2015 Annual Peace Conference

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The 2015 Annual Peace Conference will be held Saturday, October 17 from 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. at Trinity United Methodist Church, 5th & Elm Streets in Grand Island. There is no registration cost for this year’s program and everyone is welcome to attend both the morning panel and afternoon workshops for free. Meal reservations for the $10 per person Mexican buffet luncheon can be made by contacting the NFP State Office via email at nfpstate@nebraskansforpeace.org, calling 402-475-4620, or by downloading the conference brochure from the NFP website: nebraskansforpeace.org.
Nebraska Report

The Nebraska Report is published nine times annually by Nebraskans for Peace. Opinions stated do not necessarily reflect the views of the directors or staff of Nebraskans for Peace.

Newspaper Committee:
Tim Rinne, Editor; Mark Vasina, Paul Olson
Typesetting and Layout: Michelle Ashley
Printing: Fremont Tribune
Website: Susan Alleman

Letters, articles, photographs and graphics are welcomed. Deadline is the first of the month for publication in the following month’s issue. Submit to: Nebraska Report, c/o Nebraskans for Peace, 941 ‘O’ Street, Suite 1026, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Nebraskans for Peace

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

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Published by Nebraskans for Peace
Printed in the U.S.A. by a union printer
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Citizens for Peace in Space
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Throughout the summer of 2015, China and the U.S. were engaged in a deadly dance that sometimes involved government-owned computer systems, sometimes naval forces in the South China Sea. When China’s Navy and Coast Guard met the Coast Guards of five nations, as well as U.S. Pacific Command and Japan’s Self-Defense Forces, the standoffs in areas like the Spratly Island and Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands were visible and above board. When China’s computer intelligence organization hacked the “Office of Personnel Management” (OPM), the “U.S. Transportation Command” and United Airlines, the response by U.S. Cyber Command was reported to be aggressive, but dwelled entirely in the shadows. Cyber Command, which shares headquarters at Fort Meade, Maryland with the National Security Agency, operates in far greater secrecy than NSA in the ‘post-Edward Snowden’ environment, following the former NSA employee’s spying revelations.

But in both cases, U.S. Strategic Command at Offutt AFB plays an important role in orchestrating responses from the wildly divergent component commands that it oversees. Pacific Command and Cyber Command seem worlds and dimensions apart, but StratCom helps determine how responses to U.S. adversaries—and even to U.S. allies—are coordinated and prioritized in times of increased tension. Many actions require specific White House approval: according to the New York Times of August 1, 2015, President Obama explicitly ordered that a Cyber Command response to the OPM hacking be as broad as possible. While the U.S. has not identified a unified People’s Liberation Army (PLA) intelligence group responsible for the OPM assault, various small hacker groups known as “Deep Panda,” “Axiom” and “Group 72” have been tied to PLA intelligence, using a remote access Trojan Horse server called “Sakula.”

Admiral Mike Rogers, who serves as both NSA Director and head of Cyber Command, told the “Aspen Security Forum” in mid-July that his command should to make the Omaha command the overall military dominator to assure preservation of U.S. interests. The Snowden revelations have made intelligence operations far harder to conceal. Budget cuts at the Pentagon have made all federal agencies, even the component commands under StratCom’s oversight, fight for prestige and money. And the broader global ambitions of Russia under Putin and China under Xi Jinping mean that StratCom is in a more reactive posture on the ground, and must be far more careful of making claims about dominating the planet on a theoretical basis. StratCom must play a quiet and consistent role of puppet-master behind the scenes, rather than act as the overt big kid on the block.

When Dominance Isn’t an Arrow in the Quiver

Orchestrating global military forces in an era where U.S. dominance is neither sought nor appreciated can be trickier than

continued on next page
in an era of overt global control. When President Obama announced his Pacific realignment three years ago, China immediately took offense to the redeployment of resources to Pacific Command. Nevertheless, it took two years to get Australia behind the expansion of both MUOS (“Multi-User Objective System”) satellite space bases on the west coast and a nearby Marines brigade. It took an additional year to convince the Philippines to offer up Subic Bay and other facilities for a return of U.S. troops, and to get the prime minister of Vietnam to come to the U.S. and talk about military alliances. Obama has had only partial luck in getting

StratCom’s role has changed from the heady days of Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, when the coordination of component commands under StratCom was intended to make the Omaha command the overall military dominator to assure preservation of U.S. interests.

Japanese Prime Minister Abe to work for a revision of the Japanese National Security Pact (though this is more a matter of citizen opposition than to any failure on Abe’s part). The U.S. also faces continuous protests over base expansion on Okinawa.

Nevertheless, peace activists in the U.S. and Europe seem at times to be challenging the StratCom that existed in the Bush/Cheney era. Many are wooed by the most paranoid assumption of StratCom activities, and adhere to a dated world view in which the U.S. and NATO were the only sources of bad behavior on the planet. An objective observer cannot help but note that Russia and China have been involved in aggressive forward-basing of military forces in the past five years, and that many new jihadist organizations like ISIL operate with little oversight from traditional states, or even from former centralized organizations like al-Qaeda. In short, the planet has become a multipolar central. We can recognize the reality and the party in power, it is important that activists describe a world that really exists. We can recognize the role the U.S. and NATO played in initiating Maidan protests in the Ukraine, while at the same time admitting that Putin has deployed scores of irregular forces in the Donbas region in the east of the country, some of whom were responsible for the July 2014 Malaysia flight shoot-down. These are the indisputable facts on the ground. We can question the identity of Chinese cyber forces and urge care in Cyber Command responses, but the dredging of coral reefs in the South China Sea by the Chinese Navy is indisputable, and the creation of airfields and naval berths on these artificial islands is all but
a foregone conclusion. When StratCom orchestrates, it is responding to actual challenges in a given theater—though that does not mean StratCom’s chosen response will be one that U.S. citizens can or should support.

One scary aspect of StratCom has not changed in the last 15 years, and has become a domain of increased protest. In the 2000s, even some of StratCom’s commanders were expressing misgivings about the tightened response time during a crisis that was, in turn, leading many StratCom component commands to favor autonomous response systems—that is, robotic systems and networks that could respond automatically to instantaneous crises. Even the hawks within StratCom leadership were worried that with no ‘humans in the loop,’ automated warfare would take us to areas far beyond the problems created today by armed drones.

In July 2015, more than 1000 scientists led by physicist Stephen Hawking, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, and Apple founder Steve Wozniak, warned that autonomous weapon systems based on artificial intelligence would be unethical in almost any environment. They asked attendees at the “International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence” in Buenos Aires to sign a pledge that they would not work on such systems. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints and reactive crises are leading StratCom and its component commands closer to a robotic autonomous-weapon arms race that could be as dangerous as a nuclear or cyber arms race, if not more so.

StratCom has not changed its hypocrical tactic of warning about the same weapons on the horizon from Russia and China that StratCom itself has already tested. Throughout the summer, StratCom officials warned of the imminent testing of hypersonic space-plane and drone weapons from its two adversaries, even though the Pentagon is far ahead of either nation in fielding such platforms. But just as the American public knows nothing about Cyber Command in the computer realm, we learn no details about the X-37B space plane that regularly orbits Earth in secret. Nor, under its continuing veil of secrecy are we likely to learn anything about the move of robotic war components under StratCom to autonomous decision-making.

It does little to advance peace activists’ arguments when we fail to acknowledge episodes when other nations on the planet act in forward-based, aggressive ways. These are the factors that have clearly led StratCom to dial down its global dominance talk. But it also does little good, policy-wise, to talk about strategic balances without mentioning the many realms in which the Pentagon operates in the shadows—drones, robots, cyberwar and hypersonic weapons, to name but a few. StratCom is not an invincible globe-dominating giant. But it is in charge of some very scary weapons and infrastructure, which activists must examine and criticize with eyes wide open.

Sponsored by the Center for Faith Studies
October 1, 2015 at 7:00 p.m.
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Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist. He spent two decades, most of it with The New York Times, as a correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He writes a weekly column for the online magazine Truthdig. Drawing on research and his own interviews with Mumia Abu-Jamal, Julian Assange, Eric Snowden and other contemporary “revolutionaries,” Hedges paints a sobering picture of the future if transnational corporate power remains unchecked. As an ordained minister, Hedges also reminds us of our connection to “stonecatchers” — great moral actors both historical and fictional, who provide examples of the courage, selflessness and vision that will be required if we are to wrest back our democracy and halt the destruction of our ecosystem.
Japanese national and Nebraskans for Peace benefactress Nobuko Tsukui made what may have been her final visit to Nebraska this past August to participate in the Lincoln NFP Chapter’s Annual Lantern Float commemorating the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Reprinted below are her moving remarks to the more than 100 people who attended the event and released lighted lanterns onto Lincoln’s Holmes Lake at twilight.

Good evening. We gather here today—August 8, 2015. As you know, August 6 and 9 mark the 70th anniversary of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Also, August 15 marks the 70th anniversary of Japan’s defeat in World War II and unconditional surrender. Also I wish to emphasize that this is the 32nd annual lantern float conducted by Nebraskans for Peace.

I wish to report to you that a few close friends of mine living in Japan are extremely impressed by the fact that in the state of Nebraska, this peace organization (NFP) was born, and that it has continued for the past 32 consecutive years to hold the annual lantern float to commemorate the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Not only are they impressed, but they are also very grateful to NFP for what you, its active members and supporters, have been doing all these years. Miss Hayashi Kyoko, a Nagasaki hibakusha, well-known writer, and a good friend of mine, has said: “Nebraska is so far away from Hiroshima or Nagasaki; and yet, the members and friends of Nebraskans for Peace are concerned about us the victims of atomic bombing. That is more than most of the people living in the world today would be willing to do.”

I sincerely hope that NFP will continue its anti-nuclear activities for many many years to come—certainly much beyond my lifetime.

The reports I bring from Japan about nuclear developments are not good. For example, it is more than four years since the triple disaster of March 11, 2011—the earthquake, the tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear disaster. As of March 11 of this year, 15,891 are known dead; and 2,584 are still missing. Many people still remain in the temporary housing provided by the government.

These people have no other choice: most of them are old; they have lost everything—their homes, farms or livelihood as fishermen. And now they have to live on meagre pensions. Moreover, especially in the areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster, many young parents with small children have decided to leave their homes, because they fear for their children’s health.

Human beings are not the only victims of the triple disaster. Earlier this year, we received a report that cesium 137 was detected in the sea water on the Pacific coast of the United States. The world has known that both the land and the sea have been hurt from the moment of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. This report sadly confirms the radioactive contamination of the Pacific Ocean that started more than four years ago on the coast of Japan and finally has reached the west coast of the United States.

That is not all. We are becoming a more war-like country:

After Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces in August 1945, its occupation began. General Douglas MacArthur arrived on August 30, 1945 as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Occupation Forces. Six years later, on September 2, 1951, the Peace Treaty with Japan (involving 49 countries) was signed in San Francisco. And on April 28, 1952, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship took effect, and Japan became a sovereign state again.

During the occupation, in November 1946, my country’s new constitution was promulgated; and on May 3, 1947, it came into force. Today, May 3 is a national holiday called “Constitution Day.”

And for the past 69 years, not a word of our Constitution has been changed—a Con-stitution often called the “Peace Constitution.” Especially noteworthy are the Preamble and Article 9, which stands alone in Chapter II, entitled “Renunciation of War.” The text of these sections expresses the fundamental beliefs and principles of NFP. Here is an excerpt from the Preamble:

We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and are deeply conscious of the high ideals controlling human relationship, and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world. We desire to occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace, and the banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time from the earth. We recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want.
And here is Article 9:

Article 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.

Japan as a sovereign state has even had to present official interpretations of Article 9 to justify its Self-Defense Forces.

I believe that today a great majority of Japanese people—and especially those of us who have experienced World War II—wish to preserve the Peace Constitution. However, for a number of years, the movement to amend the Constitution, and especially to abolish Article 9, has gradually gained power. Alarmè by this movement, on June 10, 2004, nine prominent Japanese, including Oe Kenzaburo, writer and Nobel Prize Winner, formed the “Article 9 Association” (“9-jo no kai”). By the end of July 2005, more than 3,000 branches were born. As of May 2013, more than 7500 branches had come into being throughout Japan.

Now, the current Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet are against preserving Article 9 of the Constitution. They planned to soon start the procedure to amend the Constitution. However, several public opinion polls have shown that at least 60 percent of the Japanese people wish to preserve the Peace Constitution, especially Article 9. Abe then changed his strategy. He introduced a set of bills—based on a new “interpretation” of Article 9—to enhance the legislative foundations for our security” [Quoted from Abe’s speech to the U.S. Congress]. These bills, now under deliberation, are called "National Security Bills." But we (who are against the bills) call them "War Bills," because they will allow Japan's Self-Defense Forces to go outside Japan where war is in progress, possibly to fight in battles.

Amazingly, in April of this year, Abe spoke to the joint session of the United States Congress. At that time, these bills were not even introduced to the Japanese National Assembly (called the Diet), but Prime Minister Abe explained to the U.S. Congress what these bills would be, before explaining them to the Japanese people. Abe said: “These enhanced legislative foundations should make the cooperation between the U.S. military and Japan’s Self-Defense Forces even stronger, and the alliance still more solid, providing credible deterrence for the peace in the region.” In the same speech, Abe even promised to the U.S. Congress: “We are determined to enact all necessary bills by this coming summer.”

These bills are considered “unconstitutional” by the majority of Japanese scholars on the constitution, and even by two former “Directors General of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau.”

What is Abe’s response? He said: “These scholars are wrong. And, the Supreme Court alone may make the judgment on the constitutionality of the bills.”

Because the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party), Prime Minister Abe’s party, holds the majority in the National Assembly, they in effect control it. On June 22, they voted to convene the special session of the Diet and to extend it through September 27. So, these bills could well be passed to become laws as early as the end of July—before today, August 8.

In short, we may soon have laws believed to be unconstitutional. And if these laws are enacted, I am grieved to say that after 70 years since the end of World War II, Japan is going against the letter and the spirit of Article 9, and may indeed become a nation which has in effect ‘renounced’ its “Peace Constitution.”

I sincerely hope NFP will continue its anti-nuclear activities for many many years to come—certainly much beyond my lifetime.

—Nobuko Tsukui
Sea-Level Rise: A Cake That’s Already Being Baked

With carbon-dioxide levels in the atmosphere already as high as the Pliocene, two to three million years ago, scientists have been asking a question that will become more important in coming decades: How long will it be before enough ice melts to raise sea levels to reflect carbon dioxide at our current level of 400 parts per million?

The scientists in this recent study found that a rise in temperatures of one to two degrees Celsius virtually guaranteed a rise of 20 feet. Worldwide, several hundred million people live within 20 feet of high tide. Much of the sea-level rise has (and will) come from melting of ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica, said lead author Andrea Dutton, a University of Florida geochemist. “This evidence leads us to conclude that the polar ice sheets are out of equilibrium with the present climate,” she said (Global Sea Level, 2015).

The team that compiled this study used computer models and the geologic record to gauge the global ice pack’s sensitivity to climate change. They learned that in the past when average temperatures rose 1 to 3 °C (1.8 to 5.4 °F) warmer than levels prevailing in preindustrial times (before about 1850), sea level peaked at least 20 feet higher than today’s levels.

This study arrives a few months before an important meeting of scientists and climate diplomats in Paris where much of the agenda will be shaped by attempts to contain worldwide temperature rise to 2 degrees C. as a best case. “Even if we meet that 2 degree Celsius target, in the past with those types of temperatures, we may be committing ourselves to this level of sea level rise in the long term,” Dutton told Climate Central’s Brian Kahn. “As the planet warms, the poles warm even faster, raising important questions about how ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica will respond,” Dutton said. “While this amount of sea-level rise will not happen overnight, it is sobering to realize how sensitive the polar ice sheets are to temperatures that we are on path to reach within decades” (Global Sea Level, 2015).

“It takes time for the warming to whittle down the ice sheets,” said Anders Carlson, a co-author of the study, of Oregon State University’s College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences, “But it doesn’t take forever. There is evidence that we are likely seeing that transformation begin to take place now.”

The Toll at 20 Feet

Even at 20 feet, large parts of many coastal urban areas will be inundated—Miami (average elevation: six feet); New Orleans; Norfolk, Virginia; New York City; and others in the United States; as well as Shanghai; parts of Tokyo; Dhaka (Bangladesh, with nearly 15 million people); Singapore; and others around the world.

Sea-level rise also will not be linear, but irregular because of storm surges provoked by events such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. In many areas, such as the United States East and Gulf of Mexico coasts, the land is subsiding as the sea rises, elevating net sea level still more.

Future sea-level rise will not stop at 20 feet unless greenhouse-gas emissions are cut drastically, and quickly. Melt all the world’s ice, and seas could rise as much as 180 feet over several centuries—a level that very few coastal cities could survive. Do we need more incentive to curtail carbon emissions?

Another paper, by James Hansen. et al., also published in 2015, supports the idea that a 2-degree C. rise in temperatures will nearly certainly guarantee a large-scale sea-level rise. They wrote in Atmospher-
Planning for Our Food Future

The following article by Mark Winne appeared on Saturday, August 15, 2015 in the Lincoln Journal Star.

Like a noisy orchestra without a conductor, a rising cacophony of food and agriculture challenges are playing out across our screens and news outlets on a daily basis. One of the most discordant sounds is that 10 billion humans will be on the planet by 2050, and many experts don’t think we’ll be able to feed them all.

Just as worrisome is the number of overweight and obese people, a number that has nearly tripled for Nebraskans since 1990 and is rapidly driving up medical costs and straining health care systems.

As a person who has worked in the field of food systems and food policy for over 40 years, I still find it incomprehensible that in 21st-century America the rates of food insecurity and hunger remain so persistently high. Nebraska, over 13 percent of your neighbors may skip meals so their children can eat, or they simply may not know where their next meal is coming from!

Even when people have sufficient means, there may be an insufficient number of places to buy healthy food. Across Nebraska’s vast rural reaches, too many people are driving further and further for their groceries as country stores shut down.

Farming and ranching are enormous parts of the state’s economic engine. But agriculture—never an easy livelihood even in the best of times—is constantly faced with an ebb and flow of crop prices, uncertainty over weather conditions, and the consumer’s growing demand for sustainably produced, healthy food.

But maybe the most disturbing sound is the one we don’t hear—the silence that arises from the lack of planning for Nebraska’s food future. In light of all that is going on in our food system—whether good, bad, or indifferent—not only is there no plan to address these challenges, there is no plan to make a plan.

A good part of the reason for this is the very complexity of the food system itself. How do we get our arms around something like food which is connected to so many features of our daily lives like diet and health, jobs and the economy, soil, air, water, transportation, waste and education?

Take government for example: As important as food is—Nebraskans eat $4.4 billion of it each year, the vast majority of which is not produced in Nebraska—no state nor city in the U.S. has a ‘Department of Food.’ Lacking a common table around which to work together, the above challenges are likely to persist and grow worse.

A soon-to-be-released study of state food policies by the National Conference of State Legislatures found that between 2012 and 2014, 36 state legislatures enacted 91 separate bills that addressed healthy eating, farm-to-school programs, public procurement and other forms of support for their states’ agricultural sectors and food policy councils.

According to a 2012 survey conducted by Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, U.S. food policy councils take on issues like providing affordable, nutritious food to schoolchildren and low-income populations, farmland preservation and urban agriculture, and comprehensive food planning.

I refer to a food policy council as a common table around which food system participants can assess the community’s needs, plan for its future, and put forward recommendations. My experience of councils also suggests they are like a family dining room table where we can celebrate our achievements, and yes, sometimes bicker loudly. But without that time and place where we can come together for matters of common concern, we are each left to our own devices to grub about as best we can in an increasingly threatening world. Better to take control of our future than let it take control of us.

Mark Winne is a food system consultant, author and senior advisor at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. His visit to Nebraska, August 18-19, to discuss the creation of a state food policy council, was organized by the Center For Rural Affairs with the assistance of Nebraskans for Peace and the Nebraska Environmental Action Coalition.
The Pope’s Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality

A Radical Economist’s Review

by Hendrik Van den Berg, UNL Economics Professor Emeritus

When Pope Francis issued his Encyclical on climate change and inequality earlier this year, reactions varied from highly enthusiastic to viciously critical. This should not be surprising given the controversial nature of a very thorough work dealing with the environment and economic inequality. As an economist, I was very pleased to see the Pope address the two most important economic issues of our time. The Encyclical contains a huge dose of common sense as well as an accurate interpretation of the scientific evidence on the ecological changes that human expansion has imposed on the natural environment. Most important from my perspective is the holistic economic analysis that underlies most of the work.

Mincing no words, the Pope identifies capitalism as the primary driving force of environmental destruction as well as the growing economic inequality. Most mainstream economists will not agree with this condemnation of our market-based economy. After all, they do not want to bite the hand that feeds most professional economists. The capitalist system, in which profit serves as the engine of economic production, requires continual growth. Without the growth of the economy, there are no positive returns to business investment and thus no incentive to invest. But, as the Pope describes from his Roman Catholic perspective, it is this constant need to grow that has pushed human production to where it exceeds the earth’s capacity to sustain its natural environment.

That the Pope overtly links capitalism to both the environment and social inequality is a point that has been lost in most of the commentaries that pundits have offered on the Encyclical. I think most of the U.S. media and certainly most economists were stunned by the Pontiff’s unambiguous linking of both issues to the failures of the capitalist system. At first, they were unprepared to respond. Seldom do figures as prominent as the pope openly criticize the economic system, and historically, Catholic pontiffs have often directly opposed radical left-wing solutions to economic problems.

A serious reading of the Encyclical makes it clear that the Pope identifies capitalism as the primary driving force of environmental destruction as well as the growing economic inequality. Most mainstream economists will not agree with this condemnation of our market-based economy. After all, they do not want to bite the hand that feeds most professional economists. The capitalist system, in which profit serves as the engine of economic production, requires continual growth. Without the growth of the economy, there are no positive returns to business investment and thus no incentive to invest. But, as the Pope describes from his Roman Catholic perspective, it is this constant need to grow that has pushed human production to where it exceeds the earth’s capacity to sustain its natural environment.

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A serious reading of the Encyclical makes it clear that this is really a serious economic work, however. But because the document directly conflicts with mainstream economic thinking, many economists found it most convenient to bill the Encyclical as an environmental document—not a solid economic work. I recommend the work as serious economic reading, squarely positioned in line with the traditional interests of heterodox (if not mainstream orthodox) economies.

Liberation Theology

Those who are surprised by the Pope’s direct entry into economic issues should remember that he is from Latin America, where Catholic priests have for a long time recognized the economic system as a human-designed system that has huge consequences for how human society functions. The most radical Latin American priests who openly supported socialist revolution back in the 1960s came to be known as Liberation Theologians. Many suffered severe political consequences for their anti-capitalist sentiments at a time when U.S.-supported right-wing military dictatorships flourished and actively countered socialist governments in the region.

Interestingly, Pope Francis has been criticized for having sided with right-wing governments and for failing to support his fellow Latin American Liberation Theologians in the past. Instead, Francis was able to continue up the Roman Catholic hierarchy, which was largely controlled by the more conservative figures who were quite comfortable with right-wing dictatorships (as they had been in Europe some decades earlier). The fact that Francis...
A major part of the Encyclical is devoted to refuting the common interpretation of Genesis as giving humans the authority to exploit the natural environment. The Biblical language is difficult to refute, however. The American Standard Version of the Bible presents this authority as follows:

26 **And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.**

27 **And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.**

28 **And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.**

The 1599 Geneva Bible’s wording is nearly identical, as is the Complete Jewish Bible:

“Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth.”

Francis alleges, however, that there has been a misinterpretation of the Bible. Or, as he puts it more diplomatically (p. 73):

“An inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world. Often, what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about. Instead, our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.”

Of course, as a person of faith, the Pope will not admit that the Bible is a human-inspired document that reflects contemporary realities thousands of years ago. So, while human domination over nature may have been a reasonable goal when there were relatively few humans, today’s scientific evidence makes it clear that we had better think of stewardship rather than more unrestricted exploitation of nature. Still, the Pope’s ‘reinterpretation’ of the Bible is a huge step in the right direction.

We do gain some insight into why the Pope took the name Francis when starts his Encyclical by quoting St. Francis of Assisi (p. 3): “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.” In short, the Pope weaves a strong argument, both scientific and religious, for protecting the environment.

Population Policy?

The Pope’s Encyclical runs into some contradictions, however, when it comes to conclusion on page 12 opinion we have reached that point on the sea level issue. My conclusion, based on the total information available, is that continued high emissions would result in multi-meter sea level rise this century and lock in continued ice sheet disintegration such that building cities or rebuilding cities on coast lines would become foolish” (Hansen, July 27, 2015).

**SOURCES**


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Holism!

The strength of Pope Francis’ Encyclical lies in its holistic approach, by which I mean his close linking of the individual, the social, the natural and the economic aspects of human existence. Such a holistic view is precisely what mainstream neoclassical economics ignores. It is also what most single-minded profit-seeking businesses in a capitalist system ignore. And it is what most politicians controlled by the profit-seeking businesses and financial conglomerates are paid to ignore. The Pope is unambiguous, however: climate change and economic inequality are the results of an unbridled capitalist system. And he does not let the politicians off the hook, as he castigates political leaders (p. 34): “It is remarkable how weak international responses have been.”

Throughout the Encyclical, Francis reminds us that both environmental destruction and economic inequality are complex problems that require a complete rethink of how we manage our societies and economies. And so, to the disappointment of those who see fixes such as a ‘cap and trade’ program or the mandating better mileage for automobiles as the solutions to our environmental problems, Francis instead calls for a much more comprehensive shift in social behavior.

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“Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an education program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.” (p. 70)

Granted, as Pope, Francis is supposed to call for better behavior on our part. But his holistic view of the issues is also quite courageous in that it conflicts so directly with modern society’s most sacred cows. Not only does he criticize capitalism, but he warns about worshipping technology.

“We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build.” (p. 67)

We need only look around us to see how ‘technology’ dominates human society. We have come to expect economic growth as something of a natural right, and we are willing to accept—for lack of a true holistic understanding—only capitalism can provide the constant newness that we crave. In referring to modern consumer capitalism, Pope Francis writes (p. 126):

“This paradigm leads people to believe they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume. But those really free are the minority who wield economic power and financial power. Amid this confusion, post-modern humanity has not yet achieved a new self-awareness capable of offering guidance and direction, and this lack of identity is a source of anxiety. We have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends.”

Wow, within a few words the Pope condemns the unequal outcomes within capitalism, the harm to the environment that our blind fascination with technology causes, and our impossible quest for happiness through consumption. No wonder that mainstream economists, who are still angry about having been criticized for knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing, find the Pope’s Encyclical so disturbing.

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Death Penalty Repeal
Legislative Persistence Pays Off

By A’Jamal-Rashad Byndon
NFP State Board Member

For over 40 years State Senator Ernie Chambers advocated for the abolition of the death penalty in Nebraska. Session after session, he propounded his arguments and made his case, and this was the year—when some conservative Republicans gathered their senses and joined ranks with the progressives—that the Nebraska Unicameral voted to abolish capital punishment.

States with no death penalty have lower murder rates than states with it [http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/deterrence-states-without-death-penalty-have-had-consistently-lower-murder-rates]. Yet even I was a supporter of the death penalty until I had a series of ‘aha’ moments. I spent two years in the Peace Corps, in the country of Botswana, where it was successfully imposed upon citizens who shared the same racial make-up. Nebraska transformed my attitude, and forced me to reconsider. There were three factors that facilitated that epiphany.

1. For years I worked at Catholic Charities in Omaha, where many Catholics are against the death penalty based upon their church’s social teachings. Like many Christians, they are taught that ‘thou shalt not kill,’ and I was constantly educated as to how it is inherently wrong and that the death penalty in the United States is unfairly applied against the poor and people of color. I had a number of deep conversations with Sister Mary Hogan and others about the merits of capital punishment, and particularly recall being asked—if my loved one was murdered—whether I would seek the death penalty for the criminal. This very personal framing of the issue created consternation that impelled me to reconsider.

2. Another turning point was the execution of Harold Lamont “Wili” Otey in September 1994. Some Whites participated in a celebration during this execution outside of the state prison. The pictures that were shown on television reminded me of the over 5,000 lynchings that had taken place in the United States. Many of these historical lynchings were planned as Sunday entertainment, picnic-type events for the crowds. The vast majority of lynching victims in the United States were African Americans, and for many the cause of death was “at the hands of those unknown.” This phrase was listed on the death certificates. Yet, based upon records, law enforcement knew who the ringleaders of many of these lynching mob murders were, and it was well documented that in many communities, law enforcement was complicit in the lynching. One book that documents this conspiracy of silence is *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, by Philip Dray (2002). *James Allen’s Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2000) illustrated for me the size of the crowds and their racial makeup. And studying the hometown lynching of Willie Brown at the Douglas County Court House in September of 1919 helped me to see the horrific mentality of the participants in these miscarriages of justice and ‘unsolved murders.’

3. The final transformation for me was “The Innocence Project.” This outstanding advocacy effort arose from law schools and students in the U.S. motivated to provide legal services to those on death row and others suffering miscarriages of justice. According to the Innocence Project, since 1989, 330 convictions in 37 states have been overturned. Some were taken off death row, yet were still charged with high crimes. Based upon the project’s data so far, 205 African Americans, 99 Whites, 24 Latinos and 2 Asians who were sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit have been exonerated. With these kinds of odds, states should not be putting residents on death row. The most compelling arguments for the exonerations utilized modern technology and DNA samples. There were countless examples where prosecutors either withheld evidence, or the court did not facilitate correct actions. Yet, years later, with the zeal of fresh eyes, verdicts were reversed. The Innocence Project was relatively new to my worldview; their numbers had a substantial impact upon my change of attitude. Their irrefutable results demonstrate why we need to abolish the death penalty in all states.

In Nebraska, this past year, the Unicameral experienced a perfect legislative storm. We had State Senator Chambers, who is probably the most undervalued state senator in Nebraska’s history, being joined with many White conservative senators to revoke the death penalty. In our mostly Republican state legislature, we needed more Republican than Democratic senators to vote to end the death penalty. Senator Chambers never gave up on his mission of reversing this unjust law and challenging the mentality where racism at times played a significant factor in who was sentenced to death.

If you consider all of the costs and side deals by the predominantly White criminal justice system, there is no way capital punishment is fairly applied. For example, I recall that decades ago a man murdered five people in Iowa, and he was given a life sentence because he lived in a state that did not kill its citizens. I recall a case where a White guy killed another White guy on the roof of a building in Omaha, and got one year in prison. People of color, on the other hand, are disproportionately placed on death row at an alarming rate.

Nebraska is finally able to stand tall with other states that understand the government should not be in the killing business. Thanks are due to Senator Chambers who made abolition his 40-year mantra, and who never once in that time gave up the good fight.
Incredible Factions in the Middle East

by Rich Maciejewski
NFP State Board Member

As ‘lounge chair’ politicians assess what we ought to do regarding the violence we are now seeing in the Middle East, I wonder if they realize just how complicated the religious and political factions are in that area of the world. Short of the ‘bomb the hell out of them’ solution that too many citizens and politicians of a political party in this country frequently invoke, coming up with a workable solution to the problems there is not an easy task.

We have already engaged in proposed ‘military solutions’ in that region, and obviously that has not calmed the situation by any stretch of the imagination. Most of us in the U.S. realize the invasion of Iraq was not a good idea or solution. If anything, it has set off revolutions and violence in the Middle East hardly ever seen before. It is hard to tell what faction supports whom, who is doing what, and what faction fights against whom.

Here are a few of the complications to demonstrate just how difficult it is to get cooperation among the factions.

A lot has to do with the religious factions of Shiite and Sunni Muslims. Iraq had both factions existing somewhat peacefully because the dictator Saddam kept a lid on things by force. That was certainly not a pleasant situation, but the bloodshed that followed after our invasion was even worse. Saddam favored the minority Sunni faction over the majority Shiites, and Shiite resentment still had deep roots when the U.S. supported the formation of a post-war Shiite-majority government. Shiite President al-Maliki agreed to create a government that would share power in Iraq with both factions. That never happened. He continued to favor the new Shiite establishment. Once that was obvious, the Sunni troops his army recruited, simply dropped arms and weapons and left. They had no intention of fighting for a government they were excluded from.

This same failure of inclusion fueled the rebellion against the Assad government in Syria, and encouraged the organizing momentum for the Sunni to support the Isis group. So now we have Sunni unwilling to fight against terrorist groups like Isis in Iraq and joining forces to fight with the revolutionary group (Sunni) trying to overthrow Assad in Syria. Add to this bit of rivalry, the Iran people and government that is predominately Shiite, but has Sunni militants knocking on their door. Support is coming for the Sunni forces from both Lebanon and Saudi Arabia which are predominately Sunni populated. Need I remind you that Saudi Arabia is supposed to be one of our most trusted and close allies in the Middle East? One faction that seems fairly consistent is the Kurdish people, also Sunni. They are fierce fighters for their own territory and have avoided religious divisions other countries have. They have continually asked the U.S. and other Moslems for military assistance. It’s hard to be sure what such military assistance would help in this situation.

So... what faction and/or country in the Middle East should we support? Do we support the Sunni fighters as they try to overthrow the establishment in Syria and Iraq? Or do we change our minds and support Assad in Syria, who just a few months ago we were determined to drive from power, because of the Isis threat? Do we throw our support to Shiite-dominated governments like Iraq and Syria that still are unwilling to allow Sunni participation in their makeup?

One final situation needs to be added to the mix. Middle East and Muslim countries continue to be angry and irritated at us as we allow Israel to develop settlements in land that is not theirs. Israel has taken over large parts of land that was established for Palestinians when world powers supported the establishment of the Jewish state after World War II. Recently we have had Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, coming to the U.S. to tell us what we should or shouldn’t do in the situation. Who is the aggressor here? We have invaded Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Israel is annexing Palestinian land in the West Bank and constructing permanent Jewish settlements on this occupied territory. What country has Iran invaded and occupied? Other than provide aid to some of the factions mentioned, Iran is doing nothing more than we are to keep the Middle East in turmoil.

I am thankful that we have a President wise enough to keep us from charging into this Middle East mess once again. Any bombing may not help the situation much and certainly gains us no favor as we kill and destroy Moslem people and areas. Our hope is to engage with the UN and work hard at diplomacy to stop the violence in the Middle East, such as the nuclear agreement with Iran President Obama is supporting.
militia guards. One night, an Arab camel driver stole some grapes from a Jewish vineyard, was caught, and beaten by the community’s Jewish militiamen. The event was the beginning of over a century of militarization on both sides.

Jewish service to the Allied cause in World War I was rewarded with the “Balfour Declaration” promise of Palestinian land to the Jews that Britain had already promised to Arabs. There followed German nationalistic scapegoating of Jews for the World War I loss, a steady movement of Jews into Palestine as Fascism and Nazism built, the 1947-49 war creating Israel’s independence (with its Zionist terroristic attacks on Palestinian villages like Deir Yassin), and the unsuccessful efforts of Arab and Islamic powers to dislodge Israel in the Suez War of 1956, the “Six-Day War” of 1967, the “Yom Kippur War” of 1973, and endless minor wars in Gaza and Lebanon. After the Six-Day War came the slow trickle moving Israel/Palestine away from the two-state solution and toward permanent apartheid where the Palestinians (choosing to stay in the West Bank and Gaza) are slowly bombed out, starved out, or rendered crazy by disappointed hope. There also came the “Death to Israel” cry promoted by every Middle Eastern despotic regime, with some of the Gulf States. They will eventually turn on Israel in a serious way, given some of them or rendered crazy by disappointed hope. There also came the “Death to Israel” cry promoted by every Middle Eastern despotic regime, with some of the Gulf States. They will eventually turn on Israel in a serious way, given their relatives destroyed in Gaza and in the West Bank are not convinced. Both sides are at fault. Neither is guiltless. Is it worse to say “Death to Israel” and have no means of destroying it, or to entertain endless peace negotiations while building up an arsenal of clandestine nukes?

Eventually all fictions end, including those created by Israel, Iran, and the fundamentalists. Though Iran apparently does not now seek nuclear weapons, it will eventually if we have no agreement with them. So will its Middle Eastern rivals: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and perhaps some of the Gulf States. They will eventually turn on Israel in a serious way, given the growth of anti-Israel hatred in the area. All ideas that the nuclear arms race in the Middle East will be solved by the capitulation of one side, by a few bombings or the military elimination of Islamic production capacity, are naïve in the extreme. Only international law, a nonproliferation treaty, United Nations inspections, and international police can do that.

The stealing of a few grapes and the beating of the camel driver began this conflict. But only honesty and the aroused conscience of the world can end it.
Speaking Our Peace
by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

Stealing Grapes & Beating a Camel Driver

Recently the United States dead-ended the nuclear non-proliferation talks on eliminating nuclear arms in the Middle East. As each country would be required to reveal its store of nuclear weapons and its proposals for eliminating them, the United States pulled out to protect Israel’s clandestine 80-130 weapons cache. The event received almost no media attention in the U.S. Thereby hangs a tale.

I live alone. As is the wont of old men living alone, I channel surf and recently happened across “1913: Seeds of Conflict,” an account of Palestine in 1914. The quality of the show compensated for my many wasted hours of replayed sports chestnuts, reality-TV court battles, soap opera fornication, violence between superheroes and super villains, and generals sending cinema youth to war.

The Palestinian area always retained a few Sephardic Jews (about 30,000 in 1900) from the Roman-era diaspora. Islamic cultures had, for the most part, given respect to the “people of the book,” Christians and Jews. Then after the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, Russia blamed its Jews, renewed the pogroms, and 2 million Ashkenazim fled Russia—about 60,000 to Palestine. Without any nationalistic ‘Promised Land’ rhetoric, they formed the first wave of Jewish immigrants to Palestine.

Next, in the first decade of the 20th century, new pogroms in Western Europe brought different waves of Jewish settlers to Palestine—many of them Marxist/socialists who fostered the kibbutz movement; others Zionists influenced by Theodor Herzl’s vision of a new Israel.

The first wave of immigrants collaborated with their Arab neighbors (some Arabs viewed the settlers as foreshadowing progress and financial sophistication in the area), and that generation—trusting their neighbors—hired Arab guards for their villages. But the second wave, controlled by other ideologies and more standoffish and contemptuous of the Arabs, hired Jewish