

SPRING 2020

PEACE TALK

NORTH CAROLINA PEACE ACTION NEWSLETTER

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MILITARISM AND OUR INESCAPABLE NETWORK OF MUTUALITY

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens sickness, death and poverty, but it will be an even worse misfortune if we do not find our way through this crisis to a saner world. Returning to normal should not be our goal... not for U.S. policies, anyway. As Jon Rainwater of Peace Action writes: “This pandemic is ...a wake-up call. We need to redefine what national security means and reboot our security spending.”

Is there a better time than the current crisis to talk with others about what goes with real security?

1) Recognizing we are all connected.

In Martin Luther King Jr.’s words: “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.” Will Americans allow the virus to teach us that together we are more secure? Our common enemy the virus may get us to rethink the enemy status our government assigns to people in other nations. Not yet, of course, the Trump Administration recently sharpened sanctions on Iran creating harm and hurting efforts to stop the virus there, elsewhere, perhaps here, too. Isn’t this the moment to analyze just how wars, walls and sanctions backfire?

2) Looking past militarism for solutions.

This won't be easy. As David Niose notes, we are so conditioned to militarism, we are impaired from solving problems. "Opposition voices are sometimes heard when new military action is taken, but rarely are such voices taken seriously by policymakers, and never are other constants—such as the nation's enormous military budget (U.S. military spending is greater than the next seven top-spending countries combined) or its worldwide military presence (approximately 800 bases in 80 countries, far more than any other country)—seriously questioned. The obedient acceptance of these rather staggering realities demonstrates how effective the conditioning has been." Our governments obeisance to military and corporate power is frankly shared by most Republicans and Democrats alike. The FY2020 Pentagon budget of \$738 billion had clear bi-partisan support even as too few in Congress face squarely climate change or the environmental risks of new, untested chemicals and unsafe energies. So we find ourselves unprepared for natural disasters and a CDC facing pandemics with a reduced budget.

3) Seeing what our enemy-orientation is costing us in well being and security.

Our federal budget reveals this. Jon Rainwater calls it: "runaway Pentagon bloat and skyrocketing nuclear weapons spending." He points out that President Trump's 2021 budget proposal cut half of U.S. funding for the World Health Organization and 16% from the Centers for Disease Control [down to \$6.5 billion] while requesting \$741 billion for the Pentagon. Meanwhile, money for schools, medical care, and safe energy is long overdue.

**PROTECT OUR
DEMOCRACY**

4) Strengthening our country by helping the most vulnerable first.

Widening inequalities are ripping the fabric of our country apart. We have a dangerous build-up of wealth at the top and 60% of Americans without \$400 in savings. And how will our undocumented neighbors cope in a shutdown economy? Don't be silent. Jon Rainwater urges: "Congress is likely to pass serious stimulus spending. But there's a real danger they will do that in the wrong way by putting corporations and the Pentagon over the people at a time of great need."

We should all press for Peace Action's grassroots request:

- Guarantee sick and family leave to everyone
- Offer cost-free care related to the pandemic
- Include non-profits in any support for businesses designed to avoid lay-offs
- Ramp up production of life-saving technology (e.g. tests, ventilators, and protective gear)
- Protect the vulnerable by imposing a moratorium on deportations, evictions, foreclosures, and utility shut-offs
- Protect our democracy and elections during this time through universal Vote-by-Mail
- Suspend economic sanctions that can block life-saving medical equipment in countries hard hit by the coronavirus, especially Iran"



"WE ARE TIED TOGETHER IN THE
SINGLE GARMENT OF DESTINY,
CAUGHT IN AN
INESCAPABLE NETWORK OF
MUTUALITY"
- MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



5) Using our isolation to connect and be more active.

Some of us have more time than ever to write and talk to friends and Congress. What better time to press for not spending \$1.4 trillion on new nuclear weapons and spending on real threats –global warming, hurricanes, hunger and pandemics. A military can't fight these. Join the Global Campaign on Military Spending right from your computer chair. Check out Rae Aibileah and Nadine Bloch's irreverent guide to activism in the time of pandemic "HOLY SH*T! 7 things to do instead of hoarding toilet paper".

6) Not returning to normal.

Rev. Barber and Rev Theoharis of the Poor Peoples Campaign say to seize the day and press for the PPC's agenda. "Addressing the depth of the crises that have been revealed in this pandemic means enacting universal health care, expanding social welfare programs, ensuring access to water and sanitation, cash assistance to poor and low income families, good jobs, living wages and an annual income and protecting our democracy. It means ensuring that our abundant national resources are used for the general welfare, instead of war, walls, and the wealthy." It's time to insist on the human right to food, housing, education, medical care.

7) Declaring a medical emergency until we have Medicare for All.

As Reverends Barber and Theoharis point out "Before COVID-19, nearly 700 people died everyday because of poverty and inequality in this country." Indeed the refusal of the North Carolina's legislature to accept Medicaid Expansion has taken the lives of an estimated 350 elderly a year in our state.

8) Being aware that bad things can happen suddenly.

With our complacency battered, will we stop denying the danger of our nuclear weapons and say no first use, no executive only decision about a nuclear launch, no hair trigger alert, no new \$1.4 trillion generation of more usable nuclear weapons and yes to immediate Pentagon reductions and disarmament.

9) Being aware that bad things can happen even to us.

As we feel our own lives and those dear to us threatened, will we become attuned to the sanctity of every human life? Will our guts feel what our drones, bombs, and blockades are doing to others? Or will crowds still thrill to military planes flying over the Super Bowl? We must shed our enemy orientation and realize we are "caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.

- ANNE CASSENBAUM

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ALAMANCE COUNTY SAYS “NO WAR ON IRAN!”

It was another provocation, a rush to war; the illegal assassination of General Soleimani followed the Trump Administration’s rupture of the Iran Nuclear Deal and the long term killing sanctions. Even some Republicans in Congress questioned the reality of the immediate threat. In the peace movement, the calls went out for local protests and rallies—immediately for January 9th and then for a larger scale one on the 25th.

What do you do if you are a small affiliate in a notoriously conservative North Carolina county? It feels good to join with others to decry the abuse of power, but as someone in Peace Action said, “It can just look weak --a few folks on a street corner.”

Is it better to stay home, save gas, and put less carbon dioxide in the air?

Folks in Alamance Peace Action decided no, we had to protest the ramping up of hostilities with Iran. But as we were about to head off to swell the protest in Raleigh, a call came that an Elon University student had decided to hold a protest and see if anyone came.

Jay Tiemann may have organized it pretty much alone, but students, faculty, Alamance Peace Action folk gathered with him, spoke spontaneously, marched with signs around the main quad of the campus and got recharged by Jay’s words of resistance. Then he summed up the day’s accomplishments: we have this afternoon at least come to know other people who are with us in this struggle for justice and peace.

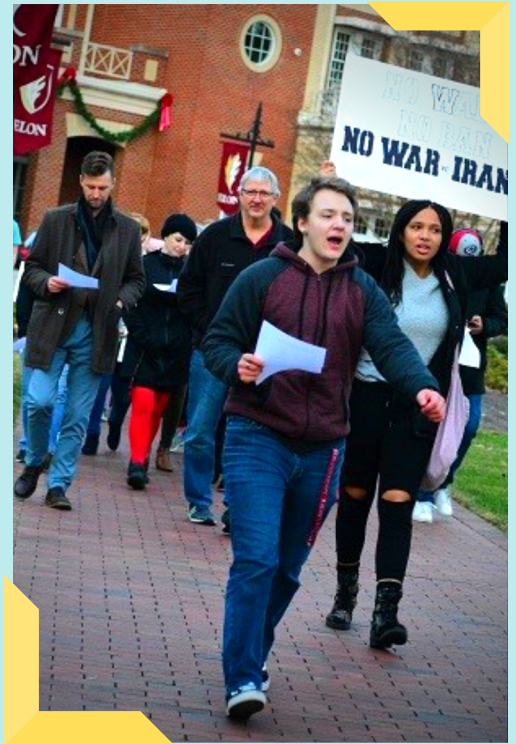
We had...and the ripples started. That rally led to an invitation to bring action ideas to a church, and then to Pastor Micah Royal of Life’s Journey UCC organizing an Interfaith Vigil for Peace on January 25th. He brought together a Muslim leader, a university rabbi, an NAACP officer and Suzanne Shoffner and Linda Dunn of Alamance Peace Action to speak to the hearts and minds of those who filled the room. Shaher Sayed followed up with a Sunday editorial reminding us that peace only comes with justice.

What is the force of these actions? Collectively they help reign in a quick militaristic response, they strengthen us and the movement as we connect and reaffirm “Let there be peace and let it begin with me.”

It is the endless work of pursuing peace and justice.

We may not get there, but we can get a lot closer than we are today in a culture where the question of how we will pay for social needs came up 24 times in the primary debates but was never once asked about our militarism.

- ANNE CASSENBAUM



JAY TIEMANN LEADING THE WAY AT ELON UNIVERSITY.

CREDIT: TONY CRIDER



SALLY JOHNSON AND BARBARA CLAWSON JOIN STUDENTS AT

ELON

A WAR COMES MARCHING HOMELESS: SLEEPING ROUGH IN RALEIGH

Research indicates that those who served in the late Vietnam and post-Vietnam eras are at the greatest risk of becoming homeless. . ." (endhomelessness.org)

David, who asks that his last name remain private, is a polite, well-spoken man. He is weather-worn and wiry, with long, grey-brown hair. His old-denim eyes are clear. From the knee, David's left leg is a prosthetic. A metal cane in David's right hand aids in balance and support.

David spends much of his day near the entrance of a busy North Raleigh grocery store. Customers who enter or exit are usually pleasant, and often generous. Some people greet David by name. Store employees step up when inclement weather threatens their friend, David.

David, please tell me about yourself.

I am sixty-four years old. My brother and I were adopted as babies. I grew up in the Hayes Barton area of Raleigh. My father died young, and my mother passed before I enlisted in the Army. I haven't seen my brother since I got back from 'Nam.

I attended local schools, and had a stint in military school, but I dropped out before entering 10th grade. In 1972, at age 18, I enlisted in the US Army for a 4-year hitch. I was deployed to Vietnam from '74-'75, stationed outside Saigon.

My job was "Water Purification Specialist", as part of a Recon Team. We checked and purified water sources, and surveyed the surrounding area in advance of the main Army. It could be dangerous. Troops got killed. The enemy could hide in "spider holes" and pop up on you out of the sand.

What do you most recall from your tour in Vietnam?

The kids. They were everywhere, playing kickball, begging soldiers for treats. I watched what the war did to kids. They'd be rigged with explosives, under their shirt. I've seen a child and a good friend blown to hell when he picked up a crying child.

Do you recall special friends from the military? Have you stayed in contact with anyone?

Tom, Johnny, Robert, and I were buddies. Robert was killed by that child I mentioned. I haven't stayed in contact with anyone I served with.

How did you lose your leg?

I was hit by machine gun fire. I was shipped to Andrews AFB to be stabilized. I recall lots of bandages, lots of morphine. I eventually got to UNC (Hospital), which saved my life.

Were you served by the VA hospitals?

I don't talk about the VA.



What are some of the challenges you've faced since you left the military?

I've been homeless, off and on, for over 20 years. It's hard to find work that I can do, and then employers say I'm an insurance risk. Old biker friends have helped me out. My leg has been an adjustment. When I was first handicapped, I resented people trying to help me. I had to get over that. I still hate it when drivers stop to let me cross in front of them. I'll want to hurry, and then I'm a fall risk, or my leg could come off.

What's life like for you these days?

Most mornings I'll go by Starbuck's, and folks sometimes offer to buy me a coffee. I earn \$ 20 a week directing cars to " Crazy Axe", an axe-throwing club. I use this sign. At times, I walk up to the intersection, and smile and wave to the people in the waiting cars. Sometimes they help me out."

Have you stayed in homeless camps, or in shelters?

Yes, and I avoid both. In a camp, or a shelter, I have to worry about other people's behavior, and how it might affect me. If I stay alone, I'm responsible only for my behavior. Sometimes people have mental health or substance abuse issues. My only vice left is menthol cigarettes.

David, I appreciate your time and your candor. Any final thoughts?

If "civilians" want to understand the lives of homeless people, spend some time among them. I believe that, "God won't put anything on you that you can't handle." Live by this, and you'll make it. I'm still alive, and have not given up like most would.

- MIA AUSTIN-SCOGGINS

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DON'T FORGET WE STILL NEED TO DEAL WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

Our worst enemy isn't China, North Korea, Russia or Iran. No, our new enemy is becoming more powerful every day. Confronting this enemy won't take guns, bombs or modern weapon systems. We are that enemy. And Mother Earth is not too happy with us. She's losing her polar ice caps, her forests are burning, her storms more destructive, her waterways flooding and her fertile fields browning into deserts through climate change.

But we still prepare to fight other countries, unaware of our largest threat.

How many organizations or contractors are getting federal funds to lessen the effects of climate change? Uncle Sam doesn't seem to publish such information. But we can compare budgets. The feds budgeted \$649 billion for defense in 2018, whereas the various agencies that work on climate action received about \$14 billion. If only the contractors above could transition their jobs from war to renewable energy, maybe we could slow the momentum of climate disruption marching into WNC.

"IF "CIVILIANS" WANT TO UNDERSTAND THE LIVES OF HOMELESS PEOPLE, SPEND SOME TIME AMONG THEM."

- DAVID



A MILITARIZED MIND

Ken Jones

I GREW UP A GOOD BOY
AND I FOLLOWED THE RULES
I KNEW WE WERE GOOD GUYS
AND THE REST OF 'EM FOOLS

BUT WHEN I GOT OLDER
WHAT TRUTH DID I FIND?

THAT I HAD BEEN RAISED WITH
A MILITARIZED MIND.

IN SCHOOLS AND ON TV
THEY TAUGHT US TO HATE -
THAT GOD LOVED US BETTER,
THAT OUR COUNTRY WAS GREAT.

BUT WHEN I GOT OLDER
WHAT TRUTH DID I FIND?
THAT I HAD BEEN RAISED WITH
A MILITARIZED MIND.

WE'RE TOLD THAT WE'RE FREE
BUT LOOK AT OUR JAILS
THE POOR IN OUR STREETS

THE WAR THAT PREVAILS

NOW IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP
LEAVE OUR SCHOOLING BEHIND,
AND FREE OURSELVES UP FROM
THIS MILITARIZED MIND



Unfortunately, much of our billions aimed at building weapons also cause climate change. If our military were a country, its fossil fuel use would fall one below Iraq and one ahead of Sweden at 34th, ahead of 162 other countries. And that's only from the use of fossil fuels, not accounting for all the other ways our military damages land, air and water, and especially millions of people, whom many of us call "climate refugees." In turn, they may become scapegoats, excuses for further armed conflicts down the road. However, the powerful create war, not the victims.

- RACHEL BLISS

WAGING PEACE IN VIETNAM

NC Peace Action members will be pleased to know of a successful project completed recently in NC's Triangle region that highlighted the crucial role that resistance can play as a force for peace and demilitarization.

For one full month (Jan. 15 – Feb. 15, 2020), the "Waging Peace in Vietnam exhibit" was on display at the Duke University Divinity School. A smaller pop-up exhibit also was on view in Hamilton Hall at UNC-Chapel Hill for a few weeks in early February.

The exhibit focuses on the under-reported and largely un-remembered breadth and depth of GI and veteran resistance to and protest against the American war in Vietnam. It is accompanied by a fascinating companion volume, *Waging Peace in Vietnam* (edited by Ron Carver, David Cortright, and Barbara Doherty) available from NYU Press. Both book and exhibit set right the false narrative of soldiers as gung-ho warriors, and illustrate a higher form of patriotism: the courage and wits to confront unjust and immoral wars. As documented in the exhibit, acts of resistance included refusal of orders, petitioning, massive desertion, rebellion in stockades, fragging of officers, the publication of hundreds of underground newspapers, marching in protest, and more. War crimes were exposed by GIs, and the increasing unwillingness of soldiers to fight ultimately undermined the US war effort.

A closing panel presentation, moderated by Duke University history professor Adrienne Lentz-Smith, offered moving first-person testimonies from curator Ron Carver; poet John Baliban; US army Vietnam war combat veteran Greg Payton; US Navy veteran Susan Schnall; US navy veteran and VFP chapter president Douglas Ryder; and Divinity School student and Iraq war combat veteran Nicholas Harrelson.

In addition, local Eisenhower Chapter 157 of Veterans For Peace offered a \$500 prize for the best essay written by a student who engaged with the exhibit. The winning essay, by Micah Latimer-Dennis, a student at the Divinity School, concluded with these words:

The conflicts chronicled in "Waging Peace in Vietnam" will not be the last in my lifetime. There will be others, near and far, and with them, betrayals of the ideals of our nation. But looking over these stories, I'm convinced that there will also be men and women in uniform who alert us to these betrayals and who point our feet toward the way of peace.

- DOUG RYDER