No Time for Complacency

- David Bantz -
APC Board Co-Chair

Peace Patriots

What are we called to do for peace and non-violent social change today? In the last year peace activists helped elect a President who came to prominence as a vocal opponent of the U.S. war on Iraq and who dared us to hope for progressive social change. A good deal of the peace and justice movement’s energy switched from protests to precinct work. It was wonderful feeling we had political allies; stunning for many of us to experience the dramatic and historic election results. Now what, now that the elation of that moment has faded?

You must be receiving the same pleas I am from those we elected to continue to organize and write letters and send money to support their agenda. It is a tribute to the effectiveness of your grass roots organizing and advocacy that elected officials look to such grass roots for continued support; they correctly warn us that merely electing them does not ensure the change we want or the programs we need. So should we, as peace and justice advocates, continue to work with - or even directly for - elected officials to effect change through the administration of government? Or are we being thus co-opted and our efforts diluted or distorted into pork-barrel programs that do not foster fundamental change? It is, of course, possible to be a change agent working “within the establishment.” I hope that those who have made this shift will remember their roots in the peace and justice movement and lend their support only so long as their work is really fostering progressive change.

But for those who have not become part of the political establishment, it is important we recognize how much work remains: while political events seem to insure a gradual scaling back of our military presence in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan appears to be following an all-too-familiar pattern of escalation; the horrendous anti-democratic executive powers asserted in the previous administration have not been withdrawn; militarization of foreign policy proceeds and U.S. military spending - about as much as the rest of the world combined - continues apace at the expense of basic human needs; efforts to reduce climate destabilization, provide health care, improve education, and basic infrastructure are all at risk as “compromises” render progressive initiatives impotent. Yes, the election was a historic shift in
some ways, but if we relax our efforts or silence our voices, it will have been in vain. Fulfilling the promise and hopes embodied in the election requires persistent efforts by human rights organizations like the Alaska Peace Center!

If complacency or being co-opted is one danger, another is cynicism. You’ve heard it or thought it as I have: whatever the symbolic value of this election, nothing is fundamentally changing - it’s useless to attempt reform of a system at bottom so beholden to moneyed elites with an anti-democratic agenda; new programs are at best marginal incremental steps offset by increases in economic injustices, environmental degradation, and militarism.

Snap out of it! In the past few months there have been several successes on progressive and peace issues that had languished for years. My friend Joe Volk has described no less than 14 such successes through patient persistent and well-documented advocacy (http://fcnl.org/about/successes/2009.htm). They include the executive order outlawing torture and secret CIA prisons; the first ever U.S. Presidential declaration of the goal of complete nuclear disarmament; a Pentagon budget that actually proposes to cancel some weapons; defeat of new funding for nuclear weapons; a permanent ban on export of cluster bombs, taking us closer to confirmation of the treaty banning use; funding for State Department civilian response corps; funding empty diplomatic posts. Yes, we need many more success stories. We will be able to report on them if (and only if) we continue to be vigorous and resourceful advocates for peace and justice.

As the other items in this newsletter document, Alaska Peace Center is both a local vehicle to promote peace and non-violent social change, and a fellowship of local peace builders. We continually seek alternative perspectives and ideas for building a more peaceful and just community and nation. Don’t be co-opted, don’t be a drop-out. Participate in our bi-monthly meetings and our periodic events; help staff our booth at the Tanana Valley State Fair; and yes, send your donations to help fund our programs.
There was a lot to celebrate on January 19th, 2009 and the Peace Center marked the occasion with a letter writing campaign and potluck. Not only was it Martin Luther King Day and Alaska Civil Rights Day, but it was also the day before the Presidential Inauguration of Barack Obama. The event was part of a nationwide effort to provide service projects in conjunction with MLK Day and the Inaugurations. Over 25 people from the Fairbanks community came out to celebrate the Inauguration of our nation’s first black president and to continue the King’s legacy of working in the pursuit of peace and justice.

The evening commenced with the traditional APC potluck followed by the movie Why We Fight, which provided sustenance and inspiration while we wrote letters. The APC provided addresses, letter writing materials and sample letters to facilitate the event. However, individuals selected specific political leaders and news media sources to send the letters to, based on their own interests. The letters urged Obama to take, like King, a pathway of peace throughout his administration. They also were supportive of closing Guantanamo, expediting the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and creating peace in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Alison Carter with the GI Rights Hotline also provided letter writing contact information for incarcerated service members who were court marshalled and are currently serving time in military prisons for resisting deployment. The organization Courage to Resist, which supports public GI resisters, is facilitating the delivery of these correspondences to the service members. Over ten letters were sent to service members as a result of the letter writing campaign.

By the end of the evening, the tables were filled with empty potluck plates and bowls. Yet, they were also piled high with letters of peaceful expression of the concerns and hopes of those present, bringing the distant goal of peace a little bit closer.

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Commemorating the looting of Iraq’s treasures
Claire Alix

On Friday April 10, 2009, about 20 people gathered at the University of Alaska Museum plaza, in Fairbanks to hold a vigil in commemoration of the looting of the Iraq National Museum. The looting had taken place six years earlier, April 10-12, during the fall of Sadam Hussein, when American troops entered Baghdad. The commemoration, spearheaded nationally and internationally by the association SAFE (Saving Antiquities For Everyone) was being held for the third consecutive year. It was
organized to raise awareness of the on-going looting of archaeological sites and the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq as well as in many places around the world. The event was organized locally by the Alaska Peace Center and the Anthropology department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The organizers presented and explained the event to the small crowd that gathered to hold candles. Information about Archaeology Month in Alaska and related activities were also announced. Posters and brochures were available with information about protecting cultural heritage.

In October 2008, the US department of State -- through then first lady Laura Bush -- announced the launching of a 12 to 13 million dollar Iraq Cultural Heritage Project. The goal of ICHP is to establish a Conservation and Historic preservation Institute in Erbil (northern Iraq), to help the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad by improving its professional staffing and build capacity of Iraq’s Museums in general. The department of state awarded the fund through the American Embassy in Baghdad to IRD (International Relief and Development). Several institutions are involved in the project, the National Park Service, the Walters Art Museum, the Winterthur Conservation Program, the University of Delaware, the Field Museum of Natural History and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Since 2003, the US has gone from ignoring international law, to embracing it. During the three to four days of the fall of Baghdad, nothing was done to prevent the looting even though the Iraq Museum had been put on a list of buildings to protect. Subsequently, a few days before the sixth anniversary of the Iraq Invasion, on March 13th, 2009, the new Obama administration has ratified the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. It is reassuring sometimes to see that progress can still take place…

Nothing is more fundamental to peaceful, constructive relationships than effective communication. On February 20, The Alaska Peace Center was excited to host an introductory presentation on Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication, a concept which the author defines simply as “a way of relating to ourselves and others, moment to moment, free of past reactions.”

An Introduction to Nonviolent Communication: A language of Life

Jill Maynard
The Alaska Peace Center jointly hosted a special event with Fairbanks Open Radio Friday evening, May 1st: Free Speech: Media Censorship and the Destruction of Iraq. It brought together Peter Phillips the director of the media watchdog organization Project Censored, and Raed Jarrar, Iraqi activist and blogger. They debunked myths about Iraq and decried the incapacity of corporate media to cover and present important news.

Jarrar pointed out the fallacy in the news of rampant sectarian violence in Iraq. He explained that in fact there were Sunnis, Shi’ites, Kurds, Christians and non-religious people on both sides of the struggle to control Iraq’s resources and to demand the departure of U.S. occupation forces. He also pointed out that the opinion polls show that 75% of Iraqis want U.S. forces to leave as soon as possible. In the 1300 year history of Baghdad, the city has been occupied many times. Never have the people wanted the occupiers to stay and conditions were never worsened by them leaving. Both he and Peter Phillips emphasized the dramatic underreporting of the death toll in Iraq.

Four scientific studies have concluded that a million or more people have died in Iraq as a consequence of the U.S. invasion. Peter Phillips described the corporate, military and Congressional interconnections that are tied to what the news media treat as newsworthy. The event was held at the JP Jones Community Center in south Fairbanks and was well attended despite the summer-like weather and numerous competing events.

To extend his teachings, Rosenberg formed the Center for Nonviolent Communication, a global network of people and communities committed to living and teaching nonviolent communication as a means to resolve conflict. The Center provides training material and envisions that people will use the NVC method to resolve their conflicts peacefully in areas that include economics, education, justice, healthcare and peace-keeping.

The Alaska Peace Center introductory presentation was brought to the Peace Center by Phillip and Suzanne Osborn, Robert Sullivan, Odessa Bogusch, Alison Carter and Carrie Farr, members of two original self-study groups here in Fairbanks, who wanted to share what they had learned and to continue the organic growth of more peaceful communication in the world. They took turns sharing their experiences participating in the study groups and incorporating Nonviolent Communication concepts into their personal lives and relationships. The members also showed an introductory video that explicat-ed Rosenberg’s philosophy and the Nonviolent Communication curriculum. As a result of the presentation, two new study groups were formed and there are efforts to bring two professional Nonviolent Communication trainers to Fairbanks this fall for an extended training session.

The presentation at the APC was another step in spreading the vision of a world where there is better understanding between people and communities and where peaceful resolution extends to all sectors of society. We look forward to watching this spread at home in our Fairbanks community.
The current deployment of the Fort Wainwright Stryker Brigade brought many calls to the Alaska G.I. Rights Hotline reporting the threatened deployment of soldiers with serious injuries and illnesses. A call to a reporter with USA Today resulted in a news story including interviews with a number of the affected soldiers. One of those soldiers, Chief Warrant Officer Aiyetoro (AJ), a 19 year veteran of the Army, is now serving a 6 month sentence for refusing to deploy with debilitating back injuries. The panel of officers who sentenced him in March did not reduce his rank or order a discharge, so his 19 years of service and benefits earned remain intact.

AJ is receiving medical care through the Navy during his incarceration at a joint services retention facility in San Diego. He could use your support in the form of letters. He cannot receive anything except letters. If you would like to send him some words of encouragement, please write to:

Aiyetoro
461H1 MiraMar Way
Suite #1
P.O. Box 452136
San Diego, CA 92145-2136

Also, his niece is taking care of his house and affairs while he is gone and needs an inexpensive automatic transmission car to buy or borrow. Please call Alison at 322-8661 if you know of one.

Winter and Spring 2009

January 2009
• 01/20: Monthly Potluck: Martin Luther King Day. Showing of Why We Fight. Letter writing campaign

February 2009
• 02/20: Monthly Potluck. Non Violent Communication and Chili meal

March 2009
• 03/19: End the Occupation Event at the Veterans Memorial Park
• 03/23 Petition signing and fundraiser for fellow soldiers from Fort Wainright
• 03/27 Monthly Potluck - Activist and Anthropology Student Stacey Fritz and Local Artist Carpenter Ryan Tinsley presented: Dew Line Passage - Tracing the Legacies of the Arctic Militarization

April 2009
• 04/10: Annual Candle Light Vigil to commemorate the looting of the Baghdad Museum - University of Alaska Museum of the North Plaza. Co-sponsored with the Department of Anthropology

May 2009
• 05/01: Free Speech Media Censorship & the Invasion of Iraq with Raed Jarrar and Peter Phillips. Co-sponsored with Fairbanks Open Radio at the Jones Community Center
• 05/13 Can Obama Really Change US Foreign Policy? Presentation by Anne Wright, retired Colonel, US Army and US Diplomat, Book signing

Coming up

August 2009, 7 to 15
As in previous years, APC will have a booth at the fair...

Volunteer are still needed to help staff the booth...
Contact Lillian Carty at flzc@uaf.edu
ALASKA PEACE CENTER PLEDGE FORM

Name: ................................ ................................ ............................... ........................... .......

Address: ................................ ................................ ............................... ...................... ...........

City/State/ZIP: ................................ ................................ ................................ ................ ...........

Phone:................................ ................................ ............................... ......................... .......

e-mail:................................ ................................ ............................... ........................ ........

May we add this email address to the APC's email list?  ○ Yes  ○ No

I am interested in volunteering two hours a month to staff APC open hours  ○ Yes  ○ No

My check for  ○ $1000  ○ $250  ○ $100  ○ $25  ○ $_______ is enclosed.

Record my donation as a  ○ monthly  ○ quarterly  ○ annual pledge of support.

The Alaska Peace Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Donations to APC are tax deductible.
The Alaska Peace Center is committed to nonviolent conflict resolution and to working for peace within ourselves, our community, and our world. APC opened in 2005. It is a non profit organization with 501 (c)(3) status. APC meets on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month (7 pm).

Board Members and Officers:
Don Ross, David Bantz, Alison Carter, Ann Mallard, Pete Bowers, Dick Heacock, David Koester, Stan Read, Claire Alix, Heather Koponen

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