

Worship and Action Update, 5/16/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

During these past 20 months, Friends have drawn sustenance from three and one-half centuries of Quaker experience with and exploration of the peace testimony. As we continue, Friends also draw upon these recent experiences to examine, reconfirm, and deepen our faith, our understanding, and our knowledge. These efforts are undertaken not merely to broaden and affirm wisdom and spirituality, but to enable us better to live in the light of our Peace Testimony in our future action. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being." As so, even as war-making recedes from the daily headlines, Friends continue to attend to the Light within and to work for peace.

On Monday, May 12th, a delegation from Purchase Quarter (John Benson, Fred Dettmer, Tom Martin, Rosa Packard, and Deborah Wood) met with Representative Christopher Shays for a third time to continue a dialogue on state respect for rights of conscience. The discussion focused on the bill to create a Peace Tax Fund (HR 2037), newly reintroduced into Congress by Representative John Lewis, and the moral and practical considerations of charging an administrative fee to those electing to have their taxes allocated to peaceful purposes. Representative Shays had been a cosponsor of the bill before the first Gulf War, and Friends sensed some progress in the way opening for him to support the proposal anew.

On Tuesday, May 13th, Paul Busby attended a talk at Riverside Church, New York City, by Arundhati Roy, a citizen of India who has been active in human-rights campaigns for many years. He shares these reflections:

Arundhati Roy is the daughter of Mary Roy, whose court case brought equal inheritance to Syrian Christian women in India. Her novel, *The God of Small Things*, is informed by Syrian Christianity. (I have no idea whether she's a Christian, but she struggles for the rights of all religions and all social classes.) Although Arundhati Roy trained as an architect, she is known for her film scripts, *The God of Small Things*, and many writings advocating human rights. (Biographical information and links to some of her writings are available at www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/arundhati.html.)

With intelligence and humor, Arundhati Roy infused the audience of 3,000 at New York City's Riverside Church with hope and inspiration. She began by saying, 'I am not a citizen of the United States, but as a citizen of India I am a subject of the American empire.' She offered an insightful perspective on the 'theft' of the 2000 presidential election, the responses to September 11, subsequent events, and links between the current administration and the money to be made in 'reconstruction' of Iraq (as well as war contracts). Among her many cogent points - too many to include here - I was especially inspired by her reminder that there are really two superpowers - the United States and world public opinion. She

closed her talk by saying, 'I hate to disagree with your president, but you are not a great country. You *could* be a great people. History is giving you the chance. Seize the time!' To see her and listen to her is to be bathed in spiritual radiance.

Friends in NYYM and friends everywhere will continue to be busy with witness and worship for peace in the coming weeks:

- New Paltz Monthly Meeting presents a program on depleted uranium and its dangerous use as a military weapon on Thursday, May 22nd, from 7:00-9:00 PM at the Quaker Meetinghouse, 8 North Manheim Boulevard, New Paltz. Depleted uranium has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. Its use in weapons has exposed, and is continuing to expose, United States soldiers, clean-up crews, Iraqi soldiers and civilians, and others to potentially dangerous levels of radiation, which may be causing cancer and passed-on genetic defects in exposed persons' children. The video *Metal of Dishonor: The Pentagon's Secret Radioactive Weapon* will be shown, followed by a discussion period, including steps we can take. Childcare will be provided. For information, call Linda Griggs at 845-255-6051 or Patti Salone at 845-883-7864.

- The fourth NYYM Worship & Action Peace Conference comes to Purchase Meeting on Saturday, May 31st, from 9:00A.M. - 5:00 P.M. It will combine worship, brainstorming, and sharing on steps we can take in view of tragic world events. Bring a box lunch; refreshments will be provided, as well as something to eat in the morning. For information and for registration forms, call Linda Griggs at 845-255-6051 or email Linda at griggsquake@hvi.net or Beth Schongar at elschongar@yahoo.com.

- Conscience and Peace Tax International, Peace Action of Connecticut, Promoting Enduring Peace, and Greenwich Forum sponsor a program on Alternatives to War: Increasing Our Peacemaking Abilities on Saturday, May 31st, from 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 noon, at Christ Church, 254 East Putnam Avenue, Greenwich, Connecticut. Panelists include Yael Martin (executive director of Promoting Enduring Peace), Michael Hovey (executive director of Hague Appeal for Peace), T. Haywood (cochair of Alternatives to Violence Project, New York) and Michael True (Friend - see Powell House retreat/workshop item below - and board member of International Peace Research Association). For further information, contact Rosa Packard at 203-661-8946 or rpackard@optionline.net.

- United for Peace & Justice conducts a National Teach-in on Iraq, Preemptive War and Democracy on Saturday, May 31st, from 1:00-5:00 P.M., at the National City Christian Church, 5 Thomas Circle, Washington, D.C. Participants will learn about and discuss issues involving (i) the domestic consequences of war, (ii) the United States occupation of Iraq, and (iii) the United States' drive for empire and a militarized foreign policy ("preemptive war" doctrine). Expected speakers include Arundhati Roy, Cynthia McKinney (former congress representative), Edward Said (Columbia University), Gene Bruskin (US Labor Against the War and the AFL-CIO), Howard Zinn, Hussein Ibish (Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee), Kathy Kelly (Voices in the Wilderness),

Michael Klare (Hampshire College), Miles Solay (Not in Our Name), Phyllis Bennis (Institute for Policy Studies), Rania Masri (Southern Peace Research and Education Center) and Ralph Nader. More information can be obtained from United for Peace and Justice at www.unitedforpeace.org/.

- The New York State Community of Churches, in which New York Yearly Meeting participates, leads a Legislative Day in Albany on June 9. Introductory issues briefings will be held at Westminster Presbyterian Church (½ block from the Legislative Office Building) at 10:00 A.M., followed by lunch, afternoon legislative visits, and a 5:00 P.M. legislative reception. Presenters will lead two one-hour sessions during the morning on the issues of: healthcare, poverty, criminal justice, environment, and farmworkers. Persons interested in participating can register by mail to the NYS Community of Churches, 382 State Street, Albany, New York 12210, or by fax to 518-427-6705, by June 2. Registration information: list your name, address, phone, and email, and the two issues briefings you would like to attend. Pat Beetle can provide directions or additional information at 518-477-4004 or paxpat@mybizz.net. This is an opportunity for more Friends to get involved in state legislation.

- Powell House offers a retreat/workshop on “Peace Within and Without” on June 13-15, led by Michael True, a member of Worcester (MA) Pleasant Street Friends Meeting and speaker at NYYM’s Annual Meeting at Silver Bay last summer. The program will include meditation, reflection, and discussion on the contributions of psychology, history, and literature for deepening a spiritual base for resistance and renewal, including presentations on the American tradition of nonviolence from the 17th century to the present, and on international “people power” since 1980. Ann Davidson reminds us that “we need to be at peace, practice peace, and pass the peace on to others.” Information on registration (\$160 for adults, \$80 for teens & children) is available by calling or emailing Powell House - 518-794-8811 or at www.powellhouse.org.

- 15th Street Friends Meeting hosts a discussion on National Policy in a Time of Crisis: How Do Quakers Respond? with Kathy Guthrie, field program secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation, and Tim Barner, FCNL’s national director of area campaigns, on Sunday, June 29th, at 12:30 P.M. (following meeting for worship at 11:00 A.M.), at 15th Street Friends Meeting, 15 Rutherford Place (between 15th and 16th Streets, just off 2nd Avenue), New York City. Discussion will center on Quaker responses to violence in Iraq and the Mideast, restrictions of civil liberties, and other current issues in Washington. Kathy and Tim also will talk about FCNL’s goals and methods, how Quaker values of peace and justice guide its work, and the future plans for FCNL’s Capitol Hill site. For more information contact Christiana Sutor at 212-662-8977 or at csutor@sutor.com. (A flyer about the event is available on the NYYM Web site at www.nyym.org/events/15st-fcni29jun03.html.)

In these many witnesses, we see Friends continuing to embrace the wisdom of Elise Boulding that “there is no time left for anything but to make peace work a dimension of our every waking activity.”

Peaceable greetings,

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

We talk about "what we hope for" in terms of what we hope will come to pass but we could think of it another way, as why we hope. We hope on principle, we hope tactically and strategically, we hope because the future is dark, we hope because it's a more powerful and more joyful way to live.

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It's always too soon to go home. And it's always too soon to calculate effect.... But history is shaped by the groundswells and common dreams that single acts and moments only represent.... History is like weather, not like checkers. A game of checkers ends. The weather never does. That's why you can't save anything. Saving is the wrong word.... Saving suggests a laying up where neither moth nor dust doth corrupt.... Problems seldom go home.

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As Adam Hochschild points out, from the time the English Quakers first took on the issue of slavery, three quarters of a century passed before it was abolished in Europe and America. Few if any working on the issue at the beginning lived to see its conclusions, when what had once seemed impossible suddenly began to look, in retrospect, inevitable.... Activism is not a journey to the corner store; it is a plunge into the dark.

From "Acts of Hope - Challenging Empire on the World Stage," by Rebecca Solnit, in the Discourse & Dissent: Thoughts on America column in the current issue of Orion Online (www.oriononline.org/pages/oo/sidebars/Patriotism/index_SolnitPR.html).