



Sacramento Area Peace Action Newsletter

December
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Working to end U.S. militarism since 1983

909 12th St, Suite 118, Sacramento, CA 95814

916-448-7157

www.sacpeace.org

Unexploded U.S. bombs & landmines keep on killing

The Lingering War in Laos

Sacramento Peace Action Board Member, Gary Meyer, travelled to Laos in 1995, and was shocked by the current and past damage that the US brought to hundreds of thousands of Lao and Hmong families. The damage continues today. Here are three experiences that he vividly recalls from that trip.

Poverty, destruction and military debris

Laos has ranked as the poorest nation in Asia for many decades. The US dropped more bombs on Laos, than had been dropped by the Allies on Germany/Europe in World War II. The number one economic activity in Laos in 1995 was collecting high grade aluminum and other metals from all the aircraft, conventional bombs, and cluster bombs which the USAF left behind. Many of these bombs landed in soft soils, *and continue to this day* as unseen “land mines,” killing and wounding farmers in Laos.

Bombing in the Hmong highlands

Our guide took us to a cave in which half of a village’s population had taken shelter

during one of the many years of heavy bombings. A USAF fighter jet struck that cave entrance, resulting in the deaths of almost all the people cowering there. Our guide told us he was a boy in that same village, and that he

knew all the people who died in that cave. Even though the Hmong people allied with the US in that struggle, they often were victims of US bombings.

The Plain of Jars: watch your step!

One of the great mysteries of Laos are the huge stone containers strewn

throughout a rolling plain in central Laos.

Our guide told us that we could step “one or two feet” off the trail, but no more. This area was heavily bombed during the Vietnam war, and “unexploded ordinance” was everywhere. The five tourists in our group formed *a very straight line!* Unfortunately, children and water buffaloes are not so careful.

The US government still does not take responsibility for all this death and destruction. It is truly time to ban all weapons which reap decades (centuries?) of damage.



Fund Health Care, Not Warfare!

(Excerpted - and edited a bit - from the Journal of Public Health, Nov. 19, 2020)

The coronavirus outbreak isn't the first crisis to affect a large swath of the nation's population. Other emergencies have brought rapid government responses. For example, in 1943 the government diverted tens of billions of dollars from civilian programs to build the atomic bomb, a military project.

What the COVID-19 pandemic requires is the reverse: the diversion of a substantial chunk of the more than \$700 billion in the Pentagon's military budget to the biomedical, public health programs desperately needed to limit the current coronavirus outbreak and prevent future pandemics.

Although some federal initiatives have made a few steps toward responding to the pandemic, they pale in comparison with the \$738 billion authorized this year for foreign wars, 800 military bases around the world, and a dangerous new nuclear arms race.

As a specific example, if a single Ohio-class submarine became its own country, it would be the sixth most heavily armed nuclear weapons nation in the world! The United States has 14 Ohio-class submarines, and there are bipartisan plans to build 12 new replacements at more than \$9 billion each.

We're not in danger of being invaded by Russians, Chinese, Venezuelans, or Iranians; we're in danger of having the fabric of our society torn apart by our failure to invest in and protect our national health and welfare.

The most urgent risks facing the United States and the world - viral pandemics, the climate change crisis, and extreme income inequality - do not have military solutions! We must be willing to shift our budgetary resources accordingly.

75 Words for Disarmament

In commemoration of the 75th anniversaries of the establishment of the United Nations and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs decided to launch the "75 Words for Disarmament Youth Challenge, which just ended on 26 September, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

The challenge was open to young people of three age groups:

- 13 to 18 years,
- 19 to 24 years
- 25 to 29 years

Here are the first place winners in each category, from youngest to oldest:

Bethlehem Beyoro

(Ethiopia)

"For me, disarmament isn't just about taking away weapons from someone, its also about working on the mind of that person so that he/she believes that the usage of arms to establish his/her ideology, interest, religion or power is wrong. It means creating a global framework that is strong enough to address the frustration of people before they take violent measures and punish whoever is to blame when wrong things are done, free from partisanship."

Krystyna Bragiel

(Poland)

"Disarmament invites us to pull down the walls, break the barriers. It allows us to see other people as human beings, not targets or enemies. Disarmament brings relief, understanding, respect and dignity. It is a chance for a deeper reflection on the value of human life and health. A chance of survival for all beings inhabiting our planet. It is a dream which can and should become a reality. Disarmament—it is our common *Cont. on p. 3*

Meet Your Board Members!

Gary “grew up” in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is arguably the “Most Conservative” city in the USA. He knew there was something wrong with many Ohioans (including his father), as they cheered on the National Guard troops at Kent State, and cheered the dogs and clubbing of civil rights activists in Alabama! Ever the contrarian, this inspired Gary to join the Revolutionary Communist Party while at college in Cincinnati.

After a stint at UC Davis, Gary used his two degrees (BS Civil Engineering/ MS Environmental Engineering) to help “clean up” the world. If you need a wastewater treatment plant, or a pumping station, just give him a call!

In the run up to the Iraq War, Gary parked his car and joined the demonstrators at 16th and J Streets. This was

the start of his many years with Sacramento Area Peace Action, including eight years as a board member! His weekly schedule always includes attending the Thursday Peace Vigil.

He composes many of the environmental articles for the Newsletter, including the article regarding unexploded ordinance in Laos on Page 1.

His love of Planet Earth extends to travels to many continents. His trips include visiting many of our close relatives: Mountain gorillas in Uganda; Orang-utans in Borneo; and Indri and other lemurs in Madagascar.

Political trips include a couple weeks in each of the following countries: Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Laos, Vietnam, Burma (Myanmar), Iran, and Libya. He looks forward to many more exciting post-COVID travels.



Gary Meyer

75 Words *Cont. from p. 2* responsibility.”

Valentina Bianco Hormaechea (Argentina)

“Disarmament means courage. Courage to shift the power balance in favor of peace, and courage to cede the advantages of a few in favor of the well-being of many. Disarmament means commitment. Commitment to redo the social contract that bonds communities together to live harmoniously. Disarmament means trust. Trust among human beings who explicitly have decided to care for each other. Disarmament means hope. Hope for a civilization that can and will do better.”

From Landmines to Nuclear Weapons A Free Online Webinar Thursday, December 3, 2020 5 pm PST

Wondering how we might do something local about those horrific land-mine stories from page 1? Check out this upcoming talk!

Naomi Egel, a PhD candidate at Cornell University, will talk about local advocacy on campaigns to ban weapons ranging from landmines to nuclear weapons.

Local contact: Sac WILPF 916 835-4330 or wilpf@nicetechnology.com

To register, go to calendar at sacpeace.org

Convicted For their Convictions

The Kings Bay Plowshares Seven

On April 4th, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. seven Catholic activists entered Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base in St. Mary's, Georgia. Inspired by the prophet Isaiah's command to "beat swords into plowshares," they became the Kings Bay Plowshares Seven.

They used a bolt cutter late at night to enter a remote gate and walked two miles through swamp and brush. They then split into three groups and prayed, poured blood, spray painted messages against nuclear weapons, hammered on parts of a shrine to nuclear missiles, hung banners, and waited to be arrested. Months later, on October 24, 2019 all seven were found guilty on four counts; three felonies and one misdemeanor.

They faced up to twenty years in prison. Earlier this month, the last of the seven were sentenced. Most got between 10 and 14 months in prison plus probation and restitution payments for trespassing, but one got a thirty-three month sentence. Thankfully, no one got twenty years!

Kings Bay Naval base opened in 1979. It's the largest nuclear submarine base in the world. There are six ballistic missile subs and two guided missile subs based at Kings Bay. Each of the six ballistic missile submarines is armed with 20 MIRV (Multiple Independently targetable Reentry Vehicle) missiles. That means that each missile contains numerous nuclear warheads, each of which can strike a separate target.

In closing remarks in court and afterward, the defendants invoked Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. who called the U.S. government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today," and called out "the evil triplets of militarism, racism, and materialism." While one commented that it was scary that weapons of mass destruction could be "hidden in plain sight," another said it was time for us to "take the veil down." She said that "The triplets are everywhere! They work together all the time, and they make each other more deadly..."

The presiding judge had issued an order

restricting any evidence or testimony having to do with international law, treaties restricting nuclear weaponry, and any religious or moral reasons for their actions. But an attorney who



spoke on behalf of the defense, and who is an NGO Representative at the United Nations, reminded the court that the world is already challenging the legality of weapons of mass destruction; in a few months, on Jan. 22nd, the United Nations Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will enter into force, making all nuclear weapons illegal under international law.

Outside of the court, after their conviction, the defendants remained upbeat and hopeful. As one said, "...we all know which way the wind is blowing. There's the Black Lives Matter movement. There's the Extinction Rebellion. There's the Me Too movement. There's an activist community waiting just behind us." (*Was he talking about us?*)

SOA Watch Exposes US Neocolonialism in Latin America

By Mario Galvan

On November 21st 30 years ago, Father Roy Bourgeois led the first protest at Fort Benning, Georgia to protest the massacre of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador by soldiers who had been trained at the infamous “School of the Americas” (SOA, aka “School of the Assassins”) at Fort Benning. A few days ago, the international movement he started celebrated its 30th Anniversary online with speakers from several nations.

COLOMBIA

Colombia, which has sent more soldiers and police to the SOA than any other country, has become the “point of the spear” for US policy in South America. The US has given them nearly \$10 billion, mostly in military aid, under the “war on drugs” pretext.

This US-created military machine is threatening its neighbor, Venezuela. US troops stationed at the Venezuelan border, supposedly to train Colombian troops, may have had a hand in attempted attacks on oil installations in Venezuela. One botched raid by US mercenaries had planned to kidnap the popular and democratically elected President of Venezuela!

They called for a Truth Commission to investigate the “many crimes” of the police and military, saying that “if this is not done, nothing will change.” They ask all US troops to leave Colombia, that aerial fumigations using glyphosate (known to cause cancer) be halted, and that no more Colombian troops should be sent to the SOA.

HONDURAS

Speakers from Honduras condemned the 2009 US-backed coup that overthrew their democratically elected, installing a repressive pro-US administration. In 2015 several cities in Honduras were declared among the “most violent in the world.” The increased militarization of the country (13 US bases) are justified as “anti-drug” efforts.

But right after the coup, many large mining and energy projects were approved without consultation of the affected communities, as required by law. Indigenous protests have met with brutal repression. The murder of activist leaders, such as Berta Cáceres, who led protests against a dam in their territory, makes Honduras “the most dangerous place in the world to defend human rights.”

HAITI

“The American Century” in Haiti began in 1914, when US troops landed during a peasant rebellion. Instead of fighting the rebels, the US troops went to the National Bank, seized the gold reserves, and shipped them to the US! Up to 20,000 were killed resisting the US invasion, but the gold has never been returned..

Since then, the US has been training Haitian military and paramilitary groups, creating a “reign of terror” that has led to mass migration. The refugee crisis of today “has its roots” in that era, when the US supported dictators in Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other countries in the region.

In 1990, Haiti held its first free democratic election, but in 1991,

Continued on p. 6



SOA Cont. from p. 5 thanks to SOA training and financing of repressive forces, the newly elected President Aristide was overthrown. He was re-elected in 2000, on a platform prioritizing the needs of the people, but the US toppled him again in 2004. They instituted a UN occupation that is still in place today, but massacres continue as the government organizes paramilitary death squads which they pass off as “gangs of criminals” to avoid responsibility.

MEXICO

In Mexico, as in Colombia, a the US has been militarizing the country under the pretext of the drug war. In 2006, Mexico let the army loose on the streets to battle the drug cartels, unleashing a wave of violence. The speaker called it a “brutal repression,” used to justify killings and “disappearances.” But as in other countries, there is a lot of economic activity moving behind the “drug war” screen.

Over 20,000 troops are stationed in the southeast (under the command of a graduate of the SOA!), where major economic developments are in the works, and being resisted by local populations. Federal troops are monitoring and intimidating protesters, and at least 30 activists have been killed. On the contrary, in the north, where most of the drug and criminal activity takes place, there are only 2,000 troops stationed.

GUATEMALA

Here, it’s the defenders (of human rights and the environment) who are on the defensive! They cite the national budget, where human services and the justice system are being defunded, as well as Guatemala’s history of

military governments since the CIA coup of 1953. The 1996 Peace Accords that ended the civil war are “being watered down,” because the government represents a “traditional oligarchy” defending its traditional privileges.

These elites enrich themselves by opening the country up to transnational investments, granting concessions for mining, hydroelectric power, and water rights. Communities are displaced, forcing migration. What makes the few rich, makes the majority poor, and those who protest are criminalized.

When activists must come to court to face trumped-up charges, their cases are often delayed repeatedly. Court costs are used as a tactic to wear down activist groups, which are often made up of poor and indigenous people. Some have trouble even paying the bus fare to their court dates.

COLOMBIA (2nd Speaker)

A national strike started last year is still going on, protesting the militarization of the country. They blame Plan Colombia, begun in 2000, and still going on. Despite all the US training and financial support, the military is “disgraced.” Not only for corruption in general, but also for its use of “false positives.” These are innocent civilians who are murdered, then listed as insurgents killed in battle. It’s not uncommon to find mass graves in the countryside.

Again, this done under the pretext of fighting the “war on drugs.”

In fact, militarization is used to “impose extractivism.” The military is serving as “private security” for corporate interests, driving people off their land. **Cont. on p. 7**



Zapatistas Under Attack By Paramilitary Groups

By Mario Galvan Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico are under attack yet again by armed groups. They claim community lands, shoot into Zapatista towns day and night, steal crops and cattle, kidnap, beat, and even shot people.

Despite the presence of army bases and thousands of troops, the new National Guard, and multiple layers of federal, state, and local police forces, these groups operate openly

SOA Cont. from p. 6 One sign at a protest “against the open war on (our) territory,” said that “there is no displacement because of war; there is war so that there will be displacement.” (see photo below)

As in Guatemala, Peace Accords signed to end a half-century of civil war are not being honored. Even US President Trump disparaged them in his recent campaign, calling them a “sell-out to the narco-terrorists by the Obama administration.” Former rebels who laid down their arms under the Accords and created a new political party, are being assassinated.

In this year alone, there have been 70 massacres, and over 240 indigenous leaders killed. The 115 indigenous ethnic groups have no protection, and are often recruited by force. In the Amazonian area 4,000 children have died of malnutrition, and some indigenous communities are “in danger of disappearance.”

The national strike is their only hope, as none of the many agreements reached so far dialogue with the government have been honored. In Colombia, indigenous people are looked down on as lazy parasites who pay no taxes. They live under “a dictatorship” and

with impunity.

The Zapatistas renounced armed struggle years ago, but have suffered many attacks since then. A wave of violence in 1997 killed many and drove over 10,000 from their homes.

Their “offense?” Resisting “development” projects that will drive farmers off the land where they’ve lived for generations, for the benefits of investors, foreign and domestic.

permanent repression. They have to “throw off the fear and terror in which they live” in order to continue their campaign for social justice.

In Conclusion

The history of the US in Latin America goes far beyond the 30 year history of the SOA, but this “up to the minute” presentation on the negative impacts of US militarization was eye-opening. We need to ask ourselves if we’re really OK with all of the violence that is being done in our name, with our tax dollars. If we believe in the “free market,” why are we using military power to protect business interests overseas? If

we believe in freedom, why don’t we let other countries to decide for themselves how to govern their countries?

It’s not enough for us to learn about what’s going on, and to meekly petition the US government to stop committing these crimes against humanity and common decency, in violation of international law. As suggested in last month’s newsletter, we need to recognize that there is no “path to peace” in our current political system, and begin to search for – **or to create** – another way. We owe it not only to ourselves, but to Latin America, and the rest of the world!



December Peace Events

Go to sacpeace.org for **live links** to all events below!

Tuesday, Dec 1, 4 - 5pm, Webinar: War, Peace, and the Supreme Court with Professor Samuel Moyn. **Click to register.** FMI: info@masspeaceaction.org

Wednesday, Dec 2, 4pm, SacPeace Board meets via conference call. For details, email SacPeace@dcn.org or call 916-448-7157.

Thursday, Dec 3, 4:30 - 6pm, Stop U.S. militarism and wars weekly vigil. Those participating are asked to stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask. 16th & J Sts. Sacramento. FMI: 916-448-7157, sacpeace@dcn.org.

Thursday, Dec 3, 5pm, Webinar: From Landmines to Nuclear Weapons. **Click to register.** FMI: wilpf@nicetechnology.com

Friday, Dec 4, 11am - 1pm, Webinar: AFRICOM & Human Rights in Africa. **Click to register.** FMI: greta@worldbeyondwar.org

Thursday, Dec 10, 4:30 - 6pm, Annual Candlelight Vigil for peace & justice in honor of the Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 12-10-1948. Those participating are asked to stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask. 16th & J Sts. Sacramento. FMI: 916-448-7157, sacpeace@dcn.org.

Thursday, Dec 10, 6:30 - 8:30pm, Showing up for Racial Justice Community Meeting. **Click to register.** FMI: surjsacramento@gmail.com

Saturday, Dec 12, 10am, Online: Wild Child - Wild & Scenic Film Festival. **Click to register.** FMI: info@mountainlion.org

Thursday, Dec 17, 4:30 - 6pm, Support Palestinian rights. Stop U.S. militarism and wars. Those participating are asked to stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask. End U.S. aid to Israel. & Boycott companies aiding Israel's abuses. FMI: 916-448-7157.

Tuesday, Dec 22, 4:30 - 6pm, Stop U.S. militarism and wars weekly vigil. Those participating are asked to stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask. 16th & J Sts. Sacramento. FMI: 916-448-7157, sacpeace@dcn.org.

Thursday, Dec 24, 4:30pm, This week's stop wars and militarism vigil will be held on Tuesday, 12-22.

Tuesday, Dec 29, 4:30 - 6pm, Stop U.S. militarism and wars weekly vigil. Those participating are asked to stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a mask. 16th & J Sts. Sacramento. FMI: 916-448-7157, sacpeace@dcn.org.

Thursday, Dec 31, 4:30pm, This week's stop wars and militarism vigil will be held on Tuesday 12-29.