

The Peace Press – April/May 2008

Working Together for Peace, Justice and the Environment

Getting Centered: Testifying to Truth of a Violent Occupation

by Elizabeth Stinson, Director

The most important and conclusive expose' of the truth and sadness of the violent occupation of Iraq was related carefully by those who know first hand, in Washington DC between March 13-16 at the Labor Hall in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Those who, under orders and with complete lack of the “rules of engagement” – the simple, logical rules in the worst of situations, like: identify your target, make a damage report, tend to the wounded. You know what I mean, simple, humane standards that you would want to be treated with, were you in a country unfortunate enough to be embargoed for 13 years while led by a dictator, and then invaded and occupied by a war criminal, masquerading as democracy, madly led by weapons of mass deception.

My heart was moved by two overriding facts: Most who testified, bravely and surely at Winter Soldier hearings in Silver Spring were very young. All were visibly suffering. We ached for them, their battle buddies and the people of Iraq, as they related their personal horror.

The young “Iraq Veterans Against War” came to the hearings in spite of great risk and a multitude of threats and insults.

Young men and women, circled by the protective presence of dedicated “Veterans for Peace” who provided the much needed security throughout the hearings. Those testifying spoke of the dehumanization of the Iraq and Afghani population by the military training and implementation of that training. They spoke of the extreme racism, sexism and rampant discrimination and homophobia pervading the military and its practices. They also talked, tearfully, about being prisoners of war, prisoners of the military, held indefinitely by the implementation of “stop loss” – a practice that makes it indefinite when your military service is over. Often their units were “stop-lossed” and returned to active duty years beyond the termination date of their contracts.

These very important hearings, although not attended by congress or major US media, were life changing. Those of us who did attend, behind very tight security, left with a commitment to help those who testified and their stories travel with and beyond us. Hope for justice and change increases as truth is sought by all of us.

The hearings could not have taken place without tremendous coalition effort. Iraq Veterans Against the War organized the hearings and gave the testimonies with the help of the legal advice of attorneys from the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild and the Center on Conscience and War: the psychiatric support of many therapists and ministers who offered their time to counsel many. Add to this the incredible red-shirted physical security and emotional support that was provided around the clock by the Veterans for Peace. The GI-rights counseling table was man/womaned by experienced military law counselors. The Courage to Resist staff was involved in every aspect of the hearings, from organizational, to stage management, to providing security. It took all the strength and best minds of all those who brought their hearts to Washington DC for the hearings.

And it took the hearts of those at home to hear the testimonies and support the organizers who stepped up to contribute to the beginning of truth rising.

We cannot forget the diligent reporting of both Amy Goodman and Aimee Allison, as well as all the international reporters who worked to bring these painful stories to the light of awareness. And we will not forget the US commercial/corporate press continued “black out” and censorship.

The media machinery that blindly and aggressively led us into this horror is complicit and intent on keeping those who would not listen to the testimonies of Iraq and Afghanistan’s Winter Warriors “embedded in lies.”

Testimonies can be found on the IVAW.org website, Democracy Now, KPFA as well as on You Tube. Please hear them, write and call congress and your friends and extended community.

Let us further the impact of the courage of the Winter Soldiers 2008.

Come Together, Now – An Integral Vision for the Peace and Justice Movement

by Jack Wikse

This issue of the *Peace Press* is focused on our vision for the Peace and Justice movement – the importance of building partnerships between organizations and articulating connections between issues so that a comprehensive understanding of what we envision can emerge. This is the spirit of what we’ve been working toward in our “New Social Contract.”

For example, the issues of immigrant rights and the war economy are interconnected. War divides us and perpetuates an underclass channeled into military service as it’s main source of survival. It was said by Robert McNamara that the war in Vietnam was an extension of the war on poverty, as if the only way to transform poverty is to militarize it. Opposing war and supporting immigrant rights belong together.

Similarly, climate protection and environmental sanity are dependent on overcoming our addiction to militarism. Militarism is a toxic way of thinking. In the current presidential election campaign, militarism isn’t “on the table” for discussion. Militarism *is* the table. Environmental and anti-war activists share common concern to educate about this relationship. Militarism extends to our schools (where history is mainly the story of war). It reinforces fear of strangers and the mentally ill. This fosters unthinking deference to police authority. Both educational reform and the police accountability movements share common ground. Young people are increasingly being trapped in the vise between ethnic poverty and policing known as “gangs.” The county of refuge movement is also about the degradation of our educational environment.

Our dominant political culture is deeply fragmented and factionalizing – tending to isolate and separate ourselves from one another. The Peace and Justice movement must work to transform itself to show another model of deep collaboration and solidarity. Often the desire for solidarity shows itself in attempting to prioritize one issue over another, as if one could work for peace but not for justice. To argue that it’s more important to work on climate change than to support the ‘9/11 Truth’ movement is to fall into a zero sum attitude toward social change. It may be that the impeachment movement will never culminate in removing president Bush from office, or that ‘9/11 Truth’ will never reveal what actually happened then. But like the war in Iraq, or energy policy, both of these issues point to a constitutional crisis, and the need to create a new social contract among us that is not subject to the secrecy of an imperial presidency.

It has been argued (by Scott Ritter) that the peace movement needs to organize itself as an army in order to have more impact. But this shows the problem, not the solution. We need to recognize and organize ourselves on the basis of non-violence, mutual aid and respect for our genuine plurality of concerns, while educating ourselves and the larger culture about our interconnected vision. Or as the Beatles put it, “I know you, you know me, one thing I can tell you is you got to be free – come together!”

Community Power

by Susan Lamont

"Community is one of those things that is hard to define, but you know it when you are in it. It is a feeling that you are not alone, that you are part of something greater than yourself – but yet, when you are in it, you are still yourself. It does not swallow you up; rather it builds you up. It is not all for you and you are not all for it. In a community there are people around you whom you like, although you probably do not like all of them equally. The people of the community are there for you when you need them and you will be there for them when they need you." – Michael Jacoby Brown

In the social justice movement, individuals speak of the need for community. Organizations hope to foster it. We all hope for it to be the source of our power to change the world. But we often find ourselves having trouble building a strong network and only a few people become responsible for most of the work of the organization.

On a recent Saturday afternoon representatives from several local social justice organizations gathered to look for solutions at the home of David Walls, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Sonoma State University and expert on social movements. We were there to meet Michael Jacoby Brown, author of "Building Powerful Community Organizations: A Personal Guide to Creating Groups That Can Solve Problems and Change the World" (Long Haul Press, 2006). Present at this gathering were organizers working on issues such as the environment, the homeless, labor, partisan politics, peace and immigration.

Brown dedicated his book to his grandmother, Minnie Jacoby. Minnie was born on New York's Lower East Side in 1893. When Minnie was 8 years old, her mother died and her father placed her brother in an orphanage. She was sent to live with an apartment building janitor, where she supported herself cleaning the chamber pots in the building's bathrooms. She never got an education and was unable to realize her dream to be a schoolteacher.

The stories of Minnie and other members of Brown's family became the foundation of his work as an organizer. Brown wrote, "When I think about what helped my family over the years, I come up with the following list: unions, public housing, unemployment insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, free quality public education, health and safety regulations at work, Social Security, affordable housing, good public transportation, public parks, and permanent changes in laws, policies and norms. Reflecting on what helped my family, I realized that these social changes were the result of groups organizing and working hard to demand those changes. They were not the result of charity."

The struggles of young Minnie's life were aggravated due to lack of a social safety net and little or no employment or safety legislation. More recently we are seeing the deliberate fraying of the safety net created during Minnie's life. We all know that because of the policies of Ronald Reagan, the two Bushes and, yes, Bill Clinton, a compliant Congress has steadily eroded the policies that helped Brown's family, and most likely yours, to succeed.

Brown wrote his book for people like us and organizations like ours "for anyone who wants to make a difference..., for people who want to change the world and know that they cannot do it alone... You might be thinking of starting a new organization... You might be a volunteer or a staff person in a group that wants to be more effective... Whoever you are, you are someone who sees that the world around you is not as you think it should be and you want to do something about it."

We came together that afternoon to learn how to help our respective organizations to be more successful. We were there to take Brown's book — which is a workbook filled with exercises - back to our individual groups to work on problems and build on strengths.

Like Frances Moore Lappe's book which was reviewed in the last *Peace Press* issue, this one is about power – how to create it and how to use it effectively for social change. It takes a nuts and bolts approach to organizing – from creating a mission statement, raising money, recruiting members and conducting accountability sessions, to creating a flyer, running a meeting – complete with refreshments – evaluating your actions and training new leaders. And Brown reminds us to celebrate together, as well.

That afternoon, Brown told us that we know more than we think and we were brought together to share our expertise. We talked about effective organizing in the past and we evaluated the afternoon's meeting as well.

Brown concluded his book by saying, "Solving the problems we face takes organizations. Organizations require organizers and leaders – people who understand the need for organizations, have the skills, patience, and commitment to build them, and exhibit the willingness to reflect upon their actions and learn from them. Even with our American adoration of individual celebrities, we recognize that no matter how smart or rich we may become, there are many things an individual cannot accomplish alone. Most of us do not want to go it alone. We are looking for community. We are looking for meaning. We want to improve our lives and the lives of our families and friends. To do this we are going to have to build – and in many cases rebuild – our community organizations."

We left David's house with plans to get together again and promised to work to improve the groups we represent. In so doing, we might make our "crazy ideas become the norm." I look forward to the day when "Peace on Earth" is the norm, and no longer viewed as a crazy idea.

Community – Our Weaknesses

by Susan Lamont

Those whom I consider to be my "community" are working hard to create a better world. We want to experience true peace; we want everyone fed and housed; we want to create a healthy environment. Given that these are our goals, it is amazing how often we ignore each other or, even worse, don't get along at all. We are well known for our circular firing squads, when we are so busy taking down our allies, so that those we truly oppose run off with the prize. And we can be as "holier than thou" as any fundamentalist.

As someone involved in the peace and social justice movements, as well as employed in sustainable landscaping, I often have the opportunity to remind people that we are all in this together – while sometimes forgetting it myself. We need peace, social justice and a sustainable environment for this world – one with homo sapiens in it – to survive. If we are missing any one of these, we won't be able to create the world we all desire.

Sometimes an environmentalist will need to be reminded that war is one of the greatest polluters of the earth. And an anti-war activist may need to understand that there is no peace when the water is not safe to drink. We need to constantly remind ourselves that we must be the change we want to see. It's tempting for each of us to think we have **the** answer to a problem and we easily fall into a "my way or the highway" pattern. But there is rarely **one** solution and we should be welcoming the multitude of methods, actions and solutions in our community. We need to encourage, not discourage, the incredible variety of imagination and talents that surrounds us. When we are trying to create change, we never know what word or action will resonate with

someone we hope to influence. What brought me to the peace movement may not be what brings someone else.

I recently asked Rabbi Marc Gafni, author of the book "Soulprints," how we can know we are on the right track. He said we should ask ourselves if our work is life affirming.

Therefore, I would simply like to remind people that our task is large and no life-affirming action is too small. We need to embrace them all and appreciate our fellow travelers who may simply be on different paths to the same goal. The next time you encounter someone who doesn't do it your way, just count to ten and say "Thank you."

Collaborations for Immigrant Rights and the May 1st March and Rally

by Davin Cardenas

The Committee for Immigrants Rights of Sonoma County has recently begun working with various faith-based organizations in order to create understanding about issues facing the immigrant community and in order to build momentum towards the upcoming May 1st march.

Forums have now taken place at the Shomrei Torah Synagogue and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation regarding immigration and the Committee's effort to establish a County of Refuge, where the Sonoma County Sheriff would no longer collaborate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Other forums are currently scheduled for April 6 at the Congregational United Church, 2000 Humboldt Street, Santa Rosa and April 13 at the Sebastopol Community Church, 1000 Gravenstein Highway, Sebastopol.

The Graton Day Labor Center and the Instituto Sanchez-Mendoza recently teamed up to put on a one-day workshop for the immigrant community entitled "Globalization and Popular Leadership." The event was presented in Spanish and was facilitated by various members of the community, with about 40 people attending.

The purpose of the event was to improve our understanding of how wealth becomes concentrated on a local and global level, creating immigration and poverty. We began by defining the traits of what a popular leader would look like to us, both in our home and in our community.

All of the workshops were interactive, including a "Know Your Rights" session at the end. Small group dialogues were facilitated during the breaks, so that people could get to know each other's shared stories. Though small in size, the event was significant in that it was a means to begin organizing future events, such as the upcoming May Day march. Education is a key step in all of these efforts.

The efforts of groups from different backgrounds to work together represent an important step for our local community organizing. As our bonds are strengthened within the immigrant community, the ability to work with faith-based organizations and other progressive groups is made much easier. We soon begin to find that if we mutually support each other, we open up the possibility to learn more, create free spaces, and protect each other's interests.

May 1st International Workers' Day March and Rally

As May 1st approaches, the May 1st Coalition invites all community groups to step forward, organize a delegation and come to our organizing meetings. The focus for the 2008 International Workers' Day March and Rally in Santa Rosa will be the following three issues:

1. We say **No to NAFTA**, the "Free Trade Agreement" which continues to promote unemployment here and cause immigration from other countries. Free Trade Agreements are

agreements made between countries (like USA and Mexico), which break down barriers for products, money and industries, and places the functions of governments into the hands of private interests. Industries in the USA are moving to places where they find cheaper labor, creating unemployment here. At the same time, because products from the North (i.e., the USA) flood the markets in the South (i.e., Latin America), the people cannot compete, and end up migrating North.

2. We are calling for **no immigration raids** on the Federal level. Families are literally being torn apart, children are being detained in border detention facilities and people are living in fear whenever they step outside their door. The community needs to understand the dire consequences of the raids and help to pressure the government to put an end to them.

3. We must establish a **County of Refuge in Sonoma County**. Right now, the Sonoma County Sheriff is collaborating with ICE, supposedly focusing on gang members but unfortunately deporting young men who have no gang ties. In some cases the person has not even committed a crime. There are also deportation sweeps of the jails. This collaboration does not create a sense of trust within the immigrant community. Real crimes and criminals are unreported. This affects us all. San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond and Los Angeles have already passed resolutions prohibiting this type of collaboration.

For this year's May 1st Santa Rosa March and Rally, we encourage all groups involved in social justice causes to participate and represent their particular issues. We will focus on our commonalities, because the system we are addressing promotes division. We hope to create a much, much better world.

Davin Cardenas is site coordinator for the Centro Laboral de Graton, member of the Committee for Immigrant Rights of Sonoma County and the County of Refuge Campaign.

Cultivation, Culture and Collaboration

by Dave Henson

The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center (OAEC) is a nonprofit education and organizing center and organic farm in west Sonoma County. OAEC works to cultivate democratic communities that are ecologically, economically and culturally sustainable.

While OAEC and west Sonoma County are amazing places, full of biological diversity and natural beauty, both are quite homogenous ethnically and culturally. As a way to build social change among and between diverse sectors of Northern California, OAEC has prioritized developing collaborations with racial, social and environmental justice organizations from around the Bay @rea since we began in 1994.

Here is some information about two such projects.

Movement Generation Project

In collaboration with the Movement Strategy Center, the School for Unity and Liberation (SOUL), and Communities for a Better Environment (all Oakland based), OAEC has developed the Movement Generation Project. The heart of the project is a series of two 3-day leadership development workshops at OAEC designed to develop practical strategies to address the increasing economic and social impacts of global environmental problems on urban, low-income communities and urban communities of color.

The workshop series is titled "Freedom Fighting While Saving the Earth: What do today's environmental crises mean for racial & economic justice organizing?" One of OAEC's partner

organizers, Jason Negron-Gonzales, who comes out of racial justice organizing, recently wrote this about the project's beginnings:

"We decided to organize these retreats not because we are long time environmental activists, but rather the opposite – we hadn't been looking much at these issues. But after seeing Hurricane Katrina, An Inconvenient Truth, and more and more articles in the media, we found ourselves thinking, 'Hey, I'm a reasonably informed person. I think about the system, and how the global relates to the local. I've been trying to develop long-term movement strategy in my work. I need to figure out what is going on with all that environmental stuff?!"

In 2007, we offered our first set of workshops for 25 young activists from 18 urban Bay Area organizations working on racial, economic and environmental justice. In 2008, we will offer the same program to a second cohort of 25 urban community activists. In these workshops, we look at peak oil, peak water, climate change, environmental toxins, food security, and losses in biological and cultural diversity, as well as new opportunities for the development of local, sustainable, socially just economies and local participatory democracy.

Some of the organizations that send program staff to the 2007 trainings include Asian Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership, Central American Resource Center, Ella Baker Center, Mujeres Unidas y Activas, Saint Peter's Housing Committee, Just Cause Oakland, Center for Political Education, La Raza Centro Legal, Partnership for Immigrant Leadership, and Action and Chinese Progressive Association.

Restoring local native ancestral knowledge and values

For several years, tribal leaders of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (FIGR) have been articulating a profound vision for restoring the values, ancestral knowledge and sovereignty of their people – Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo Tribe members from around the Bay Area. A big part of that vision is for an ecologically restored Sonoma County, and helping a rapid transition to diverse, organic agriculture and food security in Sonoma County.

Members of the Tribal Council approached OAEC in 2006 proposing to develop a series of training programs for FIGR members. So in 2007, OAEC developed and led a series of three 3-day workshops at OAEC for 20 FIGR members on Traditional Environmental Knowledge. Participants ranged from 20 to 80 years old. Together we explored principles of ecology, traditional environmental wisdom, and native flora and fauna, with the goal of becoming better practitioners of cultural regeneration and biological restoration. The project was a huge success.

In 2008, we are continuing this collaboration, with a new set of 3-day workshops at OAEC for 20 FIGR members focusing on organic gardening, food, herbs and nutrition. OAEC will also host a weekend workshop for 15 young members of FIGR – ages 12 to 18 – on Traditional Environmental Knowledge. OAEC and FIGR are also working together on several public education events and a project to develop organic community gardens in the City of Rohnert Park.

For more information about OAEC and these projects, contact OAEC Executive Director Dave Henson (dhenson@oaec.org <mailto:dhenson@oaec.org>, (707) 874-1557 x214.

The Earth is for Us an Inhabited Garden

by Debra Birkinshaw, Paul Burks and Phyllis Meshulam

"The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities; but to know someone here and there who thinks and feels with us, and though distant, is close to us in spirit – this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden." – Johann von Goethe

There is power that is magnified exponentially when people work together.

Conversely, there is an observable pattern among those of us who are progressives: we are caught in the dichotomy of valuing diversity inherent in life, and likewise the familiarity bred in homeostasis.

One can choose to meditate on the sure stillness of the surface of a pond in mid-summer, or choose to fish beneath the viscous layer to capture some of the insistent, thriving mass of life that resides in the silt below. One can become stuck in the mire, or too distracted by teeming variables to concentrate in an effective endeavor.

We run in the same circles. We see the same faces. We run the risk of re-circulating the same themes which are heard by the same ears. Minds and hearts can become numbed in this process, and spirits may be made too lethargic to move forward with well thought out intentions and constructive action.

Bringing together diverse perspectives, experiences and resources to create unique events has enabled us to rise above the mire, drawing in a larger audience and creating a sense of renewal necessary for slow, deep and lasting change to take root. It is not unlike the process of the lotus, which rises above the mud to bloom on the iridescent surface of the pond.

We avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. We share funds, as well as knowledge. We "brainstorm" together. Our imaginations find clarity, rather than viscosity, through the resonance of like-mindedness and the reassurance that our individual visions will be respected. Not only do we get unstuck – we get inspired. We dare to hope.

Hear our voices weaving the fronds of spirit, environment and social change into an integrated whole:

Paul: "The Peace and Justice Center has always been the number one facilitator in educational forums in which I have been involved, particularly events sponsored by the Network of Spiritual Progressives here in Sonoma County. The *Peace Press* newsletter has gotten the word out broadly and their media list has assisted us to reach the press and TV. Daniel Solnit and I worked very closely on the most recent NSP forum held at the Glaser Center, featuring Daniel's multimedia presentation "Facing the Heat: Climate Change, Peak Oil, and Economic Collapse – Solutions for a Sustainable Future." The Peace and Justice Center was our common contact point for development and promoting of that event. Back in March/April of 2002, the Center was indispensable in the five forums sponsored by a dozen Sonoma County organizations on the theme "Understanding & Responding to 9-11: War is not the Answer."

The opportunity offered to NSP by the Center to present an ongoing video series on "Earth and Spirit" on first Thursday evenings at the Center has greatly spread the word of what the Network of Spiritual Progressives is all about and the work it is doing. And the timely talk by Rabbi Michael Lerner on "Restoring America's Values" at the Glaser Center in 2006, with the co-sponsorship of the Center, really launched the NSP in Sonoma County."

Debra: "When the first conference of the Network of Spiritual Progressives took place in Berkeley, Paul Burks, Phyllis Meshulam and Elaine Holtz attended. The concept of integrating

spiritual, ecological and political ideas and actions appealed to me. I find the deepest truth and the greatest strength when I engage both my heart and my mind in the process of activism. Curious about the NSP, I organized a "report-back" forum at the center. Paul, Phyllis and Elaine enthralled me with their contagious enthusiasm and all that they had learned.

I joined the local NSP steering committee, along with Paul and Phyllis, so I could network with other "spirited" activists, sharing resources and creating larger events in a more effective way than I could have on my own. Last June, as part of the New Social Contract Project of the Center, I worked with Paul, Jack Wikse, Daniel Solnit, Veronica Jacobi, Stephen Fuller-Rowell, Craig Litwin, Portia Sinnott and Ellen Bicheler to put on a "Stewardship of the Earth Forum." I recently joined the local Green Sangha, directed by Trathen Heckman, and helped to organize an environmental talk given by Mary Munat at the Friends meeting that Phyllis attends.

We are all working together to create community consciousness regarding sustainability of our local air, water, land and food supply. Sponsorship extends our reach."

Phyllis: "When I attended the founding conference of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, I was already familiar with the organization of Tikkun Community, a previous brainchild of Rabbi Michael Lerner. I pictured a similar structure for this new group, chapters sprinkled throughout the country, connected by a listserv and regular conference calls. But the word "network" suggested to me something more – something to do with basketry and root systems.

And in fact, as time went on and a local chapter sprang to life here in Sonoma County, there **was** something more. We formed a steering committee of eight people, and among us there were six or seven diverse congregations represented.

Gradually, a fluidity in the internal workings of the steering committee developed. Often someone has had a pet project that they propose. That person becomes the one to spearhead the effort – perhaps contacting the speaker, finding a date. Others fall into line to find the venue, create fliers, press releases, take on needs for the event itself like refreshments and sign-ins. A few of us have found our niche roles that we feel comfortable doing.

But this basket or root system was bigger than that. Thanks to our affiliations with various congregations, as we undertook a model of bringing the public together for inspiring lectures, discussions and screenings, we found we had a ready-made way to multiply the results of our efforts. We found congregation newsletters for publicity, fellowship halls for venues, sympathetic members of our respective congregations to bake cookies and help with set-up and clean-up."

For more information, visit www.spiritualprogressives.org; www.dailyacts.org; www.greensangha.org.

To get on the local NSP news and events list contact Paul Burks at pburks@earthlight.org

Stewardship of the Earth: A Continuum of Care

by Debra Greenberg

While it is true that the focus of the New Social Contract has shifted to the topic of education, the work to protect the natural resources in our own community continues. Here are some highlights:

June 2007: Stewardship of the Earth Forum, cosponsored by the Peace and Justice Center of Sonoma County, Network of Spiritual Progressives, (with Paul Burks being a central organizing force) and Sierra Club, was held at New College, Santa Rosa. The forum highlighted the work of

Daniel Solnit, Craig Litwin, Veronica Jacobi, Portia Sinnott, Ellen Bicheler, and Stephen Fuller-Rowell. Where are they now? Continuing their strong efforts, of course.

* Daniel Solnit developed and is conducting PowerPoint presentations entitled, "Facing the Heat: Climate Change, Peak Oil, and Economic Collapse—Solutions for a Sustainable Future." Daniel is now working with SEIU. Follow his work at <http://www.iled.org>.

* Craig Litwin continues to maximize Green Power, working on the Sebastopol City Council. Craig continues to help monitor the green efforts of other local and state officials. As political director of Sonoma County Conservation Action, he has an article in the current SCCA newsletter to prepare us for the upcoming election. Follow his work at www.ConservationAction.org.

* Veronica Jacobi has been an impassioned and active Santa Rosa City Council member during the past year. Veronica regularly reminded the Council about our Greenhouse Gas Reduction targets, pushed for carbon neutral building guidelines and helped convince the Council to pass mandatory green building codes. As of this writing, she has been nominated for the Sonoma County Conservation Council (SCCC) Environmentalist of the Year award. Veronica is currently running for 3rd District Supervisor. To support her campaign, visit www.VeronicaJacobi.com.

* Portia Sinnott is Co-Director for LITE, and a very active member of the Sonoma County Conservation Council. She has been organizing the annual Sonoma County Environmental Awards Dinner for over six years and also manages the award nominations process. See her in action at www.liteinit.org.

* Ellen Bicheler works with the organization, Daily Acts. Ellen is coordinating the 2008 Sustainability Tours, which serve to teach the community about conservation, permaculture, and living an abundant yet sustainable life. To join a tour, visit <http://www.daily-acts.org>.

Stephen Fuller-Rowell is a passionate water conservationist, especially knowledgeable about groundwater preservation, Stephen is a proponent of insuring that progressive and mindful leaders get on the local and state Water Boards. Only then will we have a say on protecting our water supply. Follow his work with the Sonoma County Water Coalition by visiting <http://www.scwatercoalition.org>.

* Paul Burks is familiar to us as a vital part of the Peace and Justice Center. Beyond that, Paul has been an integral part of developing the local chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Within this dual role, he brings together large numbers of people to participate in local events that inspire them to engage in activism. Paul offers an ecological film for discussion the first Thursday of every month at the Center. Check out the network at <http://www.spiritualprogressives.org>.

As a coordinator for this part of the New Social Contract, with Derek Legg, I have personally been deeply affected by this environmental focus. Along with Susan Lamont, I have joined the Sonoma County Green Sangha, directed by Trathen Heckman. I have participated in a No-Shop action, a holiday Bring Your Own Bags reminder action to reduce plastic in our community, an interview for The Green Zone, in the December/January issue of the *Bohemian*, and helped to organize an environmental talk for the Sebastopol Appleseed Friends meeting. For info on the Green Sangha, visit <http://www.greensangha.org>.

There is so much to be done to build and sustain the Green movement in Sonoma County. We have the resources in place to continue this effort.

Winter Soldier – Public Testimony of War Crimes

Part 1 of 3

by Elizabeth Stinson and Debra Birkinshaw

On the day that commemorates the Iraq occupation that is five years too long, we write to update you on the heart-wrenching hearings we alerted you to in the last issue of the *Peace Press*.

Brave young men and women gathered in Silver Spring, MD, minutes from the Capital in Washington DC to give public testimony about war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Testimonies that were virtually ignored by US mainstream media, testimonies contrary to the daily reporting of the propaganda fed to Americans by corporate media. Sitting in the hearing room and meeting with many who testified before and after their testimonies I heard of grave abuse of power by and within the military against their own. Logan Melatori, from Camden Missouri, spoke of the rampant capacity to abuse rank. He described the grave injury to his physical and spiritual health by contributing to what he found to be a war for profit. He was never given an ROE (rules of engagement) card. The rules he learned were: signal, shout, shove, show and shoot. He was told, if you feel threatened –“shoot” and everyone felt threatened by the chaos surrounding them. They spoke about faulty intelligence, more often raiding the wrong house, destroying homes, terrorizing families and with changing descriptions of the enemy. One day, the enemy had green headbands, the next day the enemy was everyone with a black headband, the following, everyone in a taxi cab. Faulty intelligence consistently leads to the death and terrorizing of the civilian population, which the government brands as caused by insurgents. They spoke of being ordered to carry “drop weapons” that would be dropped next to a civilian when shot by US military, to make them appear to have been a threat.

Men and women spoke extensively of the sexism, homophobia and racism rampant in the military. Of news to me was the startling fact that the SAD – Sexual Assault Kit needed by those assaulted in the military – is “not covered” by the tricore contract that oversees the military medical care contract. If a woman is raped in the military – and many testified of such abuses – they had to purchase the kits themselves in order to adequately document their abuses.

When Patty McCann, Illinois National Guard, testified to this fact her tearful statement was “That is how the military takes care of sexual assault victims.”

Those of us within the hearing rooms saw slides of children. Children, towns, adults, villages – all victims of war.

More than 200 veterans joined in Winter Soldier at Silver Spring, Maryland, from March 13 to 16, to speak out against the war and to implore their government to end it. During the testimonies, they told their own stories of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They told of the killing of civilians, the destruction of houses and farms, the mishandling of war dead, the use of illegal weapons, the dehumanization of the "enemy" and the trauma that they have incurred. Some confronted actual violations of the Geneva conventions, while others detailed incidents that are often overlooked, like racism toward Iraqis, gender discrimination within the military and the waste and destruction of environmental resources.

Those who testified hope to play an integral role in ending the occupation, just as the first winter soldiers did, in 1971. "Though we may get down at times, we should be proud that we're standing up and moving forward," said Kelly Dougherty, Executive Director of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), the organization behind the event. Introducing Winter Soldier's first panel, she said "As we enter the sixth year of this occupation, the voices of veterans and service members, as well as civilians on the ground, need to be heard by the American people, and by the people of the world, and by other veterans so they can find their voice to tell their story."

They described being “prisoners of war” held to the occupation by the unrelenting and unending policy of stop-loss, which they say has gravely contributed to the breakdown of the military, from the inside out. The one theme that followed from panel to panel of both women and men who testified, was the firm belief that the corruption, lack of standard and criminal intent raining on the people of Iraq is the US policy from the top down. Great respect was shown for all they served with, for all they lost and only disgust for those in command, especially the Commander in Chief. At one point, while testifying about being abused by his command, Lars Egstrom (Marine) moved to the microphone and said: “Mr. President, your job, is to defend the Constitution.”

An excerpt of the testimony broadcast on KPFA, Democracy Now –

"My name is Hart Viges. I joined the Army right after September 11th and asked for Airborne, asked for Infantry, ended up with 82nd Airborne Division, 1st/325 HHC, Battalion Mortars, Hunters in the Sky, Death from Above, and went in November 2001 and left the Army in December 2004. I was deployed to Kuwait in February 2003 and subsequently was part of the invasion in March. Originally, we were going to jump inside Baghdad airport, but 3rd ID was ahead of schedule, so we drove in and secured this town that was hitting supply lines, a town called Al Samawa. This was my first experience with the job that I was trained to do. I was a mortar-man, 81-millimeter mortar. We were set up outside the town of Al Samawa... What I saw there, you know, more so even what I participated in, you know, hearing the radio calls over for the line companies that are in trouble, or they spot some people go into a building, so we get that fire mission, and we destroy the building with our mortars. I set the timers, I set the rounds, the charges for the mortars... You know, this isn't army to army, you know. People live in towns. It's beyond imagination to think that normal people, civilians, don't live in towns. This is upside-down thinking. So I never really saw the effects of my mortar rounds in the towns. So that just leaves my imagination open to countless deaths that I don't know how many civilians, innocents I've killed, helped kill... And the radio was always – never a good thing came over the radio. One time they said that – to fire on all taxicabs, because the enemy was using them for transportation. And in Iraq, any car can be a taxicab. You just paint it white and orange, and there you have it. And one of the snipers across the radio replied back, "Excuse me? Did I hear that right? Fire on all taxicabs?" The lieutenant colonel replied back, like, "You heard me, trooper. Fire on all taxicabs." And once that conversation ended, the town pretty much lit up; all the units that were in there, fired on numerous cars—again, you know, people. Where's the real proof? This was my first experience with war that really kind of set the tone for the rest of the deployment."

As a result of Elizabeth's collaboration with ret. Col. Ann Wright, culminating in a talk at the Peace Center recently, she was encouraged to attend the hearings in Washington. The co-chair of the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild requested that Elizabeth attend the Winter Soldier hearings to give military law as well as counseling support to those who were re-traumatized by giving their statements.

We owe it to them to listen.

It All Began with Adrienne

Adrienne Swenson 1926- 2008

by Alice Waco

About 30 years ago, long after Adrienne Swenson's initial everyday awareness of conservation and the need for world peace, she realized she needed a community of people to bring her vision to reality. She gathered people from diverse peace, justice, human rights and environmental organizations to a meeting and the Peace Network was born. Social justice activism had another place of power and voice in Sonoma County. The members worked out of donated homes, a garage of the Sonoma County Commons, a little back building on Beaver Street and finally a rented building on Pacific Avenue across from the Santa Rosa Junior College. With Adrienne's leadership and organization, her vision of a peace and justice movement was launched. The groups met, struggled with their identity and finally decided that the Peace Network needed to fold into something bigger. Thus the Peace and Justice Center was born with the help of David and Shirley Thatcher, Shirley McGovern, George Romandy and other activists from the groups which were part of the Peace Network. Adrienne took the Center through its adolescence and enabled it to find its present home on Sebastopol Avenue.

Adrienne Swenson died in January 2008 and left us with a legacy of commitment, which crosses over the lines of needs and carries a history of discernment of how to act at any certain time. There is a time for everything, but never enough time. She wanted to dismantle every nuclear weapon, free every child of fear and hunger (ESR), save the planet for our children, empower the poor with a financial savings program (IDA), stop all wars and bring the troops home "right now" (the Center), influence legislation for use of the monies saved when the cold war ended, and of course elect democrats whom she worked to keep in line with her persistent lobbying efforts. In reality, when it came to social justice, she had her heart and action in almost everything. Seeing the connection between all of them, she couldn't let go of any of them. She saw the Peace and Justice Center as her vehicle and was on the board from the beginning, acting as president during the 1990's. Simultaneously, she somehow found time for tutoring children at Doyle Park Elementary School. She had already raised three children of her own. She went to Concord Naval Base, Livermore Nuclear Labs, Nevada Test Site, the Santa Rosa Federal Building and other hot spots of military decision-making, where she maintained her commitment to nonviolence and carried out civil disobedience.

She did what she asked others to do. She had piles of papers and bags of bottles for recycling at her home, long before people even knew how to recycle. Shirley McGovern says Adrienne taught her not to leave the water running while brushing her teeth. With her husband Len, Adrienne shared the priorities of the environment and gardening. But Len went the way of environment with his leadership, and Adrienne went with the other issues.

Adrienne was blessed with a family where activism was as natural to the family as sports is to many others. Len tells us that Adrienne's father was a union man and her mother, was always active. As a youth, Adrienne's activist nature was nourished by her involvement in the Unitarian Fellowship. It just took Adrienne being a student at UC Berkeley to find herself a radical of the sort who goes to the root of the issues. During the 2000's Adrienne kept inspiring us until she became too ill and could no longer work from the front lines. She did not stop entirely, but collated the *Peace Press*, dialogued one on one, and struggled to stand with the Women in Black on Fridays. She was truly a mentor to all of us and we will continue to show our gratitude by accepting her legacy of commitment to every need as we see it.

Len Swenson arranged for memorial donations in honor of Adrienne to be made to the Peace and Justice Center or the Unitarian Fellowship. Both organizations were so important to Adrienne. Thank you, Adrienne, for your gift of self, which will live on in us through the Center. It is your time to rest in the peace you sought for all of us.

Don't Pay for Bush's War

by Eszter Freeman

Resisting war taxes can be a solitary activity. Your taxes are completed and you look at the amount you owe. Gasps of anger are uttered as you become conscious again that about 50% of your hard earned tax money will go to the military. You experience total meltdown as you realize that the war in Iraq is costing \$40 million per day, \$1.66 million per hour and \$277,777 per minute.

You start screaming, "Not with my money, you don't!" But then you get this uncontrollable fear of the IRS. *They* are going to get you if you resist. *They* are probably staring at you right now! *They* will think you are breaking the law by not paying your taxes. Oh, no! You don't want to lose your job and go to jail!

But then you say, "I am going to speak truth to power." You realize the clout of money and yell at the walls, "If *Congress* will not cut funding, then *I* will!" You get your checkbook out. You might withhold some or even all of the tax amount you owe. After all, denying money to the government is scary. But you don't want to give them all your money.

You are taking back your power.

You are giddy with excitement as you put the smaller check amount in the mail. You think to yourself how good it feels to stand up for your beliefs and to make a small but significant difference. And you wonder how many other people are going through the same process.

You are not alone. There are people all over the country who are doing the same thing. Many are members of the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC), a national network of war tax resistance groups.

Members of NWTRCC are visible on April 15 as they remind taxpayers of where their money is going. These groups, like our local Sonoma County Taxes for Peace, interface with other peace and justice organizations, to provide informational workshops and counseling on war tax resistance throughout the year.

Twice a year, NWTRCC holds a conference in different cities around the country. Many tax resistance groups send representatives, such as the War Resisters League, Quakers, Catholic workers, war veterans, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Mennonites, Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, and Voices for Creative Nonviolence, among others.

For over five years, peace activists have voted, lobbied, marched, and taken direct action to first prevent and then end the war in Iraq. Courageous soldiers have refused to fight the war. But Congress repeatedly votes to appropriate billions of dollars to continue the war and appears ready to authorize a future military attack on Iran. It's time for taxpayers who oppose this war to join together in nonviolent civil disobedience and show Congress how to cut off the funds for this war and redirect resources to the pressing needs of people.

A **War Tax Boycott** was launched in September 2007, as Congress began its consideration of a Bush Administration request for an additional \$190 billion appropriation for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was begun in the fall, ahead of tax season, so that those who want to refuse to

pay for war could explore the options, decide what to do, and prepare to resist, well before their 2007 taxes are due.

The campaign is being promoted by peace activists around the country. It was initiated by the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, partnered with Code PINK, the National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance, the Nonviolent Direct Action Working Group of United for Peace and Justice, Veterans for Peace, Voices for Creative Nonviolence, and the War Resisters League.

It is not too late to register for the boycott. Get information and sign up to participate in the boycott by going to www.dontbuybushwar.org or www.nwtrcc.org.

The next time you are in a room with your tax forms and your checkbook, remember that you are among thousands of war tax resisters around the country and the world. An international war tax resistance conference is held every 4 years. A call for support is as close as your phone, by dialing Sonoma County Taxes for Peace, at 823-9203. Monthly potlucks are held the first Sunday of the month at the Peace and Justice Center, with good food and lively conversation.

The US government expects taxpayers to behave themselves and keep bankrolling this illegal, immoral, wrongful war. What does the US government want from us in order to fight this war? For most of us, the government doesn't want our bodies, and it doesn't even want our consent. What the government wants from us is our money. We can each resist \$100 for one year. The consequences would not be so cataclysmic if the IRS caught up with you, and we can pool all of the refused war tax money and give it to survivors of Katrina and people who have fled from violence in Iraq. – Kathy Kelly, Voice for Creative Non-Violence

Eszter Freeman is a member of Sonoma Taxes for Peace and a board member of the Peace and Justice Center.

Finding Common Ground

Working in Solidarity on the Grassroots Level

by Terra Freedman

All of our local peace and justice issues have overlapping goals to create stronger community and a better, more humane world. We have a unique opportunity to find that common ground and work together for larger solutions. In early 2007, I joined with members of the Resolution to Impeach Coalition in their tireless effort to bring the Bush-Cheney administration to justice. If Congress would begin impeachment hearings, it would slow down the ceaseless horrors committed by this administration. It would also address the goals of the anti-war movement, counter-recruitment efforts, military separation work, the environmental movement and global warming, the crises in public education, our broken health-care system, and much more. We are facing these crises because we have failed in this one thing: to remove immoral and corrupt politicians from positions of power. Impeachment is one way to do that.

Many Americans expected that the 2006 Democratic Congress would finally hold the Bush administration accountable for committing six years of offenses against the law, the Constitution, and the people of this country and the world. They did not. All government officials, from office clerks to presidents, swear an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution. Our Coalition gathered hundreds of signatures and brought an impeachment resolution before the Santa Rosa and Rohnert Park City Councils in late 2007 to ask their help. We will bring this issue to the Cotati City Council as soon as possible and to the Petaluma City Council on May 19. We need your help to

gather hundreds more signatures in those two cities in the next two months. We will ask that these City Councils send a letter to Congress requesting that the House Judiciary Committee, under the Chairmanship of Democratic Representative John Conyers, begin hearings immediately.

Our goal is to add enough pressure so that Congress will finally address America's Constitutional crisis and begin investigations of President Bush and Vice President Cheney before they leave office in January 2009. Once out of office, they are less likely to be brought to justice for abuse of power because the crimes they have committed are not necessarily violations of criminal or civil law and the courts are not as effective a remedy in this case.

Congress is explicitly empowered by the Constitution to conduct hearings and investigate officials who misuse their powers and undermine the democratic system. Impeachable offenses under the heading of high crimes and misdemeanors include abuse or misuse of power, neglect of duties, betrayal of public trust and mismanagement of public agencies or funds. Impeachment in this case would be very quick because of the overwhelming evidence.

Petitioning Congress is a routine process used by local governments in order to make requests of the federal government. Because of efforts like ours here in Sonoma County, over 90 City Councils around the country have honored their oath of office and petitioned Congress to initiate impeachment investigations on behalf of their constituents.

The abuses of power by the Bush-Cheney administration have tragically affected thousands of Americans and millions of Iraqis, Afghani, Palestinian, Pakistani and other world citizens. We as peace activists must be vigilant. We must demand that our government abandon its destructive zeal for militarism, aggression and domination. The Peace and Justice Center's Demilitarization Team works tirelessly to bring home US military personnel who no longer want to participate in illegal and immoral occupations. When these soldiers return, they are suffering from emotional as well as physical trauma. One only needs to hear the recent testimonies of the men and women at the Winter Soldier Conference, held March 14-16, to realize that the best remedy for these damaged soldiers is to prevent their participation in war and occupation in the first place.

Another courageous effort is the work of the Sonoma County Taxes for Peace members. They encourage taxpayers to withhold a portion of their tax money from a government that spends over 51% of the budget on war and death. We, the American people, must demand that our government be accountable. Withholding military taxes is a powerful way to express our opposition and exert pressure on an immoral administration. The 2008 War Tax Boycott was initiated by the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, with assistance from Code Pink, the National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance, United for Peace and Justice, Veterans for Peace, Voices for Creative Nonviolence, and the War Resisters League. Information can be obtained from any of these websites. Henry David Thoreau was right when he said, in 1846, "If a thousand [people] were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them and enable the state to commit violence and shed innocent blood."

Government funds are in short supply for social programs in America, and more cuts are inevitable. Early impeachment and removal from office of this president and vice-president could have stopped the hemorrhage of resources already spent on wars and lost to waste, graft and no-bid contracts. Impeachment could have spared the nation its current trillion-dollar deficit. Those funds should instead have been made available to support the many worthy non-profit programs for homeless assistance, mental illness, after-school programs and so much more. House Bill HR 808 to establish a Cabinet-level US Department of Peace would need only a fraction of the funding currently spent by the Pentagon and the Department of War, also known as the Department of Defense. A Department of Peace would be led by a Secretary of Peace, and employ trained staff who would provide practical, non-violent solutions to domestic problems and international conflict.

The Department would support and assist efforts by cities, counties, state agencies and non-profit, private agencies in coordinating existing programs as well as develop new programs for mediation, healing, restorative justice and more. Representatives and Senators around the nation need to know that we demand humane solutions to the problems **they** have created.

The multitude of environmental groups in Sonoma County, from the Sierra Club and the Conservation Council to the Climate Protection Campaign and Peak Oil groups, would have a lighter workload if we had a federal government that had understood, acknowledged and been a leader in finding solutions to global warming and pollution issues decades ago. Our vigilance in demanding an accountable and responsible government would have spared these organizations and their millions of members from struggling to implement and maintain their programs. Instead, their programs are run with grants and donor dollars, amid corrupt and obstructive government policies.

Civil rights and humanitarian organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Amnesty International and the United Nations all have Sonoma County chapters. Their members work tirelessly to represent innocent people worldwide who suffer at the hands of repressive governments, including the torture inflicted by our own military machine and private "contractors". Allowing this administration to continue unabated these eight years has brought tragedy to innocent people around the world and kept volunteers of these and other organizations busy addressing the worst cases of abuse and torture.

The Peace and Justice Center Board of Directors recently published their position on the investigation and prosecution of President Bush. It states their intentions "*... to support and encourage Congress and the Senate to follow a path to investigate the reasons for impeachment of President George W. Bush... support and encourage criminal prosecution of Mr. George W. Bush and all others for their part in the war crimes that have been committed over the past several years, and the resultant acts against humanity including the many violations of the Geneva Conventions...*"

Over 210,000 citizens signed Judiciary Committee Member Robert Wexler's on-line petition to begin impeachment investigations. Add your name and your voice at WexlerWantsHearings.com and contact Chairman Conyers to stop the Bush-Cheney cabal before they commit one more crime against humanity.

Terra Freedman is a member of Sonoma County Taxes for Peace, Department of Peace Legislation Committee and the Resolution to Impeach Coalition.