Worship and Action Update, 11/27/02

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

At Thanksgiving, Americans of all faiths seek to share with family and friends. This week we offer reflections and recent experiences of some NYYM Friends.

Tom Rothschild, of Brooklyn Monthly Meeting and New York City Peace Friends, attended a day-long interfaith conference, A Call to Action: Conference for Justice and Peace, on Saturday, November 23, at Riverside Church in New York City. He provides this report:

> After a welcome from the senior minister, there was a call from Imam Talib to renew the prophetic voice, proclaim the true patriotism of a nation of faith following devotion to God, and engage in the greatest "jihad" (struggle): to speak the truth before a tyrant. The 400 or so attending (twice those expected) spent the day searching for ways to hear that voice, proclaim that message, and act for justice and peace in the face of an imminent invasion of Iraq.
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> Most moving of the speakers for me was Father Simon Harak, of Voices in the Wilderness. He spoke first of the Jesuit tradition of the examination of conscience and the command, "Never fight against evil as though entirely outside of yourself." He described the water system in Iraq, destroyed by U.S. bombs, with sewage flowing in the streets, in the homes, running through the schools, coming from the taps; and the medical system, where sanctions make simple medications unobtainable to combat the typhoid, cholera, amoebic dysentery and hepatitis in that water. Who then wages biological war? He spoke of the need to take up the cross – to "struggle against empire until they kill you" – even as Jesus did. He raised the important question, How does a nonviolent movement deal with a nonrepresentative government? Father Harak's answer: we must move from the nonviolence of Martin Luther King, calling on our government to "deliver" on its promises, to the nonviolence of Gandhi, opposing an alien government not representing the people. That is, we can engage in strikes and boycotts, and undertake massive noncooperation and resistance based on divine power. As a direction for our actions, he suggested a call for mediation between the United States and Iraq, and a call to Nelson Mandela to serve a mediator.
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> A few impressions of the ideas and proposals from the speeches and dozen workshops filling the day. In addressing the racism at the core of profiling and the loss of civil rights, we must go beyond "conflict resolution" and convert from punitive justice to restorative justice, where all parties recognize the need to change. Support the movement for local government resolutions refusing to enforce the Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Act, as a century and a half ago they refused to enforce the Fugitive Slave Laws. Revitalize the sanctuary movement. Mobilize to bring speakers to schools. When we act, do so in a way that draws others to act with us. There is an action within the grasp of each person to move the conscience of others.

> We must take personal responsibility to raise issues of conscience. Get involved on the level where you are and do what you are passionate about. Remember that it is in relationship, in conversation, that we can find the way to peace and justice. We must understand the power of peaceful people to make a change for peace and justice. It is up to us, the people, to stop the war, to find sanity in the midst of madness, to speak truth to power. How do we see the will of God in this?
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> And my own thought in closing: Remember that peace grows from within, from living in that Life and Power. Let us remember also that those whom we would oppose are also human. We cannot change minds and open hearts by demonizing those with whom we disagree.

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On Tuesday, November 26, a delegation from Purchase Quarterly Meeting (Fred Dettmer, Mary Eagleson, Vitalah Simon, and an invited friend from WESPAC, Nada Khader) met with Congressperson Nita Lowey.

Mary led off the conversation by noting the many concerns Friends have in common with Lowey, including initiating more rigorous gun control, improving public education, strengthening international institutions (such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court), and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the environment. We then turned to our concerns about the congresswoman's support for the war in Afghanistan and the resolution authorizing war on Iraq, and inquired how we could be helpful to her in considering issues of war in the future. Lowey shared at length her personal struggle in deciding how to vote on the war resolutions, noting that she had voted against the Gulf War resolution a decade ago and that her daughter, a graduate of Swarthmore College, had urged her not to vote for war against Iraq. In the end, she felt that there were no alternatives to responding with violence to the attacks of September 11 and that the Iraq War resolution was important as a reaffirmation of the role of the United Nations.

Congresswoman Lowey asked what alternatives to war we could offer. Among other things, Friends noted that faith in violence was misplaced, as reflected by the fact that the war in Afghanistan had not accomplished its stated goals; that nonviolent solutions would emerge if we dedicated even a fraction of the time, money, and effort allocated to the military and violence; and that we could and must rely on concepts and institutions of international law and justice. Lowey spent over a half hour with the group and seemed genuinely sorry even after that substantial time to have to end the meeting for other commitments. The group felt encouraged by the conversation, especially because she was so forthright in describing her difficulties and reservations in voting to authorize war on Iraq.

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Quaker Wanda, the NYYM Listserv for sharing thoughts, concerns, and information, has been described in previous Updates. This past week, Linda Griggs of New Paltz Monthly Meeting shared the following deeply moving reflection:

> We are called to live Peace. Peace is not the absence of war, although I sincerely hope that we can stop this one, but the cherishing of one another, the seeing of God

in each other, the ability to see the best and encourage it in all, the ability to become like a child and be nonjudgmental - to not like actions but to love people. President Bush and Saddam Hussein and you and me - we are all children of the Light who need to be loved but whose actions may be off. It is Spirit that will rise above the darkness of these times. Although we must act on conscience - like the Russian proverb: pray but keep rowing to the shore, we must also not get pulled away from the Light by darkness of negativity, put-downs, hatred, cynicism; the list goes on. So then it will be like this old hymn:

> When Peace like a river attendeth my soul,
> When sorrows like sea breezes blow,
> Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
> It is well, it is well with my soul.

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Representative Meeting in Chatham, New Jersey, draws nigh (Friday-Sunday, December 7 and 8). Among the peace concerns on which we will worship and search for unity is a proposed Minute on Registration for Selective Service. The text of the proposed minute is set out at the base of this Update.

Other activities for peace scheduled for the days ahead include:

- A NonViolence Training program by New York NonViolence Network, including AFSC and 15th Street Meeting's Peace Committee, for those considering nonviolent civil disobedience, on Tuesday, December 3rd, from 6:00-10:00 PM at Judson Memorial Church in New York City. (Information available at 212-228-0450.)
- Retha McCutchen, General Secretary of Friends United Meeting, at NYYM (at 15 Rutherford Place) on Wednesday, December 4th, for a potluck and talk on current events in Ramallah. Contact Helen Garay Toppins at office@nyym.org.
- A New Jersey Peace Train demonstration on Saturday, December 7th, organized by the Coalition for Peace Action. Information is available at www.peacecoalition.org/action/event_021202_peace_train.html.
- An International Human Rights Day Action on Tuesday, December 10, commencing at 10:00 A.M. at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza in New York City (1st Avenue and 47th Street, near the United Nations), organized by the National Council of Churches.
- A training program for counselors on conscience and war, featuring Bill Galvin (comparable to the program offered by Summit Meeting in October) at Purchase Monthly Meeting on Saturday, January 4, 2003.
- A weekend focused on worship and action - Living the Peace Testimony Now: What Shall Our Witness Be? - at Poughkeepsie Meetinghouse on January 10-12, 2003. (Information is available from Linda Griggs and on the NYYM Web site.)
- A weekend focused on worship and action at Perry City Meeting (near Ithaca) on February 14 and 15, 2003.

In continuing care,

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

Minute on Registration for Selective Service

Our commitment to nonviolence and the free exercise of religion impels us to make plain our objection to legislation introduced by New York State Senator William Larkin and signed in September as Chapter 533 of the Laws of 2002 by Governor Pataki. This law denies a driver's license to any New York State man who does not register for Selective Service between the ages of 18 and 26. New York State also denies state student financial aid and state employment to such New York residents.

Faith and Practice, the Book of Discipline of New York Yearly Meeting (the wider Quaker group of which we are a part), reads:

> Friends are earnestly cautioned against the taking of arms against any person, since all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons are contrary to our Christian testimony. Friends should beware of supporting preparations for war even indirectly, and should examine in this light such matters as cooperation with conscription.

According to The Center for Conscience and War in Washington, D.C.,

> Whether for reasons of conscience or from lack of information, young men who fail to register with Selective Service are subject to a growing number of penalties. They are threatened with a maximum five years in prison and $250,000 fine. No one has been prosecuted in the past decade but nonregistrants are currently automatically denied certain federal and state benefits. Such penalties are part of an effort to coerce young men into registering for the draft and Selective Service has been instrumental in initiating the legislation. At the federal level, nonregistrants are ineligible for student financial aid, employment with the federal government and if not already citizens, the right to citizenship.

We view with alarm the expansion and increasing severity of state and federal measures to penalize nonregistrants who are religious conscientious objectors. We emphasize the responsibility of governments to uphold the free exercise of religion guaranteed by the United States Constitution, and the human right of conscientious objection recognized as derived from freedom of religion and conscience by the United Nations.

We reaffirm our loving support of those who are faithful to our peace testimony in the face of these challenges.

(Approved at Purchase Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, November 1, 2002; and endorsed by the Purchase Quarterly Meeting for Business, November 3, 2002.)