The Maine Peace Action Committee (MPAC) was founded in 1974 with a special focus on ending the war in Indochina. MPAC has been concerned with our society’s violent and militaristic nature, which is manifested in a lack of humane and progressive values and a tendency towards solving problems via destructive means.

Our general orientation takes the double focus of analyzing and opposing militarism, or the efforts to use nuclear weapons and other military means to solve human problems, and imperialism, or the efforts by powerful nations to use economic and military means to impose their will upon less powerful peoples.

Our nation’s pursuit of these policies undermines its ability to deal with the needs of its own citizens and places us in greater danger of war. Our tax dollars are used to develop first strike capable weapons and to support repressive regimes abroad. Consequently, there are fewer dollars available for needed human services both here and abroad.

If we direct our energy and other resources into weapons systems, there is little left for creative solutions to problems such as the world food and fuel shortages which threaten our survival.

We have seen human needs are neglected by an existing government, and when that government represses groups attempting to meet those needs, violent upheaval has resulted. Our government’s military economic support for such repressive regimes has embroiled us in armed conflicts which have escalated to full scale war and could mean inevitable global destruction.

We support efforts to deal with each of these problems since we see them as resulting and contributing to an economic and political system over which most of us have little control.

We in MPAC believe that while none of these efforts by itself can bring about a completely just society, together we can work toward more comprehensive solutions. We feel that we can best contribute by challenging militarism and imperialism and proposing alternatives to these policies.

We find we can act effectively if we focus on a limited number of specific issues and campaigns.

We need projects which can:
1. unite people within our group
2. provide opportunities for action resulting in measurable achievement
3. link our efforts with national campaigns; and
4. demonstrate the dynamics of militarism and imperialism.

For our activities to be successful, we need to educate ourselves about issues, analyze the contributing factors, investigate alternative solutions, decide strategy for implementing alternatives, and share our understanding with the community to enlist their support.

MPAC believes that people united and working together can redefine our values and change our approach to problems so that we shall be able to live in a free and creative society; indeed, such efforts are imperative if we are to survive.
OCCUPY WALL STREET: OVERVIEW, ISSUES AND ETHICS

Occupy Wall Street is the most exciting thing happening in our society today. It carries with it a huge potential for changes that can improve our lives by diminishing systemic oppression, exploitation, and violence in our society. In just a little over a month's time OWS has sparked Occupations in over 100 cities in the United States and actions in over 1,500 cities globally. This is a powerful movement.

Everyone in our society should be interested in this movement because we are connected as one people, but young adults should be especially excited, inspired, and involved. We, the young, are coming into an age where we are recognizing our power of voice in our community. Our generation is inheriting the world, and we are declaring that we have chosen to create a better world for ourselves and future generations. The established power structure wants the protests to go away because the protests threaten their wealth and power. But society is waking up to the fact that the present reality is riddled with injustice, needless wars, unequal power relations that create oppression and exploitation, and many other forms of widespread suffering. It is crystal clear to us that our world needs to be changed and the Occupy movement represents a widespread mass of people realizing their power to change these conditions that have persisted for far too long.

Overview and Issues

At the core of the movement is the 99% uniting against the 1%. The 1% represents the richest and most powerful 1% of people in our society. This 1% are people who exert their power to oppress and exploit people and the environment. The corporate executives, including the corrupt bankers who knowingly cheated the public in a scam that cost the country trillions of dollars of tax-payers' money, are part of this 1%. The 99% includes students and college graduates with overwhelming loans, the jobless, the homeless, the hungry, those without health insurance, the victims of war, teachers, and every other being harmed by living in a world dominated by the rich ruling class.

Some argue that there is no clear message, point, or goal set by the OWS protesters. But for those paying attention, there is clearly a message and point to these protests. Perhaps there is simply too vast an amount of issues to pinpoint it down to one or two things. The protest is against an entire system that is riddled with injustices and instances of violence and suffering.

One of the central issues of the movement is that the rich 1% have secured power over our government and this has effectively destroyed our democracy. The 1% give huge campaign contributions to politicians that represent their interests. In addition to ensuring the election of 1%-friendly politicians, the 1% also spends massive amounts of money lobbying for policy that benefits them, such as severe tax cuts and deregulation that allows for the rich to make fortunes through exploitation and cheating.

The ideology that justifies the 1%’s wealth and power is that a deregulated free market creates the most wealth and prosperity for the whole society, because the rich are free to maximize production which also maximizes employment and thus sends money trickling down to the lower classes. This is simply not true. The rich make tons of money through the exploitation of the environment and workers of society, and then they don’t share it or use it in any way directed at the benefit of the lower classes. Evidence of this can be seen in how since around 1980, when the market really began to become deregulated and the tax-rates among the rich really began to fall, there has consequently been the biggest inequality of wealth between the rich and poor than ever before. With more money comes more power, and the 1% are entirely self-interested. They repeatedly cut their worker’s wages and benefits, send jobs overseas for cheaper labor, and destroy the environment at everyone’s expense. Trickle down economics has never been true and never will be true, yet much to the dismay of us all, the rich successfully influence our government representatives to act as if it were true.

Repeated market crashes are the results of the 1% being empowered by greater deregulation. All of us are familiar with the latest and worse one, the mortgage crisis of 2008. Rich bankers of the 1% crashed the global financial system through undeniably fraud, and not only did they get away without going to jail, they gave themselves exorbitant bonuses in the same year. A great majority of people in the world are struggling or dying because of this global market crisis. At Occupy rallies, one might hear the chant: “Banks got bailed out, we got sold out”. This is the truth. We have to ask why there haven’t been any investigations to bring justice to the criminal acts of these bankers. We have to ask why the entire system has not been transformed. After a crisis of this magnitude, it is common sense to evaluate what went wrong and then change the conditions so that it may never happen again. On the whole, the system has been left the same. Bailouts and other money has been pumped into the system to try and get it back running, but that is not a solution. That is more of the same. One of the most important things to recognize is the government officials who successfully deregulated the system and allowed this crisis to happen. Some of the officials most clearly on the side of the 1% are Larry Summers, Timothy Geithner, Alan Greenspan, and Ben Bernanke. We have to see how our whole economic-political system is built around the interests of the 1%.

Today, America’s level of inequality is so severe that the richest 1% owns about 40% of the country’s total wealth. At the same time, at least 25% of all Americans (over 75 million people) are living in poverty (poverty as defined by reasonable standards according to Richard Wolff, UMass-Amherst Professor of Economics). Also, according to a Census official, 48 million Americans of working age did not work one week out of the year in 2010. So the basic picture of America today is huge number of people in poverty, without jobs, without the means to meet the basic needs of life, while at the same time there are a few super-rich people who are not creating jobs or spending their money. In September 2011, Wolff points out that the Federal Reserve declared that businesses in America had a record amount of cash sitting in the books, an amount over $2 trillion, which is further proof that trickle-down economics doesn’t work.

Massive levels of poverty, massive levels of inequality, what can be done? If we look back in our history, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt designed a plan that brought the country out of a
situation similar to ours known as the great depression. Roosevelt made the simple observation that the rich have the wealth and resources that the poor need for jobs, shelter, and food. Therefore, Roosevelt raised the taxes on the rich in order to raise the money to create jobs and social welfare programs for the poor. The tax rate was hiked up to 94% for the upper income bracket. In today’s society, this would mean that 94% of all the money you make over $380,000 goes to the government. It is a fair and reasonable tax rate. The rich don’t need more money, the poor do. Today, because of tax-policy that favors the rich 1%, the tax rate of the upper income bracket is 35%. Taxing the rich is an obvious place to start and would alleviate the short-term suffering of millions of people with the jobs and social programs that could be created.

Another obvious way to provide for human needs in our community is to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The troops should come home and the military budget should be cut dramatically. This way, we could pay for human needs rather than the means of human destruction. The

The philosophy of Buddhism recognizes that humans have a sense of self. We all have a name, we have a sense of who we are, we tell stories about our self, and we experience, relate, give, take, live, and die as this self. Buddhism says that there actually is no separate self, but rather only an interconnectedness with the rest of the universe. True understanding in Buddhism is seeing how all things are connected and influence one another. Thich Nhat Hahn, a Zen Master and engaged Buddhist (a Buddhist concerned with working in the world to end the conditions of suffering for all beings) frequently instructs people to see how it is only possible for any one object to exist in a particular space and time because of every other thing in the universe. To put it more locally, Thich Nhat Hahn says, “If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper.”

The main idea is that we only exist with everything else, in a connected way. The inherent danger of the ego is that it has a tendency to be unaware of these connections, and can become full of self-interested motives and desires. Basically, Buddhism says the ego wants to exist and is afraid it doesn’t exist, so it has a tendency to inflate itself by acquiring, consuming, controlling and dominating. The bankers on Wall Street who make tens of millions and hundreds of millions per year are examples of people with out of control egos. Unchecked, powerful egos are very dangerous and violent, because they grow so disconnected from everything and everyone, including family, community, and the natural environment. They do not feel any hurt or shame for the harm they cause to others. The stronger the sense of disconnected ego, the more violence one does. This is a basic truth in Gandhi’s philosophy as well.

A teaching found in Buddhism is to be compassionate, to want the other to be well. The Dalai Lama says, “If you want someone else to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” Teachers like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hahn say that happiness is much greater when we act self-lessly, such as when we are generous rather than greedy. Actions that harm others most often do not benefit the self, even if it carries that outward appearance, such as the case of a rich person who lives in extreme luxury. Really, if we make fortunes by exploiting people we necessarily live in a love less, disconnected state.

Buddhism is not the only philosophy or way of life that recognizes the truth of interconnectedness. Indigenous peoples of all lands strongly based their social systems and lives around this principle. Today in western thought the idea of interconnectedness is more and more emerging. We are social beings, we need the support of others in our young age, throughout life, and right up to the point of our deaths. We have emotional needs of being cared for and caring for others. When we cooperate, share, and treat others with kindness, we feel more connected and positive. Western sociology, psychology and philosophy are more and more supporting this view of humans as socially connected beings who depend on each other and greatly influence each other.

Cooperation, sharing, caring for others, being kind, being honest, and being non-violent are values that we must learn to adopt. We want to do the least violence possible in the world. That is the point of being peaceful. The principles of non-violence and truth should be at the heart of our individual lives and social system. Nonviolence and truth are the two pillars of Gandhi’s ethics. Everything about our lives must become aligned with living with love and honesty. We have to talk nonviolently and truthfully, we have to think, act and work with and for nonviolence and truth. We have to ask in our lives periodically, how could I be less violent? With reflection, mindfulness, and the desire and commitment.
In order to live peacefully, we can transcend a lot of violent tendencies.

Just as we need to learn to align our individual lives with a non-violent and honest code of ethics, we need a social system that encourages non-violence and honesty. In fact, the social system is integral to developing a peaceful self because the society conditions the individual and encourages us towards peace or violence with the nature of self-other relations and institutions. The economic and political systems need to be peaceful systems. Capitalism does not promote non-violence and truth. When opportunity for personal property, profit, and power is the motivation for production, we see people corrupted by selfish greed and dishonesty. Capitalism is a violent system because it encourages the type of disconnected selfishness that removes the individual from community consciousness and connection. It is violent because it promotes selfish accumulation of property and wealth, and inevitably, those with wealth, property, and power end up exploiting people. It is exploitation because they use other people as means toward their ends of production and profit without caring about what those individuals want to do or who they want to become. The potential for the human to be a self-determining, creative, expressive being is lost when he or she is forced to become a wage-earning means of producing goods for someone else.

Conclusion

As members and supporters of the Occupy movement, we need to become firmly rooted in non-violent and just values. This movement presents us with an opportunity to change the world in which we live. Most of us have grown in a society that fosters selfishness, competitiveness, greed, possessiveness, materialism, exclusivity, and alienation. These are not values for a good, strong, democratic community. We need the opposite values—selflessness, cooperation, generosity, sharing, simple living, inclusivity, and healthy connection. The few people I have spoken to who have been to Occupy Wall Street report back such a strong feeling of community among the protesters. That type of community is what we need more than anything else. We need to form circles and discuss our lives and society in a civil, democratic manner and continue to oppose the powers that be with non-violent protest and non-cooperation. That is the way of progress.

—Daniel White

Sweet-and-Tangy Three Bean Salad

Adapted from Comfort Food Fix by Ellie Krieger

Makes 8 servings

½ small red onion, thinly sliced into half-moons
¾ pound green beans, trimmed
¾ pound wax beans, trimmed
¼ cup honey
½ cup cider vinegar
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 15-ounce can no-salt-added kidney beans, rinsed and drained
1 medium red bell pepper, trimmed and sliced into matchsticks

To mellow the bite of the onion, place it in a bowl of ice water and allow it to soak for 30 minutes. Drain.

Place the green and wax beans in a steam basket fitted over a pot of boiling water. Cover and steam until crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow it to cool. Cut into 2-inch lengths.

In a large bowl, whisk together the honey, vinegar, oil, salt, and black pepper. Add the onion, green and wax beans, kidney beans, and bell pepper and toss to combine. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving.

Curried Lentils with Walnuts, Spinach & Cherry Tomatoes

Adapted from Fresh and Fast Vegetarian by Marie Simmons

Makes 4 servings

1 cup brown lentils
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
2 teaspoons curry powder
1 garlic clove, grated
2 bags (5-6 ounces each) baby spinach (8-10 cups packed), rinsed and drained
1 cup small cherry or grape tomatoes, stems removed
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint
½ cup chopped walnuts
½ cup plain yogurt

Bring a medium saucepan half full of water to a boil. Add the lentils and cook, uncovered, until tender but not mushy, 18 to 20 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Heat the oil in a large skillet until hot enough to sizzle a piece of onion. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until tender, about 5 minutes. Add the curry powder and garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the cooked lentils, spinach, tomatoes and mint and cook, stirring, until heated through, about 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat the walnuts in a small skillet over medium heat, stirring, until toasted, about 5 minutes. Sprinkle the walnuts over the lentils and serve with the yogurt to spoon over the top.

Submitted by Laura Hackney and members of Sustainable Agriculture Club. For more information, you can contact Laura at Laura.Hackney@umit.maine.edu.
PEACEMAKING THROUGH SMALL CHANGES

In our world of pervasive, worldwide injustice and violence, it is easy to feel overwhelmed when trying to hypothesize ways in which to work against it. On a regular basis, our attention is drawn towards the numerous, large-scale atrocities that seem never to cease. Whatever the injustice may be; whether it be the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, exploitative child labor practices in Africa and Southeast Asia, the oppressive corporations that use their money to unfairly influence politicians, or any of the other innumerable wrongdoings occurring in the world; it is clear that these large-scale acts of oppression make those of us who want a more peaceful world feel deeply saddened and unsure of how to bring about their termination. This sorrow and uncertainty can lead to apathy when the task of bringing about change on such a large-scale seems too much for one individual to take on.

As difficult as it may be, though, it is not a viable option in the process of peace activism to simply ignore these grand injustices. Ignoring injustice is not an act of peace, but rather an act of violence, as it is complicit acceptance of the injustice. Inaction in the face of injustice yields the same negative consequences as the actual actions of injustice. Thus, awareness of the larger issues needs to be known through educating oneself and others about them.

So, then, it seems as though there is a conundrum: How can we avoid apathy and pessimism in the process of creating awareness of the large-scale injustices? The solution to this problem lies in individual and local peace activism, in focusing upon small-scale changes that can be made within ourselves and in our community. Through this process, several positive things happen: First, we gain confidence and appreciation for what we do as small changes are realistically accomplished. Second, while maintaining awareness of the larger issues and their connection between smaller issues, we begin to understand that our small changes are necessary in the process of bringing about larger change. Third, and most important, is that even if change is not readily made in the process of local peace activism, we understand that our efforts are indispensable because what we are doing is trying to help others to alleviate their suffering. And when make the effort to help others, we find that we also at the same time are alleviating our own suffering, helping ourselves to live more meaningful lives. Thus, we can move beyond pessimism because our activism has meaning beyond whether or not we make change. We know that what we are doing is right.

How, though, do we go about this small-scale change? The process can be done in many ways, but let me explain to you a few key elements that can help you in the peacemaking process.

Understanding the Many Types of Violence

Often, violence is perceived to be solely within the realm of the physical. Even though violence is sometimes said to include hateful speech, the analysis will usually end there. Violence, however, is much more multi-faceted. It can be emotional, religious, educational, nutritional, and exist in many other ways. When a religious institution uses its theological interpretations to subordinate women and encourage dogmatic thinking, religious violence takes place. When one ingests meat that came from an animal that spent its entire life suffering in a factory, one is ingesting violence, with nutritional violence taking place. When we engage in conversation with others and constantly interrupt and berate them, linguistic and emotional violence takes place. How we consume, how we interact with one another, how we are educated...all of these factors - and more - of daily life can be violent, and often are.

Thus, by understanding the multiplicity of violence, we understand that we all are participants in the perpetuation of violence in this world. To work towards peace, a change in our own actions and values must be made. We must reflect upon this knowledge of the many types of violence and see how they apply to our own lives, and then make an effort to change them.

Understanding Ignorance and the Violent Process of Socialization

However, while engaging in the process of changing ourselves and others, it is important to remember to be compassionate for oneself and for others. Do not be hateful towards yourself or for others who have acted violently. Do not be angry with yourself or angry with others because you and they have failed so far to embrace a lifestyle that reflects a broad understanding of peace. The very act of being hateful towards yourself and others is a violent act, and if this is the way in which the education of peaceful values is done, then we will not succeed in bringing about real change. Peace cannot be learned violently. Thus, we must be compassionate towards others and ourselves in the process of education.

Yet how is one supposed to develop compassion? Although there are many ways in which to develop compassion, one way to do so is to gain the understanding that many people are ignorant to the fact that they are acting violently and are ignorant and act violently because of the process of being socialized in such a violent world.

Many of us simply do not yet have the awareness that violence exists in so many ways, and that we all are often acting violently. Thus, when you realize that you and others have been living violent lives, it may be extremely distressing. You may loathe yourself, or greatly detest others for living in such a way. Yet it is important to not respond to this knowledge with anger at yourself or others. Through the process of violent socialization, all of us have lived violently because violence has become normative and an accepted part of society. It is “normal” for us to eat meat without thinking about whether or not the animal was violently abused. It is “normal” for us to be egotistical and try to increase our own capital without regard to how this might negatively affect others. In many other ways, violence has become so customary as to render our violent ways absolved from scrutiny. Therefore, express compassion to yourself and others, because you have been living violently not out of free will, but because you have been conditioned not to comprehend things in any other way.

Yet even if someone purposely makes the choice to act violently, this is still not an act made out of free will. If a parent expresses their anger by physically abusing their child, they do so because of violent influences. It is likely that they were abused themselves. They never received love, so they do not project love. They were never
taught that expressing their anger violently will not help their anger to subside. An abusive parent like this is representative of all the people who willingly act in violence and in hate: even the people who live most violently and cause such extensive suffering towards others do so because their lives have been violently traumatic. They have never received the love and compassion necessary to become a loving and compassionate person. Certainly their acts of injustice are not to be condoned; essential to living peacefully is actively opposing injustice. Yet because they act violently as a result of their violent treatment from others, we understand that compassion towards them is necessary if we want to change. Even if they do not change, though, we continue to offer them compassion because expressing hatred towards them is an action of violence.

Making Small, Gradual Changes

Once you understand how violence exists in numerous ways, it may be tempting to become impatient and want immediate, big change in yourself and others. This, however, is not advisable. Remember that because many of us have been socialized violently, it is very difficult for us to overcome our many years of living violently. From this knowledge, realize that the forcing of expansive change upon yourself and others can be incredibly trying and overwhelming. Thus, use this realization to be compassionate. With compassion, not only will you refrain from expressing anger towards those who live violently, but you will not be upset with yourself and others for not making immediate, large-scale change against this violence. The results of understanding the great variety of violence, developing compassion from comprehending the violent process of socialization, and utilizing this knowledge to make small, gradual changes will allow you and others to avoid becoming overwhelmed and apathetic, thus allowing for the peacemaking process to work.

When thinking about where to begin with small changes in a gradual way, concentrate on one way in which you act violently. Perhaps you buy clothing that was created by a child under heinous labor conditions. Or it could be that you regularly do not take the time to listen fully to your friend, which leads them to feel that you do not care about them, causing them great suffering. Likely, you act violently in many different ways. But make it your goal to make change to just one of these violent habits, as this will allow you to be very focused upon your effort to do so, and you will not be overwhelmed with attempting to make too much change all at once. Thus, with your effort focused upon one, clear goal of making small change, change can happen. You realize that change is possible. You gain confidence in yourself and are no longer apathetic. Throughout this process, though, remember the larger picture: even though the change is small, anything you do in the process of making change towards a more peaceful world matters, as it is what is necessary in the process of working towards larger change.

Making Change Together

All of what has been mentioned previously, about understanding the many types of violence, of learning about the violent process of socialization and striving to focus upon small, gradual change…none of this process needs to be restricted to an individual level. All of what has been expressed so far does not have to happen alone. Certainly, you can explore making change with others close to you, and make a commitment together to do so. That can be very helpful, as it will give you the support needed to move forth with the process. Yet there is another way in which the process of understanding and change can occur through working with others.

By participating in a peace activist group, you can learn all of the things that I have already mentioned. I say this because it has been through the Maine Peace Action Committee that I have been able to learn all of what I have expressed. Through the process of educating ourselves together, through trying to spread awareness of the injustices made by the military and multinational corporations, through our failed and successful attempts at encouraging others to participate in a peace activist group, we have been able to develop compassion, learn nonviolent principles and understand the importance of making small change in the peacemaking process. It has been through collective understanding that we have gathered the knowledge so beneficial for our peace activism. I would not have been able to gain the awareness I have now without the process of working together with others in the pursuit of peace.

The Right Thing to Do

Through working with others invested in peace activism, you can receive the guidance necessary in order to understand the essentiality of small changes in the peacemaking process. With them, you can discover how to begin making these changes. Yet it is imperative to remember not to link the success or failure of your peace activism to whether or not change occurs. Certainly, through a concerted effort to make small changes against violence in yourself and with others in your community, change can occur. But it will not always occur immediately.

How, then, to avoid the pessimism and apathy when your efforts do not yield instant change? Of course, it goes without saying that you have to be patient. The peacemaking process is a gradual one. However, rather than merely tell you to be patient, here is some advice on how to be patient in the peacemaking process. Remember that what you are doing is the right thing to do. Two things that all human beings want are to be happy, and to suffer less. Through participating in peace activism, through working to change ourselves and others to be nonviolent, through opposing oppression and injustice, we work to make ourselves and others to be happier, and to suffer less. We work for what is essential to all human beings. Therefore, do not attach the success of your peace activism to its results. Try to make a change, and do not give up this effort. Yet remember that the very act of what you do is, in itself, an act of the utmost good. Then, even when your efforts do not yield change, you know that what you are doing is right. Violence, injustice and oppression may prevent peaceful change from occurring, but it can never take away the fact that working to make this world a better place through peace activism is the right thing to do.

—Eric Collins
SCHWEITZER, KING
AND THE BELIEF IN HUMAN PROGRESS

When the scope and magnitude of the world’s problems are considered, they construct a seemingly insurmountable challenge shadowing our lives. We are faced with a myriad of issues, ranging from the degradation of our environment to ostensibly endless, costly wars. Frustration with government has boiled over to global protests and riots. To some, humankind may seem to be following the same inevitable path of energy toward entropy, chaos, and disorder. I must admit that in the past, I thought the human race was headed to a similar fate. Reading about wars, racial inequality, human rights violations, economic systems designed to exploit, and environmental abuse led me to believe that we were headed in only one direction. However, it was through reading the profound words of two ethical visionaries that my worldview underwent a metamorphosis, from one of pessimism to realistic, passionate optimism.

For years, I have been naturally drawn to Albert Schweitzer’s philosophy, because it is one of universal love and compassion for all living things. Those who are familiar with his writing can appreciate the simple beauty of Reverence for Life, and observe Schweitzer’s radiant love for nature and animals. Although confronted with daily life in equatorial Africa that was dense with suffering and constant fatigue, Schweitzer found time to be a committed philosopher and musician. He spent decades of his life healing the sick and suffering, while trying to find a universal philosophy that could fuel perpetual peace for humankind.

With this brief description, one may think Schweitzer’s view of life on our planet was one of beauty and love, and in general, it was; but that is an incomplete analysis. He recognized that nature was both creative and destructive. Life must survive at the cost of other life. With this realization, he was acutely aware of the evils facing our race, especially with emerging technological capabilities such as nuclear warfare. He argued that the material aspect of society was advancing far more quickly than its spiritual component, which meant that humankind was unprepared for the responsibility of having such immense power.

Even though he was fully aware of the presence and potential of evil and suffering, Schweitzer wrote:

“I could not but feel with a sympathy full of regret all the pain that I saw around me, not only that of men but that of the whole creation. From this community of suffering I have never tried to withdraw myself. It seemed to me a matter of course that we should all take our share of the burden of pain which lies upon the world.”

The conclusion I drew from this is that pessimism is a state of mind, caused by disconnecting and separating from the suffering of others. It is easy to feel pessimistic about the path humanity is traveling when one is accepting negativity without resistance. In this category of thinking, I include my former self. Although many things Schweitzer wrote contributed to my new way thinking, I can point to one paragraph in particular that truly began my metamorphosis:

“I remain optimistic. One belief of my childhood I have preserved with the certainty that I can never lose it: belief in truth. I am confident that the spirit generated by truth is stronger than the force of circumstances. In my view no other destiny awaits mankind than that which, through its mental and spiritual disposition, it prepares for itself. Therefore I do not believe that it will have to tread the road to ruin right to the end.”

Since he was frequently exposed to suffering and studied the extent of human evil, Schweitzer often struggled with pessimism. He did not try to disconnect himself from the fact that he was a human being, and therefore had imperfections, fears, and doubts. However, through his devotion to humanity and the power of ethical thinking and truth, he did not allow himself to be conquered by pessimism. We all face similar choices in everyday life. We can choose to ignore our call to duty and be consumed by pessimism, or we can resist negativity, seek to reduce suffering, and fight injustice.

If Schweitzer was the influence that started my change towards optimism in the direction of humankind, Martin Luther King Jr. finalized it. In his astounding book Why We Can’t Wait, King wrote about his fight against racial injustice, with profound arguments supporting non-violent protest in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In this letter, he was writing to his fellow Clergymen who suggested that he stop his ‘unwise and untimely’ protests. King argued that his protests were not untimely, because the evil of injustice permeates and infects universally.

“I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. […] I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned with what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny.”

Through his eloquent words, King issued a challenge against the temptation of being overwhelmed by the scope and magnitude of injustice. He recognized that the survival of injustice is not area specific. If we choose to observe injustice without doing our part, negativity and pessimism are destined to follow. This is because injustice is not compatible with the human soul, and those who rise against it match their actions with their inherent beliefs.

Similar to Schweitzer, King believed that no destiny awaits us but the one we design for ourselves. Despite the constant exposure to legal brutality, racial inequality, and widespread injustice, King wrote:

“Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.”

To strengthen my belief that pessimism is a state of mind and a conscious choice, King believed that we determine the nature of time: “Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively.” If we break it down, our entire lives are fragments of time and choice, action and reaction. Likewise, our views on life and humankind can either be destructive or constructive, pessimistic or optimistic. King firmly believed this, and chose to live a life promoting the power of the human spirit.
THE ONLY THING DEFICIT IS RICH PEOPLE’S SENSE OF SHAME

The 2008 financial crisis was the product of a bank-constructed bubble in real estate. Banks gave mortgages to people who they knew couldn’t pay them back, but whose risk of defaulting could be passed onto investors, since the mortgages themselves were packaged together and sold like stock. The beauty of this scheme was that with so many people receiving home mortgages, real estate values soared and if people did default, the homes could still be sold at a profit. Combined with a financial product that operates like insurance, with none of insurance’s checks and balances, this Ponzi scheme created the possibility for an economic meltdown.

Despite responsibility for the nation’s and world’s economic gloom resting firmly with the FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) sector, these same people are now pushing for policies which will further reduce the already tenuous situation of the American general public through a manufactured concern with the government deficit.

Importantly, the government is still able to borrow money at historically low interest, and none of the true reasons for high government debt (low taxes on the wealthy and corporations, the military budget and our financing of the banks responsible for the crisis in the first place) are being highlighted for correction. Instead, social expenditures have been placed on the chopping block, despite being the most popular government programs in polls of the American public. These programs are particularity reviled by advocates of private enterprise because they have unnecessarily cost the medical and insurance industries, outrageously expensive and burdensome on regular people and the general economy, but outlandishly profitable for a few.

Unfortunately for those who believed candidate Obama would deviate substantially from his predecessor, the President and Democratic Party leadership have colluded with the FIRE sector in attacking social expenditures. Given that Obama’s electoral campaign was the single most expensive in our nation’s history and the FIRE sector was his most generous contributor, this shouldn’t be surprising. Obama’s early appointments, such as of financial industry insider and now Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, confirmed the President’s true loyalties. Of special concern for those interested in the fate of education is the President’s appointment of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who made his political career championing the privatization of the Chicago public education system.

The latest bipartisan attack on the American people is being waged by a Super Committee of 12 Congressmen tasked with circumventing normal democratic operations in order to cut trillions from the deficit. Originally tasked with cutting $1.5 trillion, the President has appealed for a larger mandate of $3 trillion in cuts. The inspiration and framework for this undemocratic organ of big finance was a committee’s first conclusion has been that Medicare and Medicaid require an immediate haircut, despite being the most popular government programs in polls of the American public. These programs are particularity reviled by advocates of private enterprise because they have almost no administrative overhead and thus offer very little opportunity to make money for special interests.

Today, the Occupy Movement has been accused of waging class warfare against our country’s most enterprising individuals. On the contrary, with the explosion of wealth inequality both domestically and globally, it has been the richest few who overwhelmingly wage class warfare against the rest of society. As the rich become richer, it increases their power to dominate public policy, undermining our democratic institutions. Opinion poll after opinion poll reveal that the American public is far to the left of both Parties on issues ranging from the military budget to prospective taxation.

The subordination of the political Parties to the interests of a few; justifies and indeed requires an independent response that can circumvent the more easily corruptible avenues of lobbying and patronage that often decides policy in the shadow of big business.

— Robin da Hood

Schweitzer and King (continued from Page 7)

When choosing the right word to describe my transition from blind pessimism to realistic optimism, no better word could be used than “metamorphosis”. This is because ethical thinking must be combined with action for a fundamental change to occur. Before I realized this, pessimism consumed my thoughts on the direction humanity is traveling. Both Schweitzer and King helped me to realize that no matter how much evil I read about, how much suffering human beings cause one another, I do not have to resign myself to passively accept this. We must actively choose not to fall victim to pessimism, especially without resistance; to do so is to resign all control of our density. Both of these great ethical thinkers refused to let that happen, and their confidence in truth and the human spirit inspires me.

To solidify his belief in humanity, Schweitzer concluded his autobiography with a powerful, resonating message, “Whether we are active or suffering, we must find the courage of those who have struggled to achieve the peace that passeth all understanding.” I have come to believe that it is possible for us to achieve peace. We can make this vision a reality if we gather the strength, confidence, and courage from those who came before us. The belief in truth, love, and our ability to guide human progress is contagious, and arguably needed now more than any time in history.

— Seth Toothaker
During the summer of 2011, when deciding on a topic for the lecture I presented on October 6 as part of the Socialist and Marxist Studies Lecture Series, I was cognizant of three significant dates. May 1 marked the killing of Osama bin Laden, an event that received great publicity. September 11 marked the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and this has greatly shaped U.S. economic, political, and military policies during the past decade. October 7 is usually marked as the 10th anniversary of the start of the U.S. Afghanistan War that continues to dominate much of U.S. foreign policy priorities and has tremendous impact on life in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and that region of the world.

My position is that the U.S. policies resulting from 9/11, as seen in the so-called “war on terrorism,” with the incredible expenditure of funds on the Iraq and Afghanistan War (estimated in some research studies as reaching as high as $4 trillion into the future), have greatly weakened our nation, have made us much less secure, and have caused unnecessary death and suffering to hundreds of millions of human beings at home and throughout the world. Such policies are an integral part of the most troubling development in my lifetime, as reflected in widespread suffering and discontent and the recent remarkable spreading of the Occupy Wall Street movement to Maine, the nation, and the world. This is shockingly clear from the rapidly increasing class inequalities, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the top 1%, the domination of economic, political, military, foreign and domestic policies by the wealthy elite and big corporate interests, as seen in the military-industrial complex. This has led to the widespread recognition that our trillions of dollars spent in war dollars could be spent on good jobs at a living wage, good education for all, health care for all, decent housing for all, nutritious food and a sustainable environment. In short, such a change of priorities would provide us with much greater real security.

I’ll do something different in this article by focusing on the more specific act, the killing of Osama bin Laden, and using this to raise four general points related to 9/11 and the Afghanistan War. I’ll end by suggesting a more general framework for understanding why our disastrous U.S. priorities, policies, and wars have occurred and made more than 90% of us much less secure.

**The Killing of Osama bin Laden: Four Lessons**

Osama bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan on May 1, 2011. The killing of bin Laden brings to mind other deaths marked by May 1. This is the day of annual commemoration of Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, on which we recall the slaughter of millions of innocent Jews and other human beings. It is also the day in 1945 on which the death of Adolf Hitler was announced. For most around the world, May 1 is International May Day, the workers’ day that grew out of the bloody Haymarket Square Riot in Chicago in 1886 when police broke up a peaceful labor strike.

Publicized favorable reactions in the U.S. to the killing of bin Laden were predictable. Some celebrated, but not as many as might have been expected, primarily because most citizens have more pressing fears and priorities than bin Laden and Al-Qaida. Influential Bush Administration spokespersons and other right-wingers argued that the killing justified the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and especially the use of torture in interrogations. President Barack Obama and Democrat Party allies tended to be more restrained, but have argued that the killing justifies their record military spending, escalated Afghanistan War policies, drone attacks and killing of countless civilians. They clearly hoped for a boost to Obama’s popularity and ongoing reelection campaign, but this has not occurred.

The real lessons of the killing of bin Laden, which were completely ignored by the powerful economic and political elite and the subservient corporate media, are very different. I’ll outline four key lessons.

First, antiwar, peace, and justice activists have repeatedly warned over the decades against immoral, illegal, and shortsighted policies that arm, support, and ally the U.S. with terrorists, dictators, religious fundamentalists, and others perceived by the wealthy and powerful as acting in U.S. economic, political, and military interests. Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and Hosni Mubarak are but a few on this very long list. Regarding bin Laden, one thinks of the formulations by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who warned over the decades against supporting the bin Ladens and other terrorists who would terrorize the Russians and “our” other enemies. However, as we find repeatedly throughout the world, be prepared for the time when the chickens come home to roost, when the terror is turned against us, and when those victimized by the U.S.-supported terror regard us as their enemy.

Second, on 9/11/01, at a peace rally hours after the terrorist attacks, many of us clearly called for identifying and bringing to justice the perpetrators of the terrorism, while remaining calm and intelligent, tapping into what is best in us and not seeking widespread revenge that would inflict suffering on innocent persons. Instead, policy-makers hijacked our deep feelings of loss and fear and used them to declare their disastrous “war on terrorism,” justifying the invasion and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the deaths and extreme suffering of millions of human beings. What the killing of bin Laden shows is that limited, targeted, police action, developing intelligence on the ground, finally worked, while the war on terrorism, costing trillions of dollars, produced incredible death and suffering, generated widespread anti-American feelings, and has made us much less secure.

It is more accurate to qualify the above statement that the killing of bin Laden on May 1, 2011 shows that the more limited, targeted surveillance and military action finally worked. Despite the sensationalistic corporate media coverage to the contrary and despite the fact that bin Laden’s expressed issues resonated with millions of Muslims, it is important to emphasize that the overwhelming majority of Muslims, including Muslim clerics, did not support the 9/11 death of about 3,000 human beings. Over the years, bin Laden was facing severely fiding influence, and he was isolated and had very limited power. In this context, killing bin Laden was not such a smashing success. For example, it inflamed Pakistanis, greatly exacerbating already overwhelming anti-American feelings. This has left us in a very precarious situation, especially since nuclear-armed and unstable Pakistan, far more...
important for U.S. and global security and peace than Afghanistan, is probably the most dangerous place on earth.

Third, there seems little doubt that the killing of bin Laden was a summary execution, which was in reality a planned assassination. This raises troubling legal, as well as moral, questions. After the Obama Administration hastily put out a series of false accounts, such as the dramatic story of an intense gunfire battle before bin Laden was finally killed, it became clear that there was no resistance. At most there was one person in a different building with a gun. The 76 U.S. commandoes met no resistance from an unarmed bin Laden and his wife who tried to shield him from the bullets. The Navy Seals could easily have captured bin Laden, but they chose instead to kill him. Why? One can think of several reasons, but the major one, in my view, is that a capture would delay the torture for us. The Obama Administration seems to have cared little about torture, even if the war on terror is a war on the rule of law.

As Noam Chomsky and others have noted, the execution of bin Laden, consistent with numerous other examples, clearly violates international law, not to mention Pakistani law. Such a killing is justified only under specific conditions, when one is being imminently threatened and as a last resort. After such a killing, one is legally required to conduct a post-mortem examination and suffering of Palestinians.

Fourth, and most important, as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. repeatedly warn us, you cannot use violence and terror to overcome violence and terror. Otherwise, you become the perpetrators of the violence and terror you claim to oppose, and you become trapped in endless, vicious, causal cycles of violence, terror, and insecurity. In past lectures and publications, this is the point I've analyzed at length, but I'll only give a very brief presentation of a small part of the analysis.

What this fourth lesson invites us to do, in most general terms, is to rethink our views of violence, nonviolence, war, peace, terror and terrorism, real security, freedom, democracy, justice, standard of living, and economic and environmental sustainability. In the regard, especially relevant to 9/11 and Afghanistan, Iraq, and bin Laden, we must broaden and deepen our views of violence, terror, and terrorism.

It is true that what occurred on 9/11, with the violent overt actions that resulted in so much death and suffering, is a clear illustration of blatant terrorism. But if we are to make sense of 9/11, Iraq, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, we must include an analysis of state terrorism, military terrorism, psychological terrorism, cultural terrorism, religious terrorism, and especially economic violence and terrorism. In this regard, we must understand, resist, and change huge corporate terrorism, Wall Street terrorism, and big banker terrorism.

When we broaden and deepen our analysis of violence, terror, and terrorism, we focus not only on the almost 3,000 victims who died on 9/11, but we also include the hundreds of millions of human beings, who live under humanly caused violence and terror, without decent jobs, housing, health care, food, and suffer and die humanly preventable deaths. People, living under widespread conditions of humanly created and maintained exploitation, oppression, and terror, sometimes support or see no alternative to reactive violence and terror. The U.S. and other power elites then act to overcome this violence with far greater violence, to defeat this terrorism with policies of far greater terrorism. We thus become trapped in endless, escalating cycles of violence, terror, and insecurity.

Much of my work attempts to analyze how King, Gandhi, Buddha, Marx, and others can help us to become educated about dominant, multidimensional, physical, psychological, economic, political, military, cultural, religious, educational violence and injustice, and the usually overlooked structural violence and injustice of the status quo. Such an analysis can also help us to resist and break those cycles of violence and terror so that we have real hope for a brighter future of real security, peace, justice, and meaningful sustainable lives.
There remains one area in which the U.S. has overwhelming global superiority: our military force. We spend roughly as much on the military as the rest of the world combined. As clearly evidenced in formulations by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in the Clinton Administration and conservatives in the Project for a New American Century and other Republican right-wingers in the 1990s, the U.S. must be willing to make credible threats and use military force if necessary in order to maintain its privileged position in the world. In short, it is argued by these members of the power elite that the U.S. can be more effective in its policies if military force is an essential usable component in our diplomatic arsenal. As expressed in formulations in the 1990s, what we need is another Pearl Harbor to unite the public in overcoming the Vietnam Syndrome.

9/11 provided such a Pearl Harbor. The U.S. was not very interested in Afghanistan, and Washington even had a somewhat friendly relationship with the repressive Taliban, which was focused on internal repression and posed no threat to the U.S. The real target was Iraq with its huge oil reserves and geopolitical, military, and economic significance. Within a day of 9/11, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and others in the Bush Administration had met to plan the invasion and occupation of Iraq. However, after Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda took credit for 9/11, the invasion had to be redirected to Afghanistan, and the invasion and occupation of Iraq was delayed until March 2003.

It is open to debate whether bin Laden calculated as part of his 9/11 planning that the U.S. would retaliate with overwhelming military force, inflicting tremendous violence and terror on the Afghan people. In other words, it is debatable whether bin Laden intentionally wanted to draw Washington into the invasion and occupation. This would replicate the lessons bin Laden had learned in the 1980s when the Russians invaded with overwhelming military power, won the battles and probably killed 1,000,000 Afghans, became bogged down in a war they could not win, and finally had to withdraw greatly weakened and in disgrace. As had happened in the 1980s, such a foreign invasion, occupation, infliction of suffering and terror would greatly enhance the status and influence of bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda resisters, the Islamic jihadists, not only in Afghanistan, but also with outraged Muslims in Pakistan, in the region, and throughout the world. Whether calculated or not, this is certainly what occurred in the reaction to U.S. post-9/11 policies in the following years.

Without going into details, the U.S. Iraq War has been an overwhelming failure. Despite the confident predictions of U.S. so-called experts, who knew little or nothing about Iraq's history, culture, or religion, the invasion and occupation were not a quick and inexpensive cakewalk, the American military were not greeted as liberators, Iraqi oil did not pay for massive costs of U.S. invasion and occupation, and the U.S. did not establish a stable friendly Baghdad government subservient to U.S. economic, political, and military interests. The Iraq War policies have left the U.S. much weaker economically and politically and much less secure. Ironically, the main foreign winner in Iraq, as a result of the U.S. Iraq War, has been Iran.

The U.S. Afghanistan War and occupation have also been a huge failure. For Obama, the Iraq War was a distraction, an unnecessary or unjustified war, but Afghanistan after 9/11 was the good war. Using its major asset of the superiority of military force, the U.S. Afghanistan War policies have been largely unilateralist and overwhelmingly militaristic. The result has been what is often described as the longest war in U.S. history, a war that has involved tremendous loss of lives, especially Afghan lives, at tremendous financial cost, and with a corrupt regime in Kabul and an extremely unstable Afghanistan, and even with a resurgence of Taliban influence. As with Vietnam, Washington keeps lowering the bar and redefining what might constitute "winning." At times, winning seems to mean little more than not having lost the war and not leaving in disgrace.

The most important lesson from the failed policies of 9/11, the Iraq War, the Afghanistan War, and the killing of Osama bin Laden is the imperative to rethink and change our values and priorities. These failed policies result from the anti-democratic concentration of wealth and power in the top 1%, the shocking rapidly increasing inequalities, the dominant influence of the Military-Industrial Complex with our bloated military budgets, permanent war economy, and militarized policies throughout the world. Such values, priorities, and policies have led us to our present unsustainable situation of increasing insecurity, violence, injustice, and conflicts at home and abroad. Instead, as seen in recent encouraging developments in Occupation movements at Wall Street, throughout Maine and other parts of the U.S., and throughout the world, we need to invest our human and financial resources in real life-affirming priorities, to embrace real worthwhile values and relations with others and with nature, that allow for real meaningful lives for us, for other U.S. citizens, and for our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

―Doug Allen

**Killing bin Laden**

(continued from Page 10)

were devastated by the war, and the U.S. emerged as the world’s superpower economically, militarily, politically, and culturally. As George Kennan and other leading policymakers in Washington expressed it, the U.S. was in a very privileged and powerful situation. While only about 5% of the world’s population, the U.S. controlled and consumed a significant portion of the world’s resources. Why would the rest of the world go along with this unfavorable arrangement? What this meant was that if the U.S. were to maintain its privileged position, it had to establish economic and military arrangements with compliant others, including dictators, military juntas, and the wealthy elite, who would be rewarded by acting to further U.S. economic, political, and military interests. The U.S., with its interest in maintaining its dominant power status quo, thus emerged as the major counterrevolutionary force. This led to a history of quick military interventions and the overthrow of noncompliant, nationalistic, Third World leaders, even those democratically elected.

A major turning point was the Vietnam/Indochina War. U.S. policies were not different from postwar military, political, and economic policies throughout the world. What was different was that the war went on so long, cost so much, resulted in so many U.S. causalities (not to mention 3,000,000 Vietnamese deaths), and the U.S. did not win. What emerged in the U.S. was called “the Vietnam Syndrome”: the U.S. public would no longer tolerate sending U.S. troops into foreign wars, with such loss of dollars and lives, unless there were clear objectives and an exit strategy that received overwhelming domestic support. As the U.S. power elite in the Military-Industrial Complex repeatedly noted, it was necessary to overcome the Vietnam Syndrome in order to resume overt aggressive military interventions.

In recent decades, it has become clear that we live in an increasingly multipolar world. The U.S. remains the world’s number one superpower, but we are a relatively declining superpower. Economically, we find competing powers in terms of the European Union, China, India, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Venezuela, Turkey, and other parts of the world. While China’s economy, along with India’s and others, has been expanding greatly every year, the U.S. economy has been rather stagnant and unsustainable. Will the U.S. finally come to terms with its place in a changing world and readjust its military, economic, and political policies and priorities in ways that are more sustainable and involve less militarism, imperialism, violence, and terror?
Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of individual members of MPAC and other university and community activists. They do not necessarily express the views of other MPAC members or of the group as a whole. We know that other readers may not agree with all that is stated in this issue, and we encourage your response.

The Maine Peace Action Committee has its general meeting every Tuesday at 3:30 pm in the Virtue Room of The Maples Building on the University of Maine campus. Meeting times and dates may change. MPAC often has subcommittees working on topics of special interest to current members. MPAC also organizes film series, speakers, teach-ins, workshops, concerts, reading groups, demonstrations, and other peace and justice actions. For more information on MPAC, call 581-3860. If you are interested in peace education and activism, please join us. http://www.umaine.edu/mpac/

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