



*Nebraskans for Peace*

# Nebraska Report

*There is no Peace without Justice*

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# NFP Statement on the War in Ukraine



Nebraskans for Peace believes that the Russian invasion into eastern Ukraine and escalation of hostilities in the whole Ukraine area is a matter of the greatest concern. Nebraskans for Peace’s central commitment is carried in a statement on its website, “Nebraskans for Peace is committed to the creative, nonviolent resolution of conflict and views war as a practical failure at peacemaking. Confronting violence with violence, we believe, will never create the conditions for peace.” In that light, Nebraskans for Peace believes that the escalation of hostilities in the whole Ukraine area is dangerous as the United States and Russia are the two largest nuclear powers in the world. Credible analysts have asserted that once a hot war gets started in Ukraine, it will be very difficult to prevent its escalation to nuclear exchanges. The board of Nebraskans for Peace calls on our leaders to attempt the following actions:

- Renew negotiations to end the long-standing conflict in the Donbas region and the recent one in Ukraine as a

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*Nebraskans for Peace’s state office in Lincoln is located on land that formerly belonged to the Otoe Tribe.*

## Nebraska Report

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NFP is a statewide grassroots advocacy organization working nonviolently for peace with justice through community-building, education and political action.

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# NFP Statement on the War in Ukraine, conclusion

whole and keep negotiations going despite their difficulty in the present circumstances. The U.S. needs to call for an immediate cease fire in the Donbas and Ukraine.

- Negotiate to allow Ukraine to be militarily neutral without joining NATO or any Russian military alliance while encouraging stability within the country and economic development. In the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the U.S., the U.K., and Russia agreed to guarantee Ukraine's security if it gave up its nuclear weapons. Russia is in clear violation of this agreement.
- Negotiate—with Russia, NATO, the European Union, and other concerned actors—the creation of a stable European security architecture that reduces nukes, ballistic missiles, and border tensions in Eastern Europe and Ukraine. On the agenda in such negotiations should be the possibility of the dissolution of NATO, given that the Russian/Soviet/Eastern Europe similar security pact, the Warsaw Pact, dissolved over thirty years ago.
- Develop talks with Russia and the European Union on matters of common interest, including climate change, the Covid pandemic, extremism, and the immigrant crisis that affects almost all northern hemisphere nations.
- Commit ourselves and the European Union to allow the neutrality and self-determination to such nations as Ukraine; nations placed in a buffer position should not be asked to threaten anyone else.
- Encourage the media and sources of information to give a full background on Ukraine and Russia, their historic interactions, and American dealings in Ukraine in recent years.
- Avoid the tendency to extend the reach of American arms to the whole world; avoid the creation of a Pax Americana. We should ask other nations—including Russia—who are arming other parts of the world to pull back from armament sales that create military tensions at the same time as we ask the European nations to pay their own way in the business of defending themselves.

We congratulate the Russian Peace movement on its courage and resistance to an entirely unnecessary war.

# Poison in Nebraska

## The AltEn Disaster

At Mead, Nebraska, an ecological disaster has taken place with many fingers being pointed but few real solutions. How we got here is a story which is fascinating, infuriating and frightening. It's a story of greed, the triumph of money over morality, of death and injury. And it's a story of incompetence and negligence. In short, a witches brew of the frailties of the human condition.

AltEn began as a vision for a cleaner future. A feedlot was established on the site whose design enabled the retention of most of the manure generated by the cattle in pits below the feeding stations. This manure is mixed with water (or stillage as explained later) in a giant digester tank where the natural decaying process produces methane gas. The gas is piped from the digester tanks and burned as a fuel to boil water which is mixed with the appropriate yeasts and grain to create ethanol. Once refined, the ethanol is sold, the stillage off the ethanol production returns to the digester tank and what remains of the grain is called distiller's grain or wet cake. It is a very palatable and nutritious feed which then returns to the feedlot to be fed to the animals which will later be sold as beef. And any solids remaining in the digester tanks can be land applied for fertilizer. AltEn opened to grand fanfare about twenty years ago, with a ribbon cutting, speeches by the leadership of Nebraska's farm organizations and a visit by the Governor. It was a massive investment in the "future" of cattle feeding, the efficient marriage of technology, the environment, and an old

industry looking to improve its image and reduce the cost of beef. Government, too, had a hand in the investment at AltEn since the village of Mead had annexed farmland and provided tax increment financing to the company when it constructed the plant.

Within six months of opening an explosion occurred in one of the digesters. The company was highly leveraged and a bankruptcy soon followed. The plant sat idle for several years while the bankruptcy court reviewed the web of LLCs which made up the entity. Finally Dennis Langley, the original owner who had once been a speech writer for Joe Biden and had made his fortune in the gas pipeline business, purchased the entity out of bankruptcy. After a few years the plant was ready for operation.

The owners of AltEn recognized an opportunity in converting pesticide treated seeds into ethanol. Treated seeds are purchased by farmers all across the United States. Pesticides and fungicides are applied to the outside of the corn as a dust and portions of that dust are taken up by the plants after they germinate. These low-level pesticides inhibit insects from eating them. Some, called Neonicotinoids, are a derivative of the tobacco plant whose nicotine content makes tobacco unpalatable for most insects. Each year seed companies produce millions of tons of excess treated seed which must be destroyed once the "sell by" date has

passed which is costly for the companies.

In 2012, AltEn notified the State of Nebraska's Department of Environmental Quality that they were going to begin using treated seeds in the manufacture of ethanol at the plant. AltEn also notified NDEQ that they would be unable to feed the wetcake produced to animals in the feedlot since the seed company labels clearly prohibited feeding the residue to livestock because of the side effects. NDEQ replied that this was simply a "minor change" in their permit and the modification would not require a public hearing.

Given the green light to produce ethanol from treated seeds, the plant began doing just that. A few months later residents of Mead began noticing a putrid, acrid, rotting odor generated at the AltEn plant and began complaining to public officials. The complaints fell on deaf ears. As time went by, more and more seed companies donated their seed to AltEn, saving them the disposal costs and the company was producing 24 million gallons of ethanol annually. In late 2020, AltEn solicited business in a promotional ad stating they processed 98% of all treated seeds in North America!

Because the wetcake was high in organic matter AltEn promoted it as a soil conditioner and began land applying it to fields around the plant, even doing so at the University's Eastern Nebraska

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# The AltEn Disaster, conclusion

Research Farm (or ENREC) using a permit issued to them by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. They also entered agreements with neighboring landowners to apply some of the excess stillage produced in the distilling process to nearby farm fields.

Meanwhile area residents noticed that something had changed. They began to cough, their eyes burned, their throat hurt and the smell permeated the community—on the playgrounds at school, at the local football field, in the parks and neighborhoods. One Mead area resident spent hundreds of dollars on a sick dog who had encountered some of the applied wetcake and had a bad reaction. Dead raccoons were located near a pile of wetcake on a farm field. Complaints piled up at NDEE but the “business as usual” response was that AltEn was “in compliance” with their work.

AltEn had received permits from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to land apply the wetcake. When NDA finally tested the wetcake in 2019 they found levels of clothianidin at over 85 times the maximum limits permitted by law and a “cease and desist” order was issued. AltEn was ordered to reclaim the wetcake applied, over 33,000 tons at several locations, and remove it which they did, stockpiling it back on their own lot. But the business continued to operate and the wetcake continued to accumulate on the AltEn site as the clock kept ticking. Today the stockpiled wetcake covers 16 acres of land south of Mead and would top Memorial Stadium if piled on the football field.

Judy Wu-Smart is a specialist in the culture of beekeeping. Dr. Wu-Smart maintained several bee colonies on ENREC property near the AltEn plant. In 2017, Dr. Wu-Smart saw the loss of every bee colony on the property. That happened again the following year and again the following year. Dr. Wu-Smart began to notice irregular and erratic behavior among the bee colonies. It was obvious

to Dr. Wu-Smart that something in the environment must be contributing to the sickness in her bee colonies. She began to document this erratic bee behavior and noticed it in other insects as well and shared her concerns with friends.

On January 10th, 2021, the Guardian Newspaper broke the story of AltEn in a broad and scathing attack on both the plant itself and the regulators who failed to protect the environment. Dr. Wu-Smart’s work was prominently featured in the story, and on January 23, 2021, Senator Bruce Bostelman introduced LB

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507 which prohibited the use of treated seed in the manufacture of ethanol if the byproduct could not be fed to livestock. NDEQ also issued an order to AltEn to cease production of ethanol at the plant for the immediate future.

At the February hearing for LB 507, several individuals testified in support of the bill. Former Senator Loren Schmit, a 24 year veteran of the Legislature and a man considered to be the grandfather of the ethanol industry in Nebraska indicted NDEQ. Senator Schmit told the committee that Nebraska had been approached by seed companies over 30 years earlier about using the treated seeds in the manufacture of ethanol and that NDEQ and the ethanol industry had rejected that request soundly.

Then came the freakish cold weather of mid-February, 2021. A digester line in the plant froze and burst, dumping 4 million gallons of pesticide saturated water into creeks which ran across University ground as well as the nearby National

Guard camp before eventually emptying into the Platte River.

As spring arrived, a concerned citizens group formed to exert pressure on the state to resolve the crisis. The Perivallon Group joined with the Nebraska Sierra Club and Bold Nebraska to conduct a town hall meeting in Mead after NDEE backed out of an earlier commitment for one, sighting the Attorney General’s lawsuit against AltEn which had been filed on March 1. Many individuals attended the town hall in Mead, expressing their frustration with NDEE and the entire

fiasco at AltEn. The Perivallon Group also began digging through the many complaints listed on the NDEE website.

Because the scope of the environmental damage is so extensive at AltEn, the Perivallon Group drafted a Legislative Resolution which called for the Legislature to appoint a Special Committee made up of members of multiple standing committees to do a thorough assessment of the environmental damage in Saunders County. The study includes an examination of the regulatory failures, the financial damage, the potential damage to humans and animals, as well as efforts to examine possible criminal activities which may have taken place. Senator Carol Blood agreed to carry the LR after other senators declined. The LR was introduced late in the session and was not heard at the time, but a public hearing was finally held on the LR on February 24th.

Senator Blood put together a second town hall meeting in Mead during the summer which produced more anger



and frustration about the lack of action. Residents felt that NDEE was stonewalling them about the agency's plans for the AltEn plant. Following the second town hall meeting, a select committee of Mead residents was chosen by NDEE officials to meet behind closed doors with representatives of NDEE.

And the work of NDEE to stonewall continued at the hearing on February 24th when the chosen committee testified that a special committee of the Legislature was "not needed" and that NDEE was resolving problems in an effective and timely manner. Senator Bostelman introduced LB 1102 in January of 2022 which ostensibly beefs up the authority of NDEE to police and monitor businesses. But at that hearing Mr. Macy stated that he "already had the authority" to act on AltEn. IF he had the authority then why didn't he use it years earlier?

We constantly hear businesses complain that they are overregulated. Many regulations are ridiculed as unnecessary and costly, but it is because of bad actors like AltEn that regulations must be vigorously enforced and strenuously followed. The attempts of NDEE to "coach AltEn to compliance" were never going to happen. The company has mechanics liens filed against the property which date back to 2015. They have paid no property taxes for several years, falling into arrears. They have been permitted to sell off much of their equipment, dismantle their biochar unit and sell that, and even tried to sell pesticide saturated

biochar as recently as December, 2021. There is no bottom to the behavior of the executives who ran AltEn and were willing to foist an environmental disaster on Saunders County, Nebraska for money which is probably sitting in offshore banks. Which is more astounding, the scope of the damage caused by the plant or the unmitigated gall of the managers who tried to get away with it (and did for several years)?

Meanwhile, NDEE is relying on the seed companies to clean up the site. The seed companies lay out what they intend to do and the state simply accepts what they say, fearful that the seed companies may walk and leave the state with the bill.

At the LR 159 hearing, Jim Macy stated that it would take 3 to 5 years to cleanup just the AltEn site. An audible gasp was heard in the room. Mead residents are still unclear about what will be done, how it will be managed and when they can expect their lives to return to normal. And the damage surrounding the AltEn plant is unknown, except that pesticides have been detected in well water near Ashland and a pond six miles downstream from AltEn saw a 100% kill of all fish and invertebrates living in it.

AltEn made a dumping ground of Nebraska, polluting our land, air, and water. Every Nebraskan should be outraged that our state government went along with and supported that destruction. Our children's future depends on vigilance.

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# LAND BACK: EVERYTHING BACK

## Understanding the Expansive Global Movement<sup>1</sup>

by *Erin M. Poor*  
*Citizen of Cherokee Nation*

The LAND BACK movement is alive, and its spirit is strong. Nearly every week land is returned to Indigenous hands. We are bearing witness to historic reclamations of homelands, reunification of heritage seeds with ancestral soil, and spirit-led efforts to heal lands long exploited by commercial agriculture. Land defenders, water protectors, grassroots organizations, and sovereign tribal nations work relentlessly, for years and sometimes for generations, employing a multitude of tactics, to achieve the rematriation of land.

While LAND BACK efforts expand globally, the victories are not without losses. The past few years have been extremely deadly for land defenders around the world. More than 200 environmental activists' lives were taken in 2021. A sobering reality made even more heart-breaking by the knowledge that countless non-human lives were lost as well.

People die for the land. They are assaulted and jailed for protecting the water. Relatives endure lasting traumas from their time on the environmental frontlines. Why? Because when we say LAND BACK, we do not just mean we want the land back. We are fighting for our lifeways, knowledge systems, and kinship practices which flow to us from the land. We want waters back, languages back, relatives back, medicines back, ceremonies back, songs back, sacred items back, fire back, culture back, foodways back, genders back, EVERYTHING BACK. To be Indigenous is to be vitally

connected to the living world, and land is at the heart of it all.

Returning land and water to Indigenous stewardship helps everyone. The World Resources Institute estimates that Indigenous Peoples legally own 10% of the Earth's land mass and protect 80% of the planet's biodiversity. In 2019 the United Nations released a report warning of the decline of global biodiversity. The biggest drivers of the decline are changes in land and sea use, exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. The report found that areas stewarded by Indigenous people experienced biodiversity decline at lower rates. The U.N. report further acknowledged the importance of Indigenous ecological knowledge in nature conservation, restoration and sustainable use.

An example of traditional ecological knowledge at work can be found in the cultural burn practices of the North Fork Mono Tribe in California. For

them, bringing cultural fire back to the landscape was a reclamation of ancestral relationships with the land. They speak about fire-responsive landscapes, and the ways that fire supports new growth among flora in the ecosystem. Cultural burns help to improve material availability for traditional artisans, prevents highly destructive fires from dramatically altering landscapes, and allows the tribe to pass on its stories and its languages related to the land.

The example of the North Fork Mono Tribe demonstrates the ability of land to offer healing to a people, and for the people to offer healing to the land. It is this spirit of reciprocity, and the innate sense of responsibility to the land, that everyone can learn from. And while we say Land Back and look to traditional ecological knowledge that was developed over lifetimes and handed down through generations, it is important to underscore that the LAND BACK movement is not about going back in time. It is about move forward in a good way; it is about futures formed and informed by Indigenous knowledge.

### **How can you help the LAND BACK movement?**

There are many ways. Be ready to learn and unlearn. Unlearn that the land is a thing to own and use. Start seeing the land as a living being, or many living beings, all of whom are related, and related to you. This will take practice. A

good place to start is with your relationship to water.

Mni Wiconi. Water is life/Water is alive. Like our bodies, Mother Earth is mostly water. It is not enough to say that we need water, more accurate is that we are water. As water, we are related to all the water on Earth. Distinctions between self and environment must collapse so we can see ourselves as related and responsible for the health and well-being of all water on Earth. Water protectors embody fierce love for community and self; for past, present and future relatives who rely on water for life. They give us

***LAND BACK is a concept that contains multitudes. It is about restoration of balance in nature, honoring Tribal sovereignty and body sovereignty for humans and more-than-human relatives. It is about returning the sacred to the Mother.***

a model of care and commitment we all can learn from. They fight to protect the water and for a return to Indigenous water stewardship practices. Such practices ask us to see water as a living spirit, a being with rights, deserving of love, care, and protection. These stewardship practices link us inextricably with the living water and the living land.

This kind of conceptual reframing has been employed in the legal arena. The Rights of Nature Movement has seen people around the world advocate successfully for ecosystems such as rivers, lakes, and forests to have legal rights similar to humans. In 2016 the Ho-Chunk Nation amended their constitution to include the Rights of Nature. Their amendment holds that “Ecosystems and natural communities within Ho-Chunk territory possess an inherent, fundamental, and inalienable right to exist and thrive.” In 2018 we saw legal personhood established for Manoomin (wild rice) by the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, making it the first law to recognize the legal rights of a plant species. When the State of Minnesota permitted the diversion of 5 billion

gallons of water for a tar sands pipeline, manoomin’s right to thrive in clean water was violated. A case was filed in Tribal Court against the state of Minnesota. U.S. Federal judges will decide soon whether the tribal courts can prevent the state of Minnesota from violating the rights of Manoomin by allowing Line 3 operation to continue.

More than three dozen governing bodies have adopted Rights of Nature globally. You could advance this movement in your local and state communities. Have conversations with your peers, especially your community members

who are privileged to own land and have financial resources, about the importance of Indigenous land stewardship and the LAND BACK movement. Advocate to your governing bodies that they give land back to the Indigenous nations on whose homelands they reside. Dispel myths that giving land back to Indigenous people would mean that white people have to pack their bags and leave. Share the example of the McGirt Decision, a 2020 Supreme Court ruling which affirmed that much of eastern Oklahoma, including part of Tulsa, is sovereign Tribal land. No one was forced to move.

Learn about the treaties that were signed in your region. Who are the Indigenous stewards of the land on which you currently live? Are you living their legally or are you occupying that land illegally? Many Americans may be surprised to learn the answer.

Listen, amplify and support Indigenous Land and water defenders. Honor the Traditional Ecological Knowledge they hold and understand that more than

give us power, that knowledge can heal. Donate to legal and bail funds for water protectors and land defenders. Protect the first amendment right to protest and stay vigilant about legislation that erodes that right or threatens the rights of nature to thrive.

LAND BACK is a movement, a call to action, a spirit, and an umbrella concept for a broader framework of Indigenous reclamation and collective liberation. When Indigenous Peoples say LAND BACK, we mean land back, waters back, languages back, relatives back, ceremonies back, medicines back—EVERYTHING BACK. LAND BACK is a concept that contains multitudes. It is about restoration of balance in nature, honoring Tribal sovereignty and body sovereignty for humans and more-than-human relatives. It is about returning the sacred to the Mother. How will you participate?

*Erin Poor is a Citizen of Cherokee Nation and temporary visitor on Pawnee, UMÓ<sup>n</sup>HO<sup>n</sup> and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ land. She is the co-founder of the Intertribal Medicine Collective and is currently in school to become a clinical mental health counselor.*

<sup>1</sup>In 2021 Nebraskans for Peace published an introductory article on the LAND BACK movement. This article seeks to expand on that introduction and further inspire readers to see their own role in supporting the movement to return land to Indigenous stewards. If you are unfamiliar with the LAND BACK movement, last year’s article may be a useful starting point before reading the present essay.

<sup>2</sup>I use the word rematriate instead of repatriate to honor the rich living history of matrilineal Indigenous societies, to acknowledge the role of Indigenous Women and Femmes in the effort to defend the Earth, and to indicate the process of returning the sacred to the Mother.

# What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

## We are Asphyxiating the Oceans

Situated as we are, in the midst of North America, it is easy to forget that two-thirds of the Earth's surface is covered by water, which supports and sustains us. According to new studies in scientific journals that have not received much ink in the popular press, we are asphyxiating the oceans at a rapid rate as oxygen levels decline and corals die. The primary cause of this asphyxiation is the steady warming of the atmosphere that our ruling plutocracy insists does not exist.



### A World-wide Trend

The decline in oxygen levels is a world-wide trend, as described by Denise Breitburg and colleagues in *Science* (2018). "This oxygen loss, or deoxygenation, is one of the most important changes occurring in oceans increasingly modified by human activities that have raised temperatures, carbon-dioxide levels, and nutrient inputs and have altered the abundances and distributions of marine species," they write. In the

open oceans, deoxygenation has been intensified by rising acidity provoked by carbon-dioxide absorption, as well as the injection of nutrients from agriculture and sewage that are predominant in Lake Erie around Toledo, well as other inland bodies of water.

The decline in oxygen levels has intensified since the 1950s, due nearly entirely to human activities, from increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and overload of nitrogen-based fertilizers. All these

world indicate that oxygen-minimum zones in the open ocean have expanded by several million square kilometers and that hundreds of coastal sites now have oxygen concentrations low enough to limit the distribution and abundance of animal populations and alter the cycling of important nutrients."

### Corals: No Time to Recover

Coral Reefs, the richest source of food in the oceans, also are steadily becoming more vulnerable due to ris-

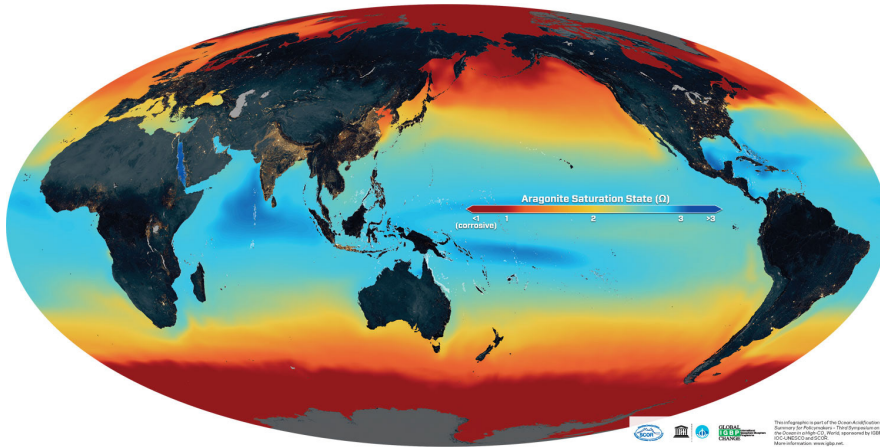
*Reefs across the Tropical Eastern Pacific exposed to warm El Niño year waters bleached. Coral reefs in Costa Rica, Panama and Columbia experienced 70 to 90 percent mortality. Most reefs in the Galápagos Islands, the cradle of Darwin's theory of evolution, experienced 95 percent mortality.* —New York Times

activities combine along coastlines at the mouths of major rivers (such as the Mississippi in the United States and the Ganges in India and Bangladesh) to produce oxygen-starved "dead zones."

"Oxygen is fundamental to biological and biogeochemical processes in the ocean," wrote Breitburg and colleagues. "Its decline can cause major changes in ocean productivity, biodiversity, and biogeochemical cycles. Analyses of direct measurements at sites around the

ing temperatures, which bleaches (kills) them. A study published in the same issue of *Science* that contained the work on ocean oxygen starvation described just how quickly the coral holocaust has developed. "Large-scale coral bleaching events, in which reefs become extremely fragile, were virtually unheard-of before the 1980s. But in the years since... the frequency of coral bleaching has increased to the point that reefs no longer have sufficient recovery time between severe episodes," wrote Kendra Pierre-Louis and Brad Plummer in the *New*





*This map shows aragonite saturation as projected in 2100. Regions in blue are values where corals and carbonate-shelled creatures can continue to grow. Regions in red are where the saturation levels are too low, and corals and shelled creatures will have a hard time building up their carbonate skeletons and shells. At these levels, corals might even start to erode away.*

*York Times.*

When coral bleaches, they wrote, “Overheated seawater causes corals to part ways with symbiotic plantlike organisms called zooxanthella that live inside of them. In addition to giving coral reefs their bright colors, zooxanthella also provide corals with oxygen, waste filtration, and up to 90 percent of their energy. Absent zooxanthella, corals not only take on a ghostly pallor, hence the term bleaching, but they are also more susceptible to death.” Given enough time between bleaching events (10 to 15 years), corals can recover. The problem is that as ocean temperatures slowly rise, the intervals allowing recovery at sustainable temperatures are becoming shorter. World-wide bleaching conditions are usually associated with El Niño conditions (the most severe of which have occurred in 1982-1983, 1998, and 2015-2016). These cause ocean temperatures to rise suddenly in tropical ocean waters that contain most coral reefs.

A study by Terry P. Hughes and colleagues examined 100 reefs world-wide and found that rising temperatures have reduced recovery time for reefs 50 percent in less than 40 years (1980-2016), also increasing damage to reefs. “As global warming has progressed, tropical sea surface temperatures are warmer now during current La Niña conditions than they were during El Niño events three

decades ago,” they wrote. “Consequently, as we transition to the Anthropocene, coral bleaching is occurring more frequently in all El Niño–Southern Oscillation phases, increasing the likelihood of annual bleaching in the coming decades.” The year 1980 was chosen to begin the study because before the major El Niño of 1982-83, mass bleaching’s were nearly unknown in the historical record.

“That year,” according to the *Times* report, “Reefs across the Tropical Eastern Pacific exposed to warm El Niño year waters bleached. Coral reefs in Costa Rica, Panama and Columbia experienced 70 to 90 percent mortality. Most reefs in the Galápagos Islands, the cradle of Darwin’s theory of evolution, experienced 95 percent mortality. While many mass bleaching’s were prompted by El Niño events, which tends to warm Pacific Ocean temperatures, the bleaching event that hit the Great Barrier Reef in 2017—he reef’s first back-to-back bleaching—occurred at the beginning of a La Niña event, when ocean waters should have been cooler. It’s a sign that global warming is steadily pushing up ocean temperatures even in cooler years.” By mid-century, given present trends, killing bleaching will be the norm in large parts of the world’s oceans.

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*Bruce E. Johansen, Frederick W. Kayser Professor at the University of Nebraska–Omaha, is author of Climate Change: An Encyclopedia of Science, Society, and Solutions (2017).*



# PEACE & DISARMAMENT

Note by Paul Olson:

**Anthony T. Fiscella was a friend of recently deceased NFP board member, Leo Yankton, and worked with him in Sweden on the Intertribal Spiritual Lodges movement that brought indigenous people from several countries together to work for freedom. Fiscella has a doctoral degree in the history of religion from the University of Lund in Sweden and has published in the book, *Essays in Anarchism and Religion: Volume III*.**

**In the search for social justice, he favors “[A] very long-term strategy of forming thousands of tight-knit collectives based on defending and celebrating life (via detox, degrowth, and decolonial lifestyles), lo-tech self-sufficiency, and mutual aid combined with outward mobilization for total liberation (animal liberation, Earth liberation, and liberation from the state, capital, white tyranny, patriarchy, substance addiction, tech dependency, and oppressive norms).”**

**Fiscella sent this essay to Susan Alleman, Leo’s partner, in the hours immediately following the invasion of Ukraine. It is a proposal for going beyond the usual sporadic anti-war protests.)**

*by Anthony T. Fiscella*

The Russian invasion of Ukraine marks the biggest act of war since the U.S. gathered 175,000 troops to invade Iraq. While we can see differences in many respects, one detail seems to stick out: popular response. This year, February 15th marked 19 years since the biggest peace protests the world has ever seen. On that day in 2003, millions of people in cities across the world mobilized to oppose the planned U.S. invasion of Iraq (see, for example, the 2014 documentary film entitled “We Are Many”). The U.S. had presented a case for invasion based on false claims of “weapons of mass destruction.” Then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell laid out so-called “evidence” before the UN (which later, of course, proved false). Yet, even before people knew what General Wesley Clark later revealed as a Pentagon plan to “take out seven countries in five years” (including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran), U.S.-corporate imperialism seemed quite apparent. Millions of people saw through the deception and, including many who had already organized through the Global Justice Movement, they rose up in opposition.

That day in 2003 marked a tremendous transition from how the U.S. (and global) public responded to previous wars. Opposition to the devastating U.S.-led wars in Southeast Asia seemed non-existent in the early 1960s. It only grew gradually until, by the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, protests shook the world. Yet, if we look at the speed and scale of resistance to militarism and war, the record seems spotty. Massive anti-nuclear protests took place in the 1980s; yet, the end of the Cold War seemed to dampen calls for disarmament—perhaps partially because, to some extent, actual disarmament took place and partially because the United States quickly consolidated global dominance.

During the period of the fall of the Soviet Union, the first Bush administration unilaterally invaded Panama in 1989-1990, directly or indirectly killing 2,000-5,000 civilians. The UN General Assembly condemned the U.S.

invasion as a “flagrant violation of international law,” but the brief war met with minimal popular opposition. No U.S. official ever faced criminal prosecution for either the invasion or its many civilian deaths and injuries. Less than a year after U.S. attacks ended in Panama, the U.S. followed up with another invasion, this time in Iraq in January 1991. The invasion killed tens of thousands of Iraqis (roughly 10 percent of them civilian). In blatant violation of the Geneva Convention, U.S. forces killed retreating Iraqi soldiers in what journalists labeled “The Highway of Death”. Throughout the 90s, the U.S. military engaged in attacks in Somalia, Sudan, former Yugoslavia, and then, in 2001, invaded and occupied Afghanistan. So, in some sense, the massive opposition of 2003 resulted from a sense of opposition to U.S. military hegemony and largely arbitrary assaults against people in other countries.

Yet, despite the “biggest peace protest in history”, the mass mobilization failed to prevent the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Since then, U.S. militarism expanded from the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan to the invasion of Libya, renewed occupation of Iraq, and military attacks in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere. Instead of growing (as the peace movement did in the 1960s and ‘70s), the post-February 15th peace movement quickly deflated.

Perhaps we still live under the shadow of that sense of resignation. If we looked around the world on February 15, 2022, we could see no global uprising of people opposing obvious preparations for war. We heard no mass-mobilized voice condemning imperialism on both sides of the conflict. We did not even see people power pressuring Ukraine to adhere to the Minsk-2 agreement which all relevant parties had signed (including Ukraine, Russia, and Ukrainian-Russian separatist leaders).

Instead, Western media generally portrayed Putin as solely responsible for any upcoming war. We heard little to nothing in Western media about European and U.S. support for Ukrainian

neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists who came to power in 2014. We heard nothing about ultra-rightwing Elliot Abrams, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State who backed the terrorist Contras in Nicaragua and the brutal dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s, more recently having supported the nationalists in Ukraine via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). We heard no mention, much less protest, that

in exchange for Soviets relinquishing of East Germany, “there will be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction or NATO’s forces one inch to the East.” Baker and the U.S. later retracted that commitment. NATO forces now occupy nearly the entirety of Eastern Europe, including Poland, Romania, and Slovenia —as well as Latvia and Estonia, both of which border Russia. We hear few calls in the West questioning that encroachment

## ...the U.S. agreed not to expand NATO and later retracted that commitment.



the Ukrainian government integrated the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion into the Ukrainian National Guard.

Western media generally did not seem to perceive NATO expansionism as made up of aggressive or hostile moves that consolidated U.S./EU power. Even when they broached the topic, as the *New York Times* did regarding a U.S. military facility in Poland, they might qualify NATO expansionism with terms such as “what [Putin] sees as the threat” and what “the Kremlin believes” rather than simply stating the facts: the U.S. agreed not to expand NATO and later retracted that commitment.

On February 9, 1990, then-U.S. Secretary of State James Baker stated that,

and no opposition to NATO activities in Eastern Europe (such as operation “DEFENDER Europe” which has annually engaged in massive war exercises including U.S. troops in Eastern Europe and on Russia’s border). So, by February 2022, when Russia had amassed approximately 150,000 troops along various borders surrounding Ukraine, Western media had already fabricated a misleading framework of accountability. Everyone could see the increasing likelihood of war on the horizon even if no one knew if or precisely when it would occur. Yet, what happened to the potentially millions of people demonstrating in streets across the world to prevent this likely invasion?

*conclusion on page 13*

# — In Memory —

## Cathie E. Genung

FEBRUARY 28, 1945 –  
NOVEMBER 27, 2021



Cathie E. Genung, 76, of Hastings, passed away Saturday, November 27, 2021. She was born on February 28, 1945, in Stuart, NE to Tommy Doolittle and Betty (Enbody) Winings. She married Tom Genung on August 14, 1965. Cathie was a lifelong educator who spent 40 years at Hastings St. Cecilia. Her classroom was always a safe place for all students. She was a conservationist at heart. She enjoyed reading, gardening, and cooking. Cathie loved her family dearly and will be deeply missed.

Cathie is survived by husband, Tom; daughter, Kim (Mike) Hendricks; son, Lance (Heidi) Genung; grandson, Cason Thomas; mother, Betty Winings; sisters, Joyce (Calvin) Seger, Sue (Boyd) Mitchell, Vicki (Butch) Deseive, Barb (Kirk) Shane, Ki (Ed) Slaymaker, many nieces, nephews, extended family, friends and neighbors.

Memorials may be given to Start Over Rover, Hastings middle school Gardens, Nebraskans for peace, Bold Nebraska.

## Kerry Lynne Beldin

MARCH 29, 1973 – JANUARY 5, 2022



Kerry Lynne Beldin, age 48, of Omaha, Nebraska transitioned from her earthly body on Wednesday, January 5, 2022. A bright light snuffed out too soon. She passed at her home, in a peaceful setting with her family members close. She succumbed to lung cancer that she had fought vigorously for six years.

Kerry was keenly aware of risk involving exposure to Covid 19 for immunocompromised people and others and, therefore, requested there be no public services or gatherings for her. Following cremation, she was laid to rest near her grandparents, in Omaha, Nebraska, in a private service with only her family on Tuesday, January 11, 2022.

Kerry was born, Thursday, March 29, 1973 in Columbus, Nebraska. She spent her early years in Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas, and ultimately ended up staying in Nebraska where she received her

B.A. degree in Psychology from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Kerry received her M.S.W. (Integrated) degree at the University of Nebraska Omaha, and her Ph.D. in Social Welfare from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.

Most recently she served as an Associate Professor of Social Work, Graduate Program Chair, MSW Coordinator, at the Grace Abbott School of Social Work, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska.

Kerry's passion to strive for excellence was recognized by the University of Nebraska at Omaha by honoring her with the Alumni Outstanding Teaching Award in May of 2016 and the Chancellor's Medal in May of 2019, the highest award bestowed on a faculty member.

Those holding her close include her parents, Barry Beldin of Greenville SC, Kate Wilhelm, Aurora, NE, sister, Kimberly Jeffries and son Nicholas, Omaha, NE, brother, Matt (Lindsey) Cox, Lincoln, NE, sister, Beth Ann of Noblesville IN, sister Lauri Zike of Louisville, KY.

Uncles, aunts, cousins, friends, colleagues, co-workers and so many others whose lives Kerry touched. And her rambunctious, one-eyed pug mix Kia, whom she loved dearly.

If you too, wish to honor the life of Kerry Beldin, watch a movie with Christopher Walken in it, or listen to some Barry Manilow, or post a sloth meme, or hug a pug....one-eyed or otherwise. Just some of the eclectic things Kerry loved and why she was so loved.

# PEACE & DISARMAMENT, conclusion

They did not materialize.

The root of the problem seems to run far deeper than a deep-seated disappointment of the 2003 mass-mobilization's failure to prevent war. I suggest that the problem runs to the very core of peace organizing and to the concept of "peace" itself. If gun control advocates had adopted

**...no disarmament, no justice. Yet, if we work for and focus on disarmament, justice, and social equality, then we might not even need to ever speak of peace again.**

the same strategy as peace activists, they would label their activity "peace work" and they would call on the approximately 80 million gun-owners across the United States to use their 350 million guns peacefully and responsibly. In effect, the gun control movement would not exist, much as the global disarmament movement does not exist. While we currently see momentum through important work by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), if we genuinely wanted an end to war, we would need to abolish all mechanisms of war, the constant preparation and training for war, the profiteering industries of war, and the very factories which produce the capabilities for war. The merchants of war and their clients may control the arsenal of material weapons but we need not relinquish control over our understanding and framing of the social dynamics that produce war.

NATO and Putin share a common appreciation of using military might to sustain systemic inequality. We can expose that and oppose that. As the old



slogan from the streets goes, first popularized in the 1980s by Robert "Sonny" Carson (aka Mwlina Imiri Abubadika): "No Justice, No Peace." Peace through justice. If we emphasize peace before justice, we sustain an unjust and unequal

system. Similarly: no disarmament, no justice. Yet, if we work for and focus on disarmament, justice, and social equality, then we might not even need to ever speak of peace again.

## Your Foundation Speaks

*Mark Vasina, Nebraska Peace Foundation President*

Donations to Nebraska Peace Foundation may be directed into two different accounts depending on the wishes of the donor. These are an unrestricted account and a restricted account. The unrestricted account goes to pay the day-to-day educational expenses of Nebraskans for Peace.

Donations into the restricted account add to the investments in the permanent endowment of Nebraska Peace Foundation. These investments bring in a yearly yield of 4 to 5% in dividends and interest. These dividends and interest then go into the unrestricted account to support Nebraskans for Peace as listed above.

Please indicate on your check whether you want your donation to go directly to the unrestricted account or to the restricted account where it will be invested in socially-responsible, fossil-free and mainly renewable energy stocks and bonds.



# HARD TRUTH, continued

Mall in DC to hear the transcendent sermon *I Have a Dream*.

Dr. King's murder felt personal, as if I had been shot through the heart, and the racist crowing of students at my high school pushed me over the edge. Like the privileged white girl that I was, I turned my anger and grief inward, made a series of bad moves that distressed my family, and dug myself into holes that took me years to overcome.

Meanwhile, half a world away, Thay resolved to spend the rest of his own life continuing the work his friend Dr. King began. Thich Nhat Hanh is the name he took with his orders when he became a monk, Thich being the surname taken by most adult Vietnamese Buddhists, and Nhat Hanh meaning "One Action." At a guess I would say One refers to Interbeing—the center of all Thay's teaching—and Action points to the Practice of Compassion, which pretty much sums up his life and career in a lapidary phrase by this master poet.

Bi-lingual from childhood, he spent his first five years in his grandmother's big house in the old French city of Hue, with aunts and uncles and cousins and siblings, playing in tall dim rooms and stone courtyards amid the lotus ponds. His father worked for the French government in a bureau of land reform, and in the early 1930s the family moved North to the mountains. Thay's older brother read Buddhist magazines and proved a powerful influence on the younger boy. In their teens they and a hand-

ful of their schoolmates studying at the local temple resolved to become monks, with something like the ardor with which other young people might decide to be artists or doctors or go to war.

Poets are historically venerated in Vietnam, and Thay first came to prominence as a poet, but he quickly turned his focus to organizing. He believed that the Buddhist path could be a saving third option—above all, nonviolent unlike the forces loyal to capitalism and communism—for the heart, soul and economy of Vietnam. After his friend the abbot was famously photographed setting himself on fire, Thay explained to the world that this self-immolation was not a cry of personal despair but meant to rivet the attention of the people of the US who were footing the bill. It was Thay who convinced Dr. King to speak against the war.

Thay fell into a terrible depression and nearly died. He found relief in a program—based on ancient Buddhist teaching—of mindful breathing and deliberate slow walking. He came to believe that Buddhism could be redeemed from joss sticks and mumbled unintelligible (because Sanskrit, no longer a spoken language) prayer, and Active Buddhism was born. This part of his life saw him come to real power as a public figure, publishing his own and others' writing, and leading education and social welfare projects created and sustained by hundreds then thousands of young people, his followers who were taught how to manage their own

reactions to the violence and tragedy everywhere. Eventually Thay grew too effective for the liking of both sides, and he was exiled from Vietnam (North AND South) for decades.

The sacred texts he longed to study were largely housed in university libraries of the West, so he learned English in his forties and moved to France to study and later teach at the Sorbonne, Princeton and other iconic academies—teaching French literature as well as philosophy, comparative and applied religion, meditation, peace and reconciliation, and a great deal more. (Thay directed his Sorbonne students in his adaptation of *Tartuffe!*)

He traveled the world for a half century, speaking and leading mindfulness workshops and retreats in Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas. He was an early voice of concern for climate change and helped conceive and bring about the Paris Climate talks. Over his time in the West, he eventually built many nonprofit rural retreats (all funds generated go to orphanages and the like) along the lines of Plum Village, where he made his own home, in rural France. His calligraphy has inspired a recognizable typeface. He is called the Father of Mindfulness, emphasizing the primacy of personal non-reactivity, and the ripples of that teaching reach into every backwater of the world as a culture of kindness, ease and understanding in families and other beloved communities.

I think of people like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Thay (and Buddha, come to that) as Redeemers, in the tra-

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## HARD TRUTH, conclusion

dition of the Old Testament Prophets, more so than as Messiahs. Dostoevski pointed out the problem—in Brothers Karamazov, the Grand Inquisitor tortures Jesus (who has returned to Earth) and condemns Him, insisting Christ has no right to add to or revise Christian dogma. "Revelation is complete."

Again, sit and think on this. How can Revelation EVER be complete? Human beings have such short attention spans. Luckily the world is full of redeemers—unlike suckers, one's not born every minute, but the main difference between them is volume, so to speak—how many creatures they touch. Some live as the beating heart of a family, some of a school or

neighborhood, a few like MLK and Thay—this small dapper man with his eyes full of kindness and his dazzling smile—change the lives of millions, of a society or a world.

To redeem is to deem—or to judge—again, the very definition of mindfulness. To redeem is to make a new priority. One does notice that a plurality of redeemers great and small seem to settle on related priorities—the Oneness of all Being, compassion and truth. This gives me Hope.

And Hope is what I want to share with you, Gentle Reader, in spite of the throes at this moment of our suffering world. The truth is that the

world of 1968 felt just about as perilous as does 2022. But things change, and with the actions that come from Compassion, change can be for the good.

In 1968, Thay was a man with a price on his head in Vietnam and a plan to change the future, to actively LOVE a new society into becoming. Two decades into this new century, following peace and reconciliation in Vietnam (of which he was, in exile, an architect) Thay was able to return to Hue and breathe his last breaths at home, a national hero, a world historical individual, a star in Creation's crown.

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# HARD TRUTH

by Sally Herrin

## Thich Nhat Hanh and Hope (1926-2022)

Thay (pronounced TIE) is the Vietnamese word by which one addresses an honored Teacher. Hundreds of thousands of people around the world call the poet monk Thay and mark his passage with love, grief and gratitude—Thich Nhat Hanh whom Martin Luther King, Jr., nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967—though no prize was awarded that year.

Stop for a moment and sit with

that. The world was in such a perilous place that no Nobel Peace Prize was awarded. Communism and capitalism were waging proxy wars on more of Earth's continents than not, mostly where poor brown people lived, nowhere with greater devastation than Vietnam.

Rolling Thunder, US President Lyndon Johnson's carpet-bombing campaign, dropped more explosive

tonnage on Vietnam (about 1/4 the size of California) than the US deployed across all Europe during World War II. 1968 would see King's assassination and that of Robert Kennedy.

I have written elsewhere of my own experience of Dr. King's death. Our Unitarian church in Atlanta was active in the civil rights movement. I was just shy of 17, and Dr. King was a family hero. My dad was on the