

## Worship and Action Update, 12/20/02

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

As the Season calls us to reflect on the hope shared by all faiths for a world of peace, it can be difficult not to be distressed by the unceasing pounding of war drums and the persistent encroachments on civil liberties in the United States. When our civil society seems to be in thrall to the shrill voices of fear, paranoia and hatred, we must enter deeply into our faith, fellowship and common worship to resist the lure to respond in kind. How can we preserve our commitment to the dignity of all life that gives resonance to our activism in a world descended into fault finding and demonizing? How can we speak to what we are for when all around speak to what they are against? Yet how can we speak truth to powers that seem intent on inflicting violence and insult and hurt without ourselves creating demons and dragons and devils?

Civil disobedience paradoxically combines a potent potential for affirmative, if provocative, action, with a risk of sliding into dark realms of anger, intolerance and even nihilism. In last week's Update, we reported on the experience of Friends in employing civil disobedience in the service of spiritual growth and positive insistence on truth during the International Human Rights Day Actions of December 10th. Other Friends are engaged in, or are considering, expressing their belief in nonviolence and our common humanity through acts of civil disobedience, such as insisting that their taxes be used only for peaceful endeavors or aiding those in distress in Iraq or protecting those under attack in the United States.

John Humphries, a Friend from Hartford who joined us at the worship and action retreat at Oakwood in August and corresponds frequently with NYYM Friends on Quaker Wanda, sends word of action by Hartford Friends Meeting to support those contemplating civil disobedience. The Meeting has formed an ad hoc committee to address issues of discernment and support for those with a leading to engage in civil disobedience as part of the Iraq Pledge of Resistance. (The Pledge can be considered and joined at <http://www.peacepledge.org/>, or through the Web site of the American Friends Service Committee at <http://www.afsc.org/iraq/activism.shtm>.) Many Friends in NYYM also are nourished by clearness committees and support of their Meetings as they consider and undertake acts of conscience.

Greg Robie of Cornwall Meeting has begun a project and Web site (<http://www.idusa.info/>) called "ipse dixit," which is intended to offer a coordinated approach for using acts of conscience to transform war taxes into peace taxes. Participants act either directly to turn their taxes to peaceful endeavors, or provide direct support for those engaged in tax civil disobedience and their families, or seek to assist through communication directed to others. Under this model, the witness of one becomes the witness of many: each person acting to transform his or her war taxes into peace taxes is directly supported in that witness by at least 10 persons, and in turn, each of these 10 support persons is networked to an additional 10 persons who are clear to communicate publicly concerning these matters.

Concerns for civil liberties and treatment of immigrants incarcerated by the government are growing. A minute of concern for immigrant detainees from Brooklyn Monthly Meeting was brought to our annual sessions in July 2002. The minute noted:

Since September 11, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the FBI have seized and detained large numbers of immigrants, primarily from Arabic and South Asian countries. . . many are held in solitary confinement, in harsh conditions, without access to family members or lawyers.... Despite legal challenges, the INS has refused to release the names of these detainees.

In keeping with Friends' tradition of service to those in prison . . . the Religious Society of Friends strongly urges the INS to release the names of those imprisoned and the charges against them, and to provide humane and just treatment for those awaiting trial. We support the immediate discharge of those held wrongfully or unnecessarily.

New York Yearly Meeting united with the concern (see minute #50, at page 119 in the Yearbook; the Brooklyn minute is posted on the Peace Action page of the NYYM Web site).

Harsh treatment and deprivations of civil rights of immigrants of Arabic or Muslim background is continuing and expanding. These include racial profiling, forced registration, fingerprinting, photographing and interviewing by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, extended detentions without resort to counsel or the courts, and deportations for insignificant mistakes.

The concerns about the treatment of our Arabic and Muslim neighbors was discussed in interviews by Terry Gross with lawyers David Cole and Douglas Kmiec on the December 18 edition of NPR's "Fresh Air" radio program. (The program can be heard on the web at [http://freshair.npr.org/day\\_fa.jhtml?display=day&todayDate=12/18/2002](http://freshair.npr.org/day_fa.jhtml?display=day&todayDate=12/18/2002).) The Bill of Rights Defense Committee ([www.bordc.org](http://www.bordc.org)) offers a great deal of information on the subject, and lists possible action steps on the "Tools" page of its Web site for persons seeking to aid this community under siege. One of their suggestions is an open letter of concern about the actions and policies of Attorney General John Ashcroft, which is promoted by a group of Japanese Americans who were arrested and imprisoned for refusing internment during World War II and who successfully pursued legal reversal of their convictions in court actions in the mid-1980's, with support (an amicus curiae brief) from the American Friends Service Committee. In 1989, the AFSC published a booklet addressing the immigration issue, entitled "Borders and Quaker Values," which was written by a working group led by Doris Shambleffer, then of 15<sup>th</sup> Street Meeting, and which is still challenging.

Mark Kenmore of Buffalo Meeting, and an immigration lawyer, points out that, because these policies and actions are clearly contrary to Friends's understanding of right conduct in immigration matters (as well as for the death penalty and other criminal justice concerns), they should be challenged and changed. How do people from different places treat one another in the Peaceable Kingdom?

Also at Silver Bay, the Yearly Meeting endorsed a travel minute for Radh Achuthan forwarded by Peconic Bay Meeting (minute #51). Radh's concern for global truth and reconciliation through spiritual and physical nonviolence is now presented through a Web site ([www.gtrc911.org](http://www.gtrc911.org)) which outlines some of the facts of the grim inequities in our world situation, presents a plan of action for addressing them, and suggests a "satyagraha" (Gandhian nonviolence-truth force) campaign to be carried out if they are not addressed. The Web site also has a page on the Spiritual Basis for putting our faith into action, offering excerpts on a number of spiritual challenges from a number of sources.

Here is part of one, under the topic Living Quaker Social Testimonies Today:

In a particularly penetrating comment on the passage of Scripture (Matthew 6: 25-31), Soren Kierkegaard considers what sort of effort could be made to pursue the kingdom of God. Should a person get a suitable job in order to exert a virtuous influence? His answer: no, we must first seek God's kingdom. Then should we give away all our money to feed the poor? Again the answer: no, we must first seek God's kingdom. Well, then perhaps we are to go and preach this truth to the world that people are to first seek God's kingdom? Once again the answer is a resounding: no, we are first to seek the kingdom of God. Kierkegaard concludes, "Then in a certain sense it is nothing I shall do. Yes, certainly, in a certain sense it is nothing, become nothing before God, learn to keep silent; in this silence is the beginning, which is, first to seek God's kingdom." (Richard Foster 1978, Celebration of discipline, pp. 106-107)

We commend this page for your reading, and remind you that if you do not use the Internet, you may request paper copies of Yearly Meeting resources from the Yearly Meeting office.

In this season of reflection and acceptance, when the northern hemisphere of the earth tilts again toward the sun, when we receive new life in light and babies and the turning of many kinds of years, we hear again the story of how a baby was born to become a great teacher. We are called to become learners, obedient followers, a people who can hear and uphold one another in action as we respond to God.

In continuing care,

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NYYM Worship & Action working group*