

Worship and Action Update, 3/14/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Even in these increasingly difficult and troubling times, Friends continue to find and share God's bracing spirit and to witness to our abiding testimony of peace.

On Saturday, March 8th, 18 people gathered in Long Island for training in civil disobedience by a member of the War Resisters League. Gretchen Haynes of Westbury Meeting provides this report:

"We came from many different faiths and from Southampton to Flushing. In a combination of discussions and roleplays, we experienced responding nonviolently to provocation, the feelings of being arrested, and how to make quick decisions in the Quaker model. We realized that not all would need to be arrested to participate in a civil disobedience event. Some may act as support and observers. At the conclusion, we decided to become an affinity group to conduct nonviolent direction in the event of U.S. war on Iraq."

Also on March 8th Friends from Long Island, Westchester, and Connecticut attended a full-day training program for counselors to military personnel facing issues of conscience. The training was sponsored by Purchase Quarterly Meeting and held at Christ and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Westport, Connecticut. The training session was facilitated by Bill Galvin of the Center on Conscience and War, who has given four sessions on draft counseling in NYYM during the last twelve months. Bill has also attended Yearly Meeting sessions at Silver Bay for the last three years, serving as a resource person on issues of conscientious objection.

On Wednesday, March 12th, about 70 people participated in a silent walk in downtown Oneonta to bring attention to a bombing campaign that will begin once our nation declares war on Iraq. The walk was organized by members of Butternuts Monthly Meeting. Paddy Lane offers this report:

"The group was led by a large replica of Picasso's dove over the words "War is not the answer," held by two people (one of whom was the sign's creator, local muralist Jennie Williams). A half block later a long horizontal streamer appeared, reading: "Must we destroy an entire society? Stop the bombing before it starts." The final banner advised "Take time, not lives-- support inspections." Friends handed out flyers about the bombing campaign. The group set out at 4 P.M. and continued the walk for one and a half hours.

"It was a very rewarding experience. Most people seemed very grateful to receive our small handout, as they are aware that they do not get the full picture of what will happen from our mainstream media. It is so important

for people to stand up and speak out about what may happen before a world conflagration is ignited that we will likely not be able to stop.”

This past weekend, March 7-9, many Friends gathered at Powell House for Coordinating Committees Weekend. In addition to the business of committees and reports on the ongoing work of NYYM, we shared worship and thoughts on peacemaking as the nation is poised on the edge of war. Friends spoke out of the silence on the ways they support themselves and others engaged in actions to prevent war on Iraq, and Helen Garay Toppins provided a spirit-lifting report on the vibrant activities at the Yearly Meeting office.

Following the weekend, on Monday, March 10th, we received a letter from our clerk, Linda Chidsey, encouraging NYYM Friends to gather and to reach out to our communities as war nears:

“With the increasing likelihood that our nation will declare war in the upcoming days, Friends are encouraged to open their meeting houses and gather in worship. In inward communion with one another and the source of our true security, we find comfort and strength in the knowledge that there is One who is over all.

“Friends are urged to reach out and extend welcome to those in our communities who seek a place of respite and sanctuary, a place to listen for the voice of God in these times. Let us uphold one another as we seek through daily practice to become, provide and bear witness to the peace the world so longs for.”

In this light, we have been invited by Bishop Desmond Tutu, Friends, and members of other faiths to participate in "A Global Candlelight Vigil" this coming Sunday, March 16th, at 7 P.M. Peoples around the world are asked to join with neighbors in central locations and share in a time of witness and prayer for peace. Monthly Meetings (including Amawalk, Brooklyn, Cornwall, Fifteenth Street, and many others) and Friends organizations, such as the American Friends Service Committee, have answered this call with plans to open their meetings for candlelight vigil and worship on Sunday evening. A registry of local vigils can be found on Move On's Web site at www.globalvigil.org.

Other upcoming activities for peace include:

- United for Peace and Justice is organizing another peace rally in New York City for Saturday, March 22nd. More information will be included in next week's update and will be available as plans are made on United for Peace and Justice's Web site at www.unitedforpeace.org.

- Purchase Quarterly Meeting is organizing three Wednesday evening workshops on civil disobedience to be held at Purchase Monthly Meeting on March 26th, April 9th and April 23rd. Complete information should be included in next week's Update and will be available soon on the New York Yearly Meeting Web site, www.nyyym.org.

Peaceable Greetings,

*Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship & Action working group*

This past week, many Friends in NYYM received and circulated the following synopsis (author unknown) of a talk given by Dr. Robert Muller, former assistant secretary-general of the United Nations, on February 5th San Francisco.

WE ARE WAGING PEACE!

Dr. Robert Muller, former assistant secretary general of the United Nations, now Chancellor emeritus of the University of Peace in Costa Rica was one of the people who witnessed the founding of the U.N. and has worked in support of or inside the U.N. ever since. Recently he was in San Francisco to be honored for his service to the world through the U.N. and through his writings and teachings for peace. At age eighty, Dr. Muller surprised, even stunned, many in the audience that day with his most positive assessment of where the world stands now regarding war and peace.

I was there at the gathering and I myself was stunned by his remarks. What he said turned my head around and offered me a new way to see what is going on in the world. My synopsis of his remarks is below:

"I'm so honored to be here," he said. "I'm so honored to be alive at such a miraculous time in history. I'm so moved by what's going on in our world today."

(: I was shocked. I thought -- Where has he been? What has he been reading? Has he seen the newspapers? Is he senile? Has he lost it? What is he talking about?)

Dr. Muller proceeded to say, "Never before in the history of the world has there been a global, visible, public, viable, open dialogue and conversation about the very legitimacy of war".

The whole world is in now having this critical and historic dialogue--listening to all kinds of points of view and positions about going to war or not going to war. In a huge global public conversation the world is asking-"Is war legitimate? Is it illegitimate? Is there enough evidence to warrant an attack? Is there not enough evidence to warrant an attack? What will be the consequences? The costs? What will happen after a war? How will this set off other conflicts? What might be peaceful alternatives? What kind of negotiations are we not thinking of? What are the real intentions for declaring war?"

All of this, he noted, is taking place in the context of the United Nations Security Council, the body that was established in 1949 for exactly this purpose. He

pointed out that it has taken us more than fifty years to realize that function, the real function of the U.N. And at this moment in history--the United Nations is at the center of the stage. It is the place where these conversations are happening, and it has become in these last months and weeks, the most powerful governing body on earth, the most powerful container for the world's effort to wage peace rather than war. Dr. Muller was almost in tears in recognition of the fulfillment of this dream.

"We are not at war," he kept saying. We, the world community, are WAGING peace. It is difficult, hard work. It is constant and we must not let up. It is working and it is an historic milestone of immense proportions. It has never happened before--never in human history--and it is happening now--every day every hour--waging peace through a global conversation. He pointed out that the conversation questioning the validity of going to war has gone on for hours, days, weeks, months and now more than a year, and it may go on and on. "We're in peacetime," he kept saying. "Yes, troops are being moved. Yes, warheads are being lined up. Yes, the aggressor is angry and upset and spending a billion dollars a day preparing to attack. But not one shot has been fired. Not one life has been lost. There is no war. It's all a conversation."

It is tense, it is tough, it is challenging, AND we are in the most significant and potent global conversation and public dialogue in the history of the world. This has not happened before on this scale ever before--not before WWI or WWII, not before Vietnam or Korea, this is new and it is a stunning new era of Global listening, speaking, and responsibility.

In the process, he pointed out, new alliances are being formed. Russia and China on the same side of an issue is an unprecedented outcome. France and Germany working together to wake up the world to a new way of seeing the situation. The largest peace demonstrations in the history of the world are taking place--and we are not at war! Most peace demonstrations in recent history took place when a war was already waging, sometimes for years, as in the case of Vietnam.

"So this," he said, "is a miracle. This is what "waging peace " looks like."

No matter what happens, history will record that this is a new era, and that the 21st century has been initiated with the world in a global dialogue looking deeply, profoundly and responsibly as a global community at the legitimacy of the actions of a nation that is desperate to go to war.

Through these global peace-waging efforts, the leaders of that nation are being engaged in further dialogue, forcing them to rethink, and allowing all nations to participate in the serious and horrific decision to go to war or not.

Dr. Muller also made reference to a recent New York Times article that pointed out that up until now there has been just one superpower--the United States, and

that that has created a kind of blindness in the vision of the U.S. But now, Dr. Muller asserts, there are two superpowers: the United States and the merging, surging voice of the people of the world.

All around the world, people are waging peace. To Robert Muller, one of the great advocates of the United Nations, it is nothing short of a miracle and it is working.