; and to everyone for joining us.

MVPP Monthly Meeting – First United Methodist Church – April 22, 2008 – 7:30 PM.
<http://www.merrimackvalleypeopleforpeace.org/>

Printed on recycled paper

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

Local Resolutions

Brattleboro, VT voted on March 4th in support of a measure calling on the town's police force to arrest and to indict George W. Bush and Dick Cheney for crimes against the U.S. Constitution. The vote was 2012-1795. The indictment question was on the primary ballots for both parties.

Marlboro, VT passed a similar measure at its town meeting the same day at which the vote to indict Bush and Cheney was 43-25 with 3 abstaining.

Exit polls in Vermont indicated that the Iraq war remains the No. 1 issue concerning people there – no wonder considering that Vermont has the highest per capita death rate among U.S. service members, so the war practically touches everyone in the state.

A similar resolution has been filed in **Kennebunkport, ME**, where the Bush family summer compound is located. Laurie Dobson, independent candidate for the Maine US Senate seat, has recently presented it to the town's board of selectmen. The resolution calls for Bush's and Cheney's arrests and deportation to a jurisdiction where they can be prosecuted for war crimes and other criminal violations.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) led student protests in over 90 schools in a week of anti-war actions marking the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. From high schools to Harvard, hundreds of students left class and took to the streets to demand an immediate end to the war in Iraq and a reinvestment in America's schools. Some staged die-ins, like at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte and Middle Tennessee State University. Others organized massive walkouts. The SDS chapter in Providence, Rhode Island occupied a recruiting center, risking arrest. At the University of Central Florida in Orlando, students lined 500 pairs of shoes on walkways, each containing a card with the name of an Iraqi woman or child who was killed in the war.

In Washington, D.C., students and youth took to the streets as part of an action named "Funk the War," targeting war-profiteer Lockheed Martin and blocking traffic. And in Portland, Oregon, over 1000 high school students walked out of school and joined a downtown march numbering in the thousands. The following day, hundreds more students boycotted school and continued their demonstration against the war.

The new "phoenix" SDS was re-founded in the beginning of 2006 to build progressive student power. It is the fastest growing student led organization in the nation, with over 100 chapters at schools and in communities.

SDS was also present in Minneapolis, MN, where on March 27 sixteen demonstrators were arrested after shutting down the offices of the Army National Guard Recruiting Office and protesting five years of war in Iraq. The civil disobedience action included participants from many local peace groups, including the University of Minnesota SDS and Youth against War and Racism. It was coordinated with an action by Macalester SDS as they shut down another nearby military recruitment center. "We are here to educate people about the lies recruiters tell and to protest a system that uses and abuses its soldiers," explained the demonstrators.

Meanwhile, the Army Recruiting Station at the Midtown Place Shopping Center in Atlanta, GA was visited by a group of enthusiastic aspiring soldiers eager to be enlisted and sent to Iraq as soon as possible. **Ten "Grandmothers for Peace"** ranging in age from 57 to 80, appeared at the station on March 17th early in the morning. "When do you get the bonuses? Do you get them right away?" one of them asked. After a witty exchange with the recruiters and refusing to take "no" for an answer and leave the station, the ten grandmothers were arrested, taken to Fulton County jail and charged with criminal trespassing. The action was supported by dozens of activists standing outside of the station and chanting under a banner that read, "Take Us, Not Our Grandchildren!"

Editors Note: The world's largest religious organization, The Roman Catholic Church, is considering sainthood for a conscientious objector. This writer within that church points out the significance.

Excerpted from an article by Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy at www.lewrockwell.com/orig7/mccarthy7.html. October 15, 2007. Thanks to Brenda McCarthy.

The Man Who Chose To See

War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today.

~ John F. Kennedy

The life of Franz Jägerstätter was the ordinary life of an Austrian farmer in the village of St. Radegund. He was a devout Catholic. Sexton of his parish church, he was married and had three children. But, on August 9, 1943 Franz Jägerstätter's life became other than ordinary, when he was legally killed by the German Military for refusing to kill for the German Military.

At the hour of his death few people knew him and no one who did know him supported him in his refusal to engage in homicide for the Führer. Legions of Christians of all ranks told him to do his duty and go to war like the other Christian men. His bishop, pastor and spiritual advisors endeavored to persuade him that his conscientious objection was a wrong and futile course, even possibly sinful and contrary to Church teaching. He was looked upon as the embarrassing, if not mentally unstable, polar opposite of the heroic Aryan warrior . . . when the blade of the guillotine fell at Brandenburg Prison near Berlin at 4 p.m. on August 9, 1943, Franz Jägerstätter was . . . destined to be totally forgotten.

...on October 26, 2007, the Catholic Church [will] formally Beatify Franz Jägerstätter as a martyr of the Christian faith. His Beatification will close forever for all Catholics, and hopefully for all Christians, any thought that they can obey the laws of a nation or the orders of an agent of a state if what is required to obey is doing that which is not in conformity with the Will of God . . .

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).

It is not exaggeration to assert that the greatest scandal and distortion of Christianity – Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical – over the last 1,700 years has been its enormous participation in and justifications of homicidal violence and enmity as consistent with following the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies. Yet, it is a scandal and a distortion that almost no Christian or Church will publicly admit exists . . .

Franz Jägerstätter's schooling ended when he was fourteen. He could not articulate a formal theology of Gospel nonviolence nor could he articulate a formal just war theology. How could he possibly be expected to, when even today most Christians are taught little or nothing – or outright falsehoods about both? Yet after two periods of military training, he permanently turned away from the only war and military operation he ever encountered; one which had the enthusiastic endorsement of his fellow Austrian and German Christians. He made this decision on the basis that participation would be a betrayal of his Lord and could seriously jeopardize his eternal destiny . . .

Are we Christians today perhaps wiser than Christ Himself? Does anyone really think that this massive bloodletting can possibly save European Christianity from defeat – or bring it to a new flowering? Did our good Saviour, whom we should always try to imitate, go forth with His apostles against the heathens as German Christians are doing today?

While sophisticated religious propagandists for the government and military were telling people that St. Paul teaches in Romans 13, that Christians are "to obey authorities," Jägerstätter was responding "but only to the extent that they do not order anything evil, for we must obey God rather than men."

...
Franz Jägerstätter, then, is not only a Christian martyr, he is also a chosen prophet... The Hebrew prophets are not fortune tellers nor are they persons who simply speak their own minds and conjectures. They explicitly speak the universally applicable Word (Logos) of God to concrete situations. By

Merrimack Valley People For Peace

God's grace they vividly see what others profess not to see, namely, rebellion against God in the here and now. . .

Vigils in Newburyport

Niki's plan for a vigil on Solstice last Friday was successful. 20 of us, more or less, were present, including four from Gloucester: Jeanne, Sunny, John and Janet. Afterwards we gathered at Niki's place for delicious food and some good blues music by our new friend, Andy and his guitar.

At today's vigil (Dec.23), a young woman approached us, and started to thank us, saying through her tears that she and her husband had just returned from Iraq. She needed a lot of embracing. She also said that there are many in the service (no time to find out exactly which one) who felt that the war was a mistake. Unfortunately, she could not stay, but before she left we told her about the Iraqi Vets against the war, the MVPP web site, and urged her to join us next week. So, for those of us who may be questioning the continuing use of vigils, here's your answer.
--Barbara Haack

Barbara and Niki reported on the wonderful rally and march in Newburyport on March 16. They had over 100 people attending, complete with a drummer who accompanied the walk, singers and speakers. They also had wonderful response from the crowd on their vigil on the 19th.

Letters

A combat veteran's antiwar effort

Boston Globe November 4, 2007

I was appalled at your coverage of the Oct. 27 antiwar demonstration on Boston Common ("10,000 in Boston rally against war," Page B6, Oct. 28). Not only was it buried deep within the paper, but it failed to mention perhaps the most significant aspect of the march to Copley Square: that it was led by a platoon of combat veterans.

When the troops speak out against this horrific war, their voices are silenced by blatant omissions from the mainstream media. As a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, and as a combat veteran Marine who was among those leading the march, I feel deeply disrespected.

To continue to receive this newsletter... **We Invite You to Join /Rejoin Us**

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\$10.00 Student/Senior
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Return to P.O. Box 573
North Andover, MA 01845

MVPP is registered with the IRS as a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions to MVPP are tax deductible. Last year, approximately one-third of our members joined/renewed at higher than the basic rate. **Check here [] if you prefer to receive your newsletter via e-mail.**

Veterans have a unique perspective on what is happening on the ground in Iraq. More than 1 million of us have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since the start of the war, and the truth is starting to emerge. Soon our voices will be impossible to censor, and America will be forced to confront how much blood is on our hands.

It's bad enough that I was betrayed by the country I swore to defend. It's almost more painful to be ignored by my hometown newspaper when I returned. Corporal Matt Howard
(This eloquent letter helped inspire the Veteran's Day protest, in which two MVPP members took brave stands.)

Let's resolve to make peace in '08

Marblehead Reporter January 7, 2008

To the editor:

It is in the spirit of the New Year that we reach out to anyone who thinks that they can make a difference in this crazy world, is willing to question what most accept as the inevitable, and is willing to stand up to the belief that violence is the best answer to troubling questions.

It is in that spirit that many of us vigil for peace in Iraq each week on Tuesdays from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m. in front of the high school and Community Center at the corner of Humphrey and Pleasant streets.

We usually receive a lot of support from drivers, but occasionally, as happened last Tuesday, an adult drove by and shouted, "Drop a bomb on them," which his young passenger then repeated out the window. We have one sign that says, "No Place for Hate," but here in this small, seemingly peaceful town, there is still much fear to be addressed in our community. When our president divides us all into two camps — those with us and against us — we turn our rage against the "other," black or Hispanic, gay or lesbian, pro-or anti-war, Christian, Jew or Muslim, in acts of aggression, like destroying the Peace Pole beside the YMCA, or in disparaging remarks.

We ask you to join us in reaching out to our neighbors, in bringing up tough questions about war and peace, about the protection of human rights, about the American use of torture, about the fact that our country is viewed as the number-one threat to peace by other nations on this planet. It is so important that we be positive role models for our young people, isn't it? Let's channel our fear and anger into positive actions.

There will be a film series about non-violence starting Wednesday, Jan. 16 at 7 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 28

Mugford St. Everyone is invited to see the films and a discussion afterwards. We all have something to offer toward peaceable community.

Kathy Sands-Boehmer Green Street Tom Gale Manataug Trail

Re-license Vermont Yankee?

Commentary in the Rutland Herald, VT. March 2008

"You would think a re-licensing inspection for a nuclear plant would be at least as thorough as the house inspection you get when you purchase a home," said Paula Gotch, a member of one of the nine groups involved in a petition to halt the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission, NRC, "Cut and Paste" re-licensing tactics. "My inspector tested equipment and systems carefully himself. Here you have a federal agency, the NRC, content to just shuffle papers. It's truly mind boggling."

Despite a seriously flawed re-licensing process, the NRC, gave its blessing in early March to Entergy to extend the license of the 36-year-old Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant in Vernon, Vermont. It evidently makes no difference to the NRC that its own Office of the Inspector General, OIG, issued an alarming critique in September, 2007, of the NRC's own renewal process. The entire OIG report (#OIG-07-A-15) is available at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/insp-gen/2007/>

There is no indication that the NRC has addressed the points in the OIG critique.

Environmental and citizens' groups from Vermont, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts responded to the OIG report with a petition demanding that the NRC halt the license renewal process for the "aging fleet of nuclear power plants until objective and independent analysis is conducted into the current licensing renewal process." Vermont Yankee is among the oldest nuclear power plants still in operation. It was licensed in 1972 for 40 years with a life expectancy determined to end in 2012. This did not take into account a 20 per cent uprate, which creates much more wear and tear.

"So far, the re-licensing process has been a conveyor belt to a rubber stamp, not a proper safety review," stated Richard Webster of the Eastern Environmental Law Center, one of the attorneys representing the groups.

"The NRC is an agency in need of Congressional overhaul, and if this OIG report doesn't prove that, nothing short of a meltdown will," stated Peggi Sturmfels a member of the coalition of petitioners.

“The OIG report makes it clear that the current NRC license renewal process is a failure and must be completely re-evaluated before another plant is re-licensed,” stated the attorney for Riverkeeper, an environmental group working on the Indian Point re-licensing.

Vermont’s Governor Jim Douglas, joined anti-nuclear groups from Vermont, New York, Massachusetts and New Jersey in an effort to stop the NRC’s re-licensing of four nuclear reactors until the NRC overhauls its review process. The Douglas administration joined Vermont’s state congressional delegation in asking for an independent safety assessment of Vermont Yankee before the NRC or state signs off on an additional 20 years of operation.

Some of the issues that were raised by the OIG audit are

1. In more than 70 per cent of audited plant renewals the NRC staff did not verify the authenticity of technical safety information submitted by nuclear power plant operators;
2. NRC staff reviewers routinely “cut and pasted” whole sections of the renewal application text into their own safety reviews, rather than write their own evaluations.
3. The NRC has no procedures in place to check whether the safety reviews were done properly.

Agreeing with the “cut and paste” criticism is Sarah Hofmann, director of public advocacy for the Vermont Department of Public Service commented. “The other thing is they (NRC) don’t go in and check and independently verify.”

Top officials in Governor Deval Patrick’s administration in Massachusetts are also urging the NRC to revamp their oversight of the licensing process before moving ahead with pending renewals.

“The report states that re-licensing decisions fail to document that NRC staff is providing the intensive, independent review of industry submittals that the public both expects and relies on for its protection,” states James Milkey chief of the environmental protection division of Martha Coakley, Massachusetts attorney general.

“Given the importance of the safety review associated with nuclear power plant re-licensing, these conclusions (in the audit) are disturbing to say the least,” stated both Massachusetts secretaries of energy and environment and public safety.

Nuclear power can never be considered safe, cost effective, reliable or sustainable. NRC’s failure to evaluate a nuclear plant proves the point.

Also unnerving are uncertainties of true costs of decommissioning, unsolvable issues of protecting and storing waste, and risks associated with nuclear proliferation. Projected extreme weather conditions caused by global warming will impact nuclear plants and their waste in other as yet unknown ways.

More than 500 organizations from the United States and 38 countries on six continents have signed statements rejecting the use of nuclear power as a means of addressing climate change. It is clear that our energy future must be carbon-free AND nuclear-free. Certainly Vermont is up to the task.

by Hattie Nestel, 25 miles from Vermont Yankee in Athol, Massachusetts and a member of Citizens Awareness Network

Hattieshalom@verizon.net

President Bush’s Veto of Bill Banning Torture

Eagle Tribune March 11, 2008

Letter to the Editor

I am extremely disappointed that President Bush has vetoed H.R. 2082, the Intelligence Authorization bill, which prevents the CIA and other US agents from using waterboarding, sexual humiliation, dogs and other techniques that amount to torture.

The Bush administration’s stubborn and reckless disregard for basic decency and international law has already brought us disrepute. The President’s veto further compounds the incalculable damage to the United States’ standing at home and abroad. The veto of the anti-torture legislation loudly contradicts his assertion that the United States “does not torture.”

I applaud the Congress for rejecting the bogus arguments and false claims that torture is an effective interrogation tactic. I urge the Congress to take the next step and pursue the available credible evidence of illegal and inhuman extraordinary renditions and torture in clandestine gulags around the world, and promptly hold all those responsible for the blatant violations of national and international laws.

Masood A. Sheikh
North Andover

Support our troops by voting for change March 18

Newburyport Daily News March 18

To the editor:

Vote for change. What problems have been solved by the war in Iraq? For what good reason have 655,000 people been killed - 3,973 or our own troops killed, 29,080 wounded-and trillions of dollars spent for the war? How can we support our troops if we don't question the government's handling of foreign policy? If we don't adhere to international law and human rights? If we don't hold the government accountable to a balance of powers, to the equitable handling of our resources? How can we allow some corporations to profit from war while soldiers lose their lives, health and homes?

Imagine what could be if our troops dedicated their gifts in service to non-violent ways of building a world of justice, including a just and careful handling of the resources of the Earth itself. And, if we contributed our particular gifts to such purpose.

It has been said that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and women to do nothing.

Vote, act.

Trish Walker
West Newbury

Misguided Missile Defense

Excerpts from Op-Ed, by Congressman John Tierney and Stephen Flynn, senior fellow for national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations

Boston Globe, March 28 forwarded by Peter Cameron

“For 2009, the White House is requesting \$12.3 billion to develop ballistic missile defense...

“Over the past decade, security experts have warned that the most likely way a nuclear weapon will find its way into the United States is hidden in the cargo of a ship or smuggled across US borders. But this spring the Bush administration asked for just \$120 million for port security grants, slashing by one-half what congress allocated in 2008...

“Five years ago this month, the Bush administration took its eye off the ball when it invaded Iraq instead of pursuing Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Throughout the Bush presidency, it has been doing the same by investing more heavily in missile defense than port and border security. The best way to mark the 25th anniversary [this week] of President Reagan’s “Star Wars” speech would be with a debate about its strategic relevance in our post-September 11 world. “

Let's come to our senses and leave Iraq

Newburyport Daily News April 1, 2008

To the editor:

Over five years ago the U.S. invaded Iraq under the pretext that it possessed weapons of mass destruction, stored by Saddam Hussein, formerly a U.S. ally. Our country conveniently has forgotten that President Bush and Vice President Cheney stated that our war would be a short one. Today, between 600,000 and one million Iraqi civilians and soldiers have died violently, as well as over 4,000 U.S. soldiers - plus, there is no official number of the soldiers who have died in hospitals in Germany or in the U.S. from traumatic wounds.

Do these deaths mean anything to the American public? Yes, our soldiers' senseless deaths hit us, but we are ignorant and casual about the eradication of countless Iraqis, destruction and death being so removed from our placid and safe American life. Moreover, we are told incessantly that in spite of losing so many of our young men and women, this "war on terrorism" is worth it. But what are we winning? The answer continues to be the need for Iraq's oil and the need to account for our hurt pride until we get the job done.

I think of those Iraqi civilians - children, mothers, fathers, grandparents - or those brave American soldiers who no longer are with us. Or of the 30,000 wounded U.S. soldiers, many horrifically. Their full-time care is a portion of the projected \$3 trillion this war will cost. Moreover, the complicity between our government and the media assures that we receive a minimum coverage of war-torn Iraq, with its food, gas, electricity, health, educational and infrastructure shortages that are at lower standards now than at the beginning of the war.

On September 11, 2001, we lost nearly 3,000 people. Bent on retaliation, our country set out to punish first Afghanistan and then Iraq (though there never was evidence of al-Qaida influence in Iraq at that time). If our intent is an eye for an eye, we certainly are the bully. By any definition, going to war is an act of terrorism.

Let's come to our senses: Our soldiers should leave Iraq, except for a small contingent (printed, but Barbara would delete), and the United Nations should step in to help the Iraqis stabilize the country. The millions of dollars that we spend daily on the war could instead be pumped into energizing our own recessive economy as well as helping the Iraqis get back on their feet.

Barbara Haack
West Newbury

A news blackout of Winter Soldier Hearings

Newburyport Daily News April 7, 2008

To the editor:

It surprised me to learn recently that The New York Times published information about the Winter Soldier Hearings, held in Washington, D.C., March 13-16, in its international paper, the International Herald Tribune in Paris, but not in The New York Times' editions published here in the United States. What am I to make of this news blackout in America, whereby all the rest of the world gets to know about the hearings, but not American citizens? There were reports in places as far-flung as Britain, Australia, Croatia and Iran. Are we to be the last to know?

The Winter Soldier Hearings bring talk of war to the very human level - which is what war is really about - to the level of people who have directly experienced war and its terrible consequences. Not the rants of politicians whose wealth and bloated egos keep them insulated from any concern about ordinary human beings, nor the conniving of sycophants who see advantage in kissing up to power, nor the rapacious greed of the oil industry and weapons manufacturers, nor the inhuman callousness of military planners who are devoid of conscience, all groups that personally profit from a state of war.

The Winter Soldier Hearings are the personal testimonies of Iraq war veterans; what they saw, what they did, what that has done to them, and how veterans have been treated. It is also individual stories of what has been done repeatedly, over and over, to hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi people - infants, children, men and women of all ages - whose only fault was to live in their own country. But the world's superpower wants to take what they have and has lied grotesquely to further its agenda. Sorry, but that's what it comes down to.

There are some places where information on the hearings is available. Go to IVAW.org or truthout.org for coverage. The testimonies are painful to hear, but at the same point Americans must face what is being done in our name and with taxpayers' money.

Diana Philip
Newburyport

Recent Events

15 Veterans for Peace including Pat and Arthur, and three supporters were arrested, at Boston's Veterans Day event November 11, 2007. They and others stood solemnly at City Hall Plaza. They wore gags to symbolize being denied free speech by the American Legion. Charges were dropped in December.

MVPP members Boryana Tacconi, Arthur Brien, and Jim and Mary Todd went to the ever larger demonstrations against the **School of the Americas**, at Fort Benning, Georgia. November 16 weekend.

Winter Soldier Hearings: Iraq and Afghanistan

Boryana Tacconi

*God bless the truth that fights towards the sun
They roll the lies over it and think that it is done
It moves thru the ground and reaches for the air
And after a while it is everywhere...*

Malvina Reynolds

From March 13-16 hundreds of veterans and active-duty soldiers of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars convened at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland for the Winter Soldier hearings. The event was organized by Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), with the help and support of Veterans for Peace (VFP), Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) and others. It was named Winter Soldier to honor the historic 1971 gathering by the same name held during the Vietnam War.

Over four days, the participants heard around 30 hours of statements from veterans and active duty soldiers who had the great courage to go public with their first-hand experiences and to talk about what is really going on day in and day out on the ground. In addition, panels of scholars, veterans, family members and journalists gave context to the testimony. All participants and their stories had been thoroughly checked out by a verification team from IVAW. Several witnesses stated that they would like to testify under oath to Congress.

"We've heard from the politicians, we've heard from the generals, we've heard from the media – now it's our turn," said Kelly Dougherty, executive director of IVAW and a former sergeant in the Colorado National Guard, who served in Iraq. "It's not going to be easy to hear what we have to say. It's not going to be easy for us to tell it. But we believe that the only way this war is going to end is if the American people truly understand what we have done in their name."

For four days, the horrors and injustice of the ongoing occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan unfolded in heart- and gut-wrenching eyewitness accounts, supported by video and photographic evidence. The testimony was organized in several panels:

- Aims of the Global War on Terror: the Political, Legal and Economic Context of Iraq and Afghanistan
- Racism and War: the Dehumanization of the Enemy (Part 1 and 2)
- Rules of Engagement (Part 1 and 2)
- Corporate Pillaging and Military Contractors
- Civilian Testimony: the Cost of War in Iraq and Afghanistan

- The Cost of War at Home
- The Crisis in Veterans' Health Care
- Divide to Conquer: Gender and Sexuality in the Military
- Breakdown of the Military
- The future of GI Resistance
- Winter Soldier and the Legacy of GI Resistance

In story after story told in choking voices, the witnesses revealed how normal, decent human beings can behave when put in the inhuman situation of a brutal occupation and the civil war it sparked.

The soldiers and veterans repeatedly described their honorable motives in joining the military: to serve their country, to bring democracy to the people of Iraq - and how they came to the understanding that the invasion and the occupation were unjust and not what they were led to believe. They explained how our soldiers are conditioned before even leaving U.S. soil to think and speak of Iraqis and Afghans in demeaning and dehumanizing terms, making it psychologically easier to kill, and in the process are losing their humanity themselves. Repeatedly put in situations where it was impossible to understand who is friend and who enemy, the Rules of Engagement eroded to the point of "Shoot anything that moves."

They told about the grief and rage over the deaths of their comrades erupting into indiscriminate and unnecessary killing and abuse of civilians.

They spoke about the predawn raids when they would terrorize and humiliate families, ransack a whole house and then realize that they had gone to the wrong home. How they were congratulated by their superiors on making a first "kill". How many of those "kills" were civilians who had happened to be in their way at the wrong time.

"I remember one woman was walking by, carrying a huge bag, and she looked like she was heading towards us. So we lit her up with the Mark 19, which is an automatic grenade launcher. And when the dust settled, we realized that the bag was only full of groceries. And, I mean, she had been trying to bring us food, and we blew her to pieces for it." (Testimony of Marine Jason Washburn.)

Most expressed their belief that behind each of their personal stories there are thousands of related or similar stories, results of a system. As Phil Aliff, who served in Falludjah and in the city of Abu Ghraib, put it in a related interview with Democracy-Now!:

"We are here today to show that soldiers are not committing these crimes and atrocities in Iraq individually; it's actually policy from the top. From the top general to the US President, they are all implicit. And by sending soldiers to go and fight and die in an illegal war is causing this country to become, you know, polarized, go into a crisis. And so, for us it's most important to be able to articulate our opposition to the war for the American people and be able to show them that this is something from the top. These atrocities – Abu Ghraib, Haditha – are policies of the US government and not individual soldiers."

Many ended their testimony with expressing deep regrets for what they did, apologizing to the Iraqi people and calling for a complete and immediate withdrawal of all forces. In the words of Camilo Mejia,

“War is dehumanizing a whole new generation of this country and destroying the people in the country of Iraq. In order for us to reclaim our humanity as a military and as a country, we demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all troops from Iraq, care and benefits for all veterans, and reparations for the Iraqi people so they can rebuild their country on their terms.”

Camilo Mejia was court-martialed in 2004 for refusing to go back to Iraq and served a year in prison. He is now chair of the board of IVAW.

The hearings were broadcast live on **Pacifica Radio** by the excellent team of journalists Aaron Glantz and Aimee Allison. They were also extensively covered by **Democracy Now!**, **Free Speech TV** and the **Real News Network** and can be heard, read and viewed on the archives of all of those independent networks, as well as on the web-site of IVAW:

www.ivaw.org. They were televised on about 20 public access channels and in public gatherings from Florida to Alaska and were accessible online.

On the other hand (are we really surprised?) the event was almost entirely ignored by the American corporate media. None of the major broadcast TV networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) mentioned Winter Soldier in their newscasts, neither did PBS. Neither did the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times or most major newspapers in the country. The Washington Post came up with some coverage that it choose to place in the local section. The Boston Globe did better than most with Anna Badkhen's article "Veterans recall horrors of war in live broadcast" from March 16th.

It is now up to all of us who want the war to end, to support the Iraq Veterans Against the War by spreading the information about the Winter Soldier hearings as broadly as we can.

Nate Goldschlag, Veteran Against the War from Arlington, produced a 53 minute video you can watch, or even submit to a cable station. see it at <http://smedleyvfp.org/page27/page27.html>

You can view un-condensed videos at <http://ivaw.org/wintersoldier/howtowatch>

Palestinian witness. Yousef Bashir, a young Palestinian peace-maker, spoke at Beacon Hill Friends House April 4th. Having grown up in Gaza, with a father who always sought peace without sacrificing justice, Yousef made the best of a bad situation.

His father refused to leave his house when ordered to by the Israeli army. Years later his father was wounded by a stray bullet, in that house. Some time after that, fifteen year old Yousef was deliberately shot by a soldier while walking near home. He was treated in Tel Aviv. There, coached by his father to find the best in people, he had a unique opportunity for growth. He found that the Israeli medical staff were fine people, not at all like the bad image a boy gets under siege. Being in medical care for three years (the bullet is still in his spine), he made many friends and observed that the language and culture of the Pales-

tinians and Israelis was very similar. He then attended the Ramallah Friends School (Quaker) and an American program, Seeds of Peace.

Yousef learned to forgive the soldier who shot him (though he has not met him). Though he does not deny how unfair the Israeli and American governments and press are, he can forgive them also. He does not have an instant solution to the spiraling anger around his homeland, but believes both sides will eventually learn to cooperate. He encourages increasing dialogue, and is preparing himself to help the two societies work together.

Coming Events

Students for a Democratic Society Northeast Regional Convention. Harvard U. April 11 - 13 see http://www.newsds.org/wiki/index.php?title=Spring_2008_Northeast_Convention

Norman Finkelstein is speaking at Boston College on April 16 at 4:30 P.M. on Israel/Palestine <http://normanfinkelstein.com/content.php?pg=9>

Chernobyl Day Vigil in Brattleboro, VT April 18, 2008 10:00 AM to 3:00PM. Wells Fountain, Main St. (in front of courthouse). Memorial Observances for those that lost their lives and suffered from the radioactive releases at Chernobyl, April 26, 1982. In remembering Chernobyl, we will call for the shut-down of Vermont Yankee. This aged and brittle reactor poses the same threat of an accident and release of radiation to our communities.

For further information contact Deb Katz of CAN, 413-339-5781 or Doug Renick of AFSC, 413-584-8975

"Eyes Wide Open" will be at Merrimack College on April 23 and 24. This exhibit will honor the U.S. military casualties from New England who have been killed in Iraq. The exhibit also includes a display representing Iraqi civilian casualties killed in the conflict and a multimedia presentation exploring the history, cost and consequences of the war.

New England United (NEU) Conference, April 25-26, 2008 Tufts University – Medford, MA http://newenglandunited.org/files/Save%20the%20Date_NEU%20Conf%20prelim%20handout.doc. The April conference will be a general meeting of New England United, and resolutions approved by a supermajority of two-thirds at the Conference plenary will be official decisions of NEU. Submit proposals for the Conference plenary by April 23. at neu-conference@newenglandunited.org. To join the conference committee or assist with publicity and outreach in your area, please contact Marilyn Levin at MarynL@alumni.neu.edu.

MVPP Benefit Concert in Andover, Saturday May 17, 7:30 PM Ming-Chi Tsai, violin, and Ernest Goldman, piano: Music of Handel, Mozart, and Franck. Suggested Donation: \$15 to \$25, Benefactor: \$50, Peacemaker: \$100. Concert will be in the home of the violinist, so space is limited. Directions provided when reservation is made. For tickets, please e-mail Bobbie Goldman bg@comcast.net or call 978-661-9009.

Legislative Watch

Peter Cameron

Peace Action asks voters to call our Senators to ask them to support **Senate Bill 1914**, introduced by Senators Feinstein (D-CA) and Collins (R-ME). It would require a nuclear posture review from the next administration before Congress would fund any new nuclear weapons programs.

We now have **updated contact information on the last page**, for Rep. Niki Tsongas.

The proposed Student Privacy Protection Act of 2007, would prohibit the release of students' names, addresses, and telephone numbers without the consent of parents, thereby reversing the language in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 – which gave recruiters access to that personal information unless students or parents explicitly opted out.

Mike Capuano, is (Dec. 14) the Commonwealth's only U.S. representative who has not signed the bill limiting a recruiter's access to a student's personal information.

... the term "opt out" means that you must send in the proper "no thank you" form in order to prohibit a recruiter's access to your child's information.

From an exciting article at www.wickedlocal.com/malden/news/lifestyle/columnists/x118365162 by Audrey Valeriani

Nuclear Posture Review

Peace Action asks voters to call Senators to ask them to support Senate Bill 1914, introduced by Sens. Feinstein (D-CA) and Collins (R-ME) which would require a nuclear posture review from the next administration before Congress would fund any new nuclear weapons programs.

From the President of MVPP

Dear Members and Friends,
As this newsletter indicates, in the midst of worldwide tragedy, there is much to be thankful for. As Dr. Loretta Williams puts it, "in the struggle for justice is the hope."

We are struggling and meeting and vigiling and campaigning on the MVPP front and I hope you join us when you are able and where fits best.

- The Israel-Palestine Committee (Richard Hudak chair) is planning to show Tom Jackson's film on the Combatants for Peace and is working on how best to observe May 15th which is Israel's 60th Anniversary and what the Palestinians call Al-Nakba, the Calamity, when over 700,000 forcibly lost their homes.
- The End the War Committee (Pat Scanlon) has supported Winter Soldier II and allied itself with Iraq Veterans Against the War and Veterans for Peace. Pat Scanlon co-coordinates the latter group and we have promoted his compilation album, /Kennebunkport Songs for Peace./
- The Educating for Peace Committee (Kathie Robinson) promoting an alternatives to violence program for teenagers out of Barbara Hildt's "Help Increase the Peace Program" (HIPPE).
- The Counter-Recruitment Committee (Jim and Mary Todd) is working with Lowell's group and visited the Greater Lawrence Technical School recently.
- Vigiling continues in earnest. And much more.

You are welcome to all of our programs and we hope to see you the fourth Tuesday of the month, April 22nd, at 7:30pm, at N. Andover United Methodist. Thanks for all your wonderful work and faith in peace and non-violence. You can get in touch with me or any of the people above by phone or email. In the struggle is the hope, Ralph Galen, President, RalphGalen@comcast.net, 978.886.2734

Volunteers needed

We need more people to help with preparing the newsletter, to get the good news out on a regular monthly basis.

Contact brian@quirk.ws

Poem

Read at the March 19 vigil

Do you feel lied to?
Do you feel used?
As he speaks his betrayal,
His thin smile unfurls.

Where is the reason
We give for this war?
Is no life sacred
Anymore?

Do you feel lied to?
Do you feel used?
As he speaks his betrayal,
His thin smile unfurls.

Do you see them fighting,
The money machine?
Bombs dropped, cities blazing
What a bloody scene.

Is this God or
Is this pain?
A son's vengeance,
A madman's reign!

Can you stand it
anymore
When will we stop
this unjust war?

Do you feel lied to?
Do you feel used?
As he speaks his betrayal,
His thin smile kills.

--Charlotte Purcell

In Memory

Tom Lewis

March 17, 1940 - April 4, 2008

On ... the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Patrick Lewis died of natural causes at his Austin Street home in Worcester, MA. His commitment to justice and peace flowed out of his love and art and began with civil rights, continued with opposition to the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, and the current US War in Iraq. He was arrested many times for nonviolent civil disobedience, serving more than 4 years of his life in jail for his acts of conscience, including a multi-year sentence for his part in the burning of draft files in Catonsville, Maryland in 1968.

Tom trained in the service to follow up after the use of nuclear weapons. Then he developed art skills and worked in church organizations in the 1960s. He met the Berrigans and Catholic Workers. He joined the Civil Rights movement, and then the anti-war movement.

Since moving to Worcester in the late 1970s, Tom has been a leader in the peace movement. He organized a long and successful campaign to end work on the MX nuclear missile at GTE in Westboro. He received long jail sentences after taking part in two (of many) "Plowshares Actions." He illustrated a number of scripturally-based books about resistance to war, and enjoyed teaching art in war torn areas.

Tom said that prison keeps "our minds sane and our direction clear. The nuclear age is calculated to dull our senses with false security and an illusion of hope, a hope which in fact is death. I believe that to stay alive, one must risk or enter jail for non-violent resistance to the Nuclear Beast. Otherwise we are dead before the very first strike is made."

Tom was in an Alexandria, Virginia court on Good Friday this year for his part in protests at the Pentagon. His case was dismissed and he was set free. His spirit was set free yesterday.



Tom Lewis in front of one of his murals.

excerpted from Scott Schaeffer-Duffy e-mail

Ralph DiGia

December 13, 1914 - February 1, 2008

Ralph DiGia, lifelong war resister and pacifist died this afternoon in New York City. Ralph had a bad fall a couple of weeks ago, broke his hip, and has had a series of serious health problems following his admission to St. Vincent's Hospital.

Ralph, 93, has been the heart and soul of War Resisters League since he came on staff shortly after the end of WWII and his release from federal prison, where he had served a term for refusing service as a conscientious objector.

An associate of A. J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, Dave Dellinger, Barbara Deming, and many others, Ralph held key posts over the years with Liberation magazine as well as being on the staff of the War Resisters League. While Ralph was not a public speaker or a writer, he played a key a role within the radical pacifist movement, and was central to many of the major antiwar actions of the past six decades.

Ralph was deeply loved by the movement, especially by those at his political home, the War Resisters League. He is survived by his wife, Karin DiGia, his children, and his two brothers.



Ralph DiGia rode a bicycle in 1951, from Paris to Moscow, with Bill Sutherland and Dave Dellinger, for disarmament and nonviolent resistance

from the War Resisters League e-mail

War Resisters League Tax Pie Chart:

next page

WHERE YOUR **INCOME TAX** MONEY REALLY GOES

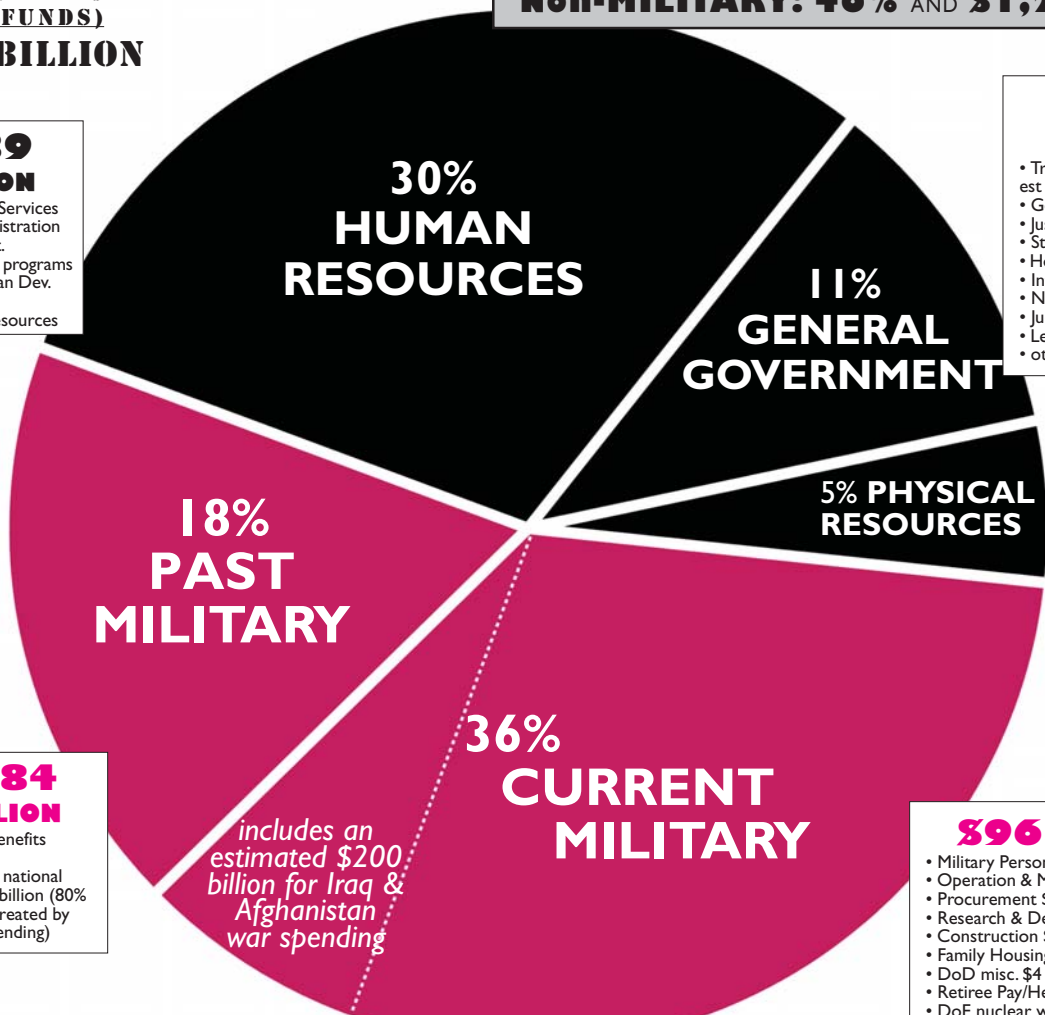
U.S. FEDERAL BUDGET **2009** FISCAL YEAR

**TOTAL OUTLAYS
(FEDERAL FUNDS)
\$2,659 BILLION**

Non-MILITARY: 46% AND \$1,210 BILLION

**\$789
BILLION**

- Health/Human Services
- Soc. Sec. Administration
- Education Dept.
- Food/Nutrition programs
- Housing & Urban Dev.
- Labor Dept.
- other human resources



**\$304
BILLION**

- Treasury, incl. 20% Interest on debt (\$97B)
- Government personnel
- Justice Dept.
- State Dept. (partial)
- Homeland Security (15%)
- International Affairs
- NASA (50%)
- Judicial
- Legislative
- other general govt.

**\$117
BILLION**

- Agriculture
- Interior
- Transportation
- Homeland Security (15%)
- HUD
- Commerce
- Energy (non-military)
- Environmental Protection
- Nat. Science Fdn.
- Army Corps Engineers
- Fed. Comm. Commission
- other physical resources

**\$484
BILLION**

- Veterans' Benefits \$94 billion
- Interest on national debt \$390 billion (80% est. to be created by military spending)

includes an estimated \$200 billion for Iraq & Afghanistan war spending

**\$965
BILLION**

- Military Personnel \$129 billion
- Operation & Maint. \$241 billion
- Procurement \$143 billion
- Research & Dev. \$79 billion
- Construction \$15 billion
- Family Housing \$3 billion
- DoD misc. \$4 billion
- Retiree Pay/Healthcare \$70 billion
- DoE nuclear weapons \$17 billion
- NASA (50%) \$9 billion
- International Security \$9 billion
- Homeland Secur. (military) \$35 billion
- State Dept. (partial) \$6 billion
- other military (non-DoD) \$5 billion
- *"Global War on Terror" \$200 billion*

We added \$162 billion to the last item to supplement the Budget's grossly underestimated \$38 billion in "allowances" for the "War on Terror," which includes the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

MILITARY: 54% AND \$1,449 BILLION

HOW THESE FIGURES WERE DETERMINED

"Current military" includes Dept. of Defense (\$653 billion), the military portion from other departments (\$150 billion), and an additional \$162 billion to supplement the Budget's misleading and vast underestimate of only \$38 billion for the "war on terror." "Past military" represents veterans' benefits plus 80% of the interest on the debt.* For further explanation, please go to www.warresisters.org/piechart.htm.

These figures are from an analysis of detailed tables in the "Analytical Perspectives" book of the *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2009*. The figures are federal funds, which do not include trust funds — such as Social Security — that are raised and spent separately from income taxes. What you pay (or don't pay) by April 15, 2008, goes to the federal funds portion of the budget. The government practice of

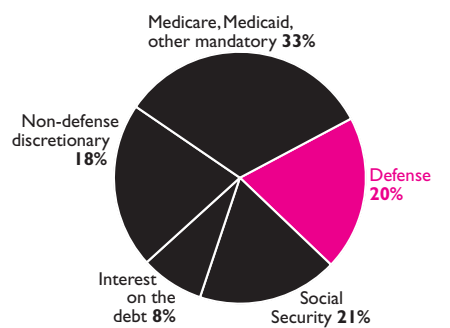
combining trust and federal funds began during the Vietnam War, thus making the human needs portion of the budget seem larger and the military portion smaller.

*Analysts differ on how much of the debt stems from the military; other groups estimate 50% to 60%. We use 80% because we believe if there had been no military spending most (if not all) of the national debt would have been eliminated.

Government Deception

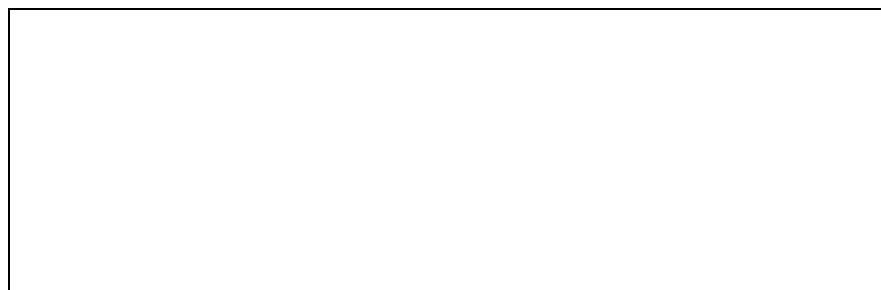
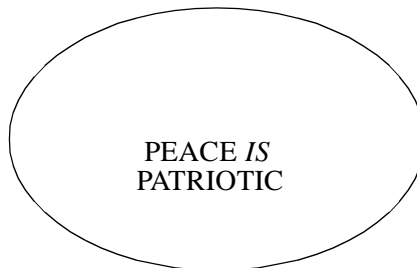
The pie chart (right) is the government view of the budget. This is a distortion of how our income tax dollars are spent because it includes Trust Funds (e.g., Social Security), and the expenses of past military spending are not distinguished from nonmilitary spending. For a more accurate representation of how your Federal income tax dollar is really spent, see the large graph.

Source: Congressional Budget Office for FY2008



Merrimack Valley People For Peace
P.O. Box 573
North Andover, MA 01845-0573

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



The MVPP Newsletter is printed monthly and has a current distribution of 200. We are grateful for suggestions, comments, and help with publication. (Unless **2008** appears on your label, your dues have expired. Please remember to renew.)
MVPP Acting President: Ralph Galen. Vice President: Jim Todd. Newsletter contributors: Arthur and Margaret Brien, Peter Cameron, Tom Gale, Barbara Haack, Matt Howard, Richard Hudak, Brenda McCarthy, Hattie Nestel, Diana Philip, Brian Quirk, Kathy Sands-Boehmer, Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, Boryana Tacconi, and Trish Walker

President George W. Bush

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500
White House Comment Desk: 202 456-1111
E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov

Senator Edward M. Kennedy

304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202 224-4543 fax: 202 224-2417
2400 JFK Building, Boston MA 02203
617 565-3170 fax: 617 565-3183
Form: <http://kennedy.senate.gov/contact.html>

Senator John F. Kerry

304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202 224-2742 fax: 202 224-8525
One Bowdoin Sq., Boston, MA 02114
617 565-8519 fax: 617 248-3870
Form: <http://kerry.senate.gov/text/contact/email.html>

Representative Niki Tsongas (District 5)

2447 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202 225-3411 fax: 202 226-0771
305 Essex Street, Lawrence, MA 01840
978 681-6200 fax: 978 682-6870
E-mail form: <http://tsongas.house.gov/contact.shtml>

Representative John Tierney (District 6)

120 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202 225-8020 fax: 202 225-5915
17 Peabody Sq, Peabody, MA 01960
978 531-1669 fax: 978 531-1996
E-mail: <http://www.house.gov/tierney/email.htm>

A link to all in US legislature:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/legbranch/legbranch.html>

How Senators and Representatives voted:

Senate: http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/a_three_sections_with_teasers/votes.htm
House: <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2004/index.asp>

State Voting Information: Look up who you vote for at
<http://www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.php>