Nuclear Disarmament a Victim of the 2016 National Security State

by Loring Wirbel
Citizens for Peace in Space
Colorado Springs, Colorado

The Paris attacks of November 13 and the subsequent domestic terrorism events in Colorado and California killed more than just civil liberties in the waning days of 2015. Nuclear disarmament and arms control—already on life support since the NATO standoff with Russia began—has been universally snubbed, defeated and ignored. It’s bound to be a grim presidential-election year to come.

The U.S. and Russia maintain close to 15,000 nuclear warheads, split almost evenly between the two countries. President Obama pledged in his first year of office to reduce U.S. nuclear weapons by a third. But Michael Sainato said in a December 1 blog item in Huffington Post that Obama had done almost nothing to practically reduce those numbers. The Federation of American Scientists said he had done the least to implement arms reduction of any president in the nuclear era. In fact, a new nuclear arms modernization effort for land ICBMs, sea ICBM and bombers began under Obama that will cost the U.S. $963 billion—nearly $1 trillion—between now and 2040. And Obama is not encouraged to think otherwise. The Sept/Oct 2015 issue of Foreign Affairs, the house organ of the Council on Foreign Relations, was a special issue on the history of Obama’s foreign policy. Editor Gideon Rose ridiculed Obama for daring to believe in nuclear disarmament in 2009, and praised the realism of the new Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter.

Meanwhile, ever since Turkey’s downing of a Russian fighter jet on the Turkish border in late November, Russian President Vladimir Putin has appeared almost fervent in wanting to expand nuclear forces and exercises around the Russian border. After conventional surface-to-air missiles were brought into Syria in early December, Russian military sources hinted that some SAM batteries might switch to low-yield tactical warheads. In a December 3 speech to the Duma, Putin said he would not be satisfied with economic sanctions against Turkey, and that “we are prepared to take other measures.” Earlier, Putin leaked information to state media about a secret Russian project to develop a nuclear torpedo. NTV and Channel One carried a photo of a document from a Kremlin meeting on a long-range submarine-launched nuclear torpedo under development called Status-6. The torpedo could be launched by a drone...

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Nebraska Report

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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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Why do I want to become an NFP member?

Nebraskans for Peace opposes violence, social injustice and war-making wherever they threaten, acting on opportunities for peacemaking in Nebraska whenever possible.

* NFP works to cut our military appropriations (about 50% of the federal discretionary budget) and put the savings on human needs.

* NFP has successfully worked on important state legislation: the Nebraska anti-bullying bill; the repeal of the death penalty; the ‘Dreamers’ driver’s license act; divestment from South Africa; authorization of a state climate assessment. We remain continuously engaged in the legislative process.

* NFP works to oppose discrimination: whether against Oglala Lakota Tribe members in Whiteclay, African Americans in North Omaha, undocumented immigrants or LGBT citizens.

* NFP works to alter climate change’s causes—the global warming that is already contributing to social upheaval and violent conflict—by promoting clean renewable energies like wind and solar and opposing the transport and use of carbon fuels like coal and tar sands.

* NFP sponsors the Cat Lovers Calendar—now sold worldwide.

* NFP brings together people of good will to address economic, class, racial and social tensions—working with them to take action on the problems afflicting their communities.

* NFP publishes newspaper articles that frame national issues for Nebraska readers and equip them to contact their senators and members of Congress.

* NFP organizes an Annual Peace Conference on peace, justice and climate change issues, rotating the event between Grand Island, Lincoln and Omaha.

* NFP, simply stated, is the oldest statewide Peace & Justice organization in the entire U.S., founded in 1970. We’ve got a national reputation for peacemaking.

NFP Works:

… to build relationships with other progressive Nebraskans interested in peace—in our communities, our state, our nation and the world

… to give support and encouragement to like-minded people working on peace and justice issues, and affords our members a way to promote positions and policies that could be too controversial for our day jobs

… to reach out to and educate the public through our website at www.nebraskansforpeace.org.
sub. All indications are that the ‘leak’ was made with full Kremlin approval.

This attitude did not find favor with all of Russia’s former affiliated states. The nation of Kazakhstan in particular, which used to play host to the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, was one of the strongest proponents of further nuclear reductions at a conference held in Berlin at the end of November. Ukraine, also, has been increasing its talk in favor of nuclear arms reduction, though this obviously is related to its disputes with Russia over Ukraine’s eastern provinces.

The U.K. and France both revived talks about nuclear force modernization in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, even though nuclear weapons would hardly prove useful against the ISIS threat. In fact, the only nuclear-armed state that seemed to show reserve was China. Despite its bluster-

its influence globally, but it seemed prepared more than any other nation to treat its nuclear arsenal as a separate weapons reserve that should not be touted in the current shaky global environment. This is not only a change from the typical tough-guy talk of Prime Minister Xi Jinping, but a complete turnaround from the era when former Chairman Mao Zedong referred to nuclear-armed states as “paper tigers.”

So what can U.S. activists expect in the coming election year? If the ruckus surrounding David Cameron’s speech in the U.K. Parliament December 2 on bombing Syria is any indication, the world is going through a time similar to 1979-80 or 2001-02, when most citizens seemed ready for war. But this also leads to a stronger movement away from bellicose talk, as is already emerging in both the U.K. and France. U.S. activ-

ists will have to beware of silencing themselves to make their own messages more palatable. In the Democratic Party, the Sanders campaign will probably pay lip service to nuclear arms reduction, though the Clinton campaign may need more nudging in the face of unified Republican clamorings for barring refugees, increasing spot-checks of citizens and silencing dissent in the name of national security.

Nuclear weapons will not be first on the agenda of everyday citizens, either, as attention will be steered to tactical weapons, drones, militarized police and the like. Anti-nuclear activists will have to remind citizens that more than 15,000 nuclear weapons remain on alert worldwide, many on hair-trigger alert. NORAD’s underground city under Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs, mothballed for a few short years, has gone back to active status since the terror threats increased. Yet it should be obvious that nuclear weapons will play little role in challenging terror attacks or isolated military-style massacres within the U.S.

The coming year will be the type to try the souls of all peace activists, particularly since national-security specialists love to use fear and terror as organizing tools. We must not turn our gaze out of fear or seek ‘safe spaces’ in a world that has become an atrocity exhibition. Instead, we must face fear head on, and use it to empower us into action, moving beyond fear into love and understanding. This applies even more so to nuclear dread. The nukes are still here, and can be used at any time. They remain an existential threat in a world gone mad. In the nervous and fear-soaked atmosphere of 2016, we must not remain silent about civil liberties threats, regional tactical wars, or the dangers of modernized nukes. It is time to raise our voices even louder against the background noise of fear and dread.

Catholic Workers at the Feast of the Holy Innocents vigil outside Stratcom’s Kenney gate on December 28, 2015

The 2016 campaign will try the souls of peace activists, as national-security specialists love to use fear and terror as organizing tools.
For well over a decade, Nebraskans for Peace has publicly supported the Catholic Worker protests of StratCom’s nuclear and space war missions—including the nonviolent civil disobedience trespass of protesters onto Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue to spotlight the peril these missions pose to life on earth. This past December 27, however, an individual with connections to the Des Moines Catholic Worker community, as a protest, destroyed some property at Northrop Grumman, a private military contractor working directly with StratCom. Nebraskans for Peace had no advance knowledge of this action—nor do we condone such property destruction, as it runs counter to our organizational policy of nonviolence. While NFP shares the ethical, social and economic concerns defendant Jessica Reznicek raises about StratCom’s (and Northrop Grumman’s) activities in the statement reprinted below, willful destruction of property is not a political tactic Nebraskans for Peace advocates. Nebraskans for Peace will continue to use all peaceful means to resist the U.S. government’s increasingly dangerous militarism—including ‘modernizing’ its nuclear weapons and delivery systems. But we will also maintain our policy of nonviolent protest.

— Ron Todd-Meyer, NFP President

"WHY I ACTED"

by Jessica Reznicek
"Hammer of Justice" Statement from the Sarpy County Jail
Papillion, Nebraska

January 11, 2016

Hello everyone!

Thank you to all who are carrying me with them in heart and mind while I do this time here in Sarpy County Jail. It is felt deeply.

My spirit is strong these days, and I attribute this to the kindness surrounding me. Mostly I am grateful just simply to be alive and well, swinging my hammer of justice at Northrop Grumman/StratCom.

I stand today with fierce conviction for the nonviolent direct action I have taken against the Northrop Grumman property in Bellevue, NE on Dec. 27, 2015. I broke two windows and a door window out of the Northrop Grumman building that night in an effort to expose the details of the defense contracts currently held by Northrop Grumman with StratCom. Over the years billions of taxpayer dollars are pouring into the hands of these money-hungry, bomb-building, computer geek space war criminals.

I want to say now that I truly believe that the American people are done with war; done funding, killing and dying in U.S.-led wars and terrorism and are ready to pave a path to peace.

Some folks, even personal friends of mine, are questioning my property-destruction tactics at Northrop Grumman as one of a nonviolent nature. I refuse to delve too deeply into this conversation, for I believe the focus should rest primarily on Northrop Grumman & StratCom’s countless crimes against humanity. However, I will address a few small details of the events which occurred on the evening of Dec. 27th.

Yes, glass did shatter. It shattered like the illusion that Northrop Grumman holds human life in any way in its best interest. It shattered like the illusion Iraq ever possessed weapons of mass destruction. It shattered like the illusion Iraqis were involved in 9/11. It shattered like the lie that perpetual war will ever bring peace. Glass shattered in the name of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives taken when Northrop Grumman/StratCom’s direct bombs from space rained down upon them from space. I destroyed two windows and a door, yes! StratCom with its cooperate partner Northrop Grumman destroys life in the tens of thousands.

I did not swing my hammer blindly. Actually, quite the opposite. I swung only at windows whose blinds were pulled up, to ensure I would injure no one. Nor did I break either of the windows or door threatening a human being.

When the police arrived, my arresting officer (who I ended up adoring and would love to grab a beer with when this is all said and done) found me kneeling in the main entrance of the Northrop Grumman building, with my empty hands raised above my head. He first asked me to lift my coat slowly to make sure I had no bombs strapped to me. I was eager to cooperate. I was not feeling threatened by him and I wanted to return the favor. I wanted to convey to him that I had love and respect for him as a fellow human being.

Admittedly, however, I did shrug a little, considering the irony that Northrop Grumman has just recently been awarded a $55 billion contract to build a new long-range U.S. bomber… and I am the one being checked for bombs.

That all being said, I suppose that what I am trying to say is I acted in accordance

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CHANGE THE SYSTEM, OR NOTHING WILL CHANGE

by Hank Van den Berg
UNL Economics Professor Emeritus

As 2016 gets underway, the news media are full of stories of terrorism and what can only be described as disgusting politics. Xenophobic political groups are gaining increased popularity in most Western countries as we are all stampeded by the corporate media into fearing the next terrorist attack. What is incredible is that so few Americans connect the Middle Eastern chaos that is driving unprecedented refugee movements (the world now has over 50 million refugees, according to the United Nations) and the terrorism in Paris, Lebanon, Nigeria, Iraq and many other countries to a century of Western militaristic/hegemonic policies. Instead, most political leaders are advocating more of the same militaristic responses that have caused the chaos in the first place; e.g., Ted Cruz’s call for carpet bombing Syria.

Interestingly, we see Russia seeming to follow a strategy similar to the U.S., using the claim that ISIS shot down a Russian passenger aircraft with over 200 tourists, to justify increased Russian bombing of religious extremists in Syria and Iraq as well as the anti-Assad terrorists that the CIA and the U.S. military have trained and funded. Of course, Russia supports the Assad government in Syria under the guise of attacking ISIS, but the U.S. finds it difficult to criticize Russia for doing what the U.S. has been doing for years. The fact is that Russian leaders know better than anyone that U.S. policies of using religious fundamentalists to counter the feared spread of socialism around the world are directly responsible for the current carnage and chaos in the Middle East and Africa. This chaos has threatened Russia directly for decades. Russia’s straightforward assessment of who caused the chaos has been quickly distorted by President Obama and most other U.S. political leaders, who have blamed Russia’s Putin for the chaos he obviously does not want on his borders. Why on Earth are our leaders doing and saying these things?

A Bit of History

The fact is that the U.S. has routinely used religious fanatics to topple socialist-leaning secular governments in the region, and we have resorted to an amazing combination of lies, distortions of history, and phony appeals to patriotism to justify the inevitable destruction and chaos we have caused. In fact, if there is one common result of U.S. policies overseas, it is the preference for chaos, violence and insecurity over the alternative of stable secular socialistic governments. The metaphor of ‘the only good socialist is a dead socialist’ continues to hold, no matter how much subsequent destruction we may cause.

We have undermined democratic socialist-leaning governments in the Middle East (not to mention Latin America, Asia and Africa) for a long time—at least since the 1953 CIA overthrow of the secular government of Iran. Western meddling in the Middle East goes back much farther to the colonial era. The winners from the toppling of secular socialistic governments are transnational corporations, global financial firms and the wealthy elite that own and control these monopolistic capitalist organizations. The wealthy will tolerate almost any form of government over socialism—which directly threatens their property and economic power. From my time as a Foreign Service Officer in the Department of State, it was always quite obvious that U.S. business would demand, and usually get, support from the U.S. government in any for-

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eign disputes over U.S. business interests. My two years working at the U.S. embassy in Nicaragua in the 1970s made it very clear to me that our government would support a dictator like Anastasio Somoza as long as he gave U.S. corporations free rein in the country. Of course, we routinely spent huge sums of money and trained military officials to overthrow democratically elected leaders who had the audacity to take measures that restricted U.S. corporations or, even worse, successfully led governments that promoted non-capitalist economic systems. Such examples of alternatives could not be permitted to survive, so chaos was always preferable to a peace that might lead to a successful socialist regime.

The desire to set up stable governments (including our own) continues with the support corporate and financial elites have towards the completion of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the proposed Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Both agreements are designed to further strengthen intellectual property rights that put corporations in control of human technologies, encourage a race to the bottom in government regulation, taxation, labor rights and social programs, and create business-controlled international arbitration institutions that will have to power to overrule national economic, environmental and social policies. Under this latter provision, national policies that negatively affect corporate profits would be deemed a violation of free trade, and the new arbitration institutions would be able to assess damages to be paid. Obviously, the threat of such rulings will immediately begin to discourage further changes in government policies on the environment, worker safety, competition, labor rights, and so many other measures that protect the interests of all the stakeholders beyond the absentee stockholders of corporations.

The Logic

The political sellout to corporate business and financial interests, which has coincidentally occurred in virtually all Western societies and most other countries in the global economy, is not as simple as the fact that corporate profits rise when environmental regulations are reduced, when workers’ wages are lowered, when taxes are lowered, and when government bails out firms that made bad business decisions. Yes, guns, drones, oil and prisons are all profitable business ventures, and financial fraud is turning out to be a very profitable and safe business! All you need to do is buy the regulators, design a misleading public relations and advertising campaign, paint yourself as a great American institution, and there is really no limit to the fraud you can commit.

However, there is much more to this than mere greed and irresponsible corporate behavior. The problem cannot be solved by asking corporate CEOs to be nice. As soon as their accountant walks into the room and shows a deteriorating financial result, all promises and good intentions are out the window because, fundamentally, modern capitalism is based on profit as the all-encompassing goal of the business enterprise. The profit motive is strengthened by the fear of failure. But also critical to understanding the situation we are in is the fact that the normal dynamics of capitalism have concentrated corporate ownership to where just 2000 business enterprises account for about half of measured global production. And, the globalization of business increased its collective power over national governments. Finally, the whole capitalist project has been very astutely nurtured by influencing our national cultures to where most people unquestioningly embrace individualism and individual responsibility over collective action and social responsibility. This combination of fear, concentration, globalization and the actively nurtured culture of individualism—known as the ‘neoliberal paradigm’—is very powerful because it creates both a necessity and the real power for the global elite to maintain their privileged position in society for themselves and their heirs.

Understanding Capitalism and the Fight over the Surplus

Capitalism builds an elite that is both a social and an economic elite. Economic power supports social and political power, and the latter, in turn, further concentrate economic power. Economic power allows a firm or group to capture a disproportionate share of the gains from the economic activity that provides for our needs and wants. Such provisioning consists of the basic food, shelter and clothing that we need to survive—and, if we are lucky, the additional goods and services that make our survival worthwhile. Most modern economies provide us not only with food, but with iPhones, Las Vegas vacations and electric coffee makers. We call this additional provisioning economic surplus. Humans have been fighting over this surplus for thousands of years, ever since we shifted from hunter-gatherer societies to geographically fixed communities that allowed us to better accumulate resources and increase our production. Capitalism intensified the fight over surplus by establishing private ownership of productive resources and thus permitting further accumulation of wealth, which linked social status with economic status.

True, the negative and positive incentives built into capitalism increased human
Palestine was to take effect, thousands before the UN-proposed partitioning of by the Jewish army. Beginning months were forcefully expelled from their homes Catastrophe”) when Palestinian citizens Nakba” (the Arabic word meaning “The began. His family experienced “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the quest for ending the Occupation of Palestine were presented from the perspectives of both men. They were invited by the Social Justice and Peacemaking Committee of Missouri River Valley (MRV) Presbytery and the Nebraskans for Peace’s Palestinian Rights Task Force. There were four events: one for laypersons/clergy at Christ United Methodist Church in Lincoln; another for students/professors/the public at the University of Nebraska—Kearney sponsored by the Departments of Political Science and Social Work; the third for students/professors/the public at Omaha’s College of St. Mary in joint sponsorship with the Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community, and finally for the MRV Presbytery at Presbyterian Church of the Master in Omaha.

Working ‘across the divide’ toward peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians, Rosen and Abusharr’s words were especially powerful when they told their personal stories.

Rizek Abusharr was a teenager when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began. His family experienced “The Nakba” (the Arabic word meaning “The Catastrophe”) when Palestinian citizens were forcefully expelled from their homes by the Jewish army. Beginning months before the UN-proposed partitioning of Palestine was to take effect, thousands of Palestinians were killed and many became refugees in the country where their ancestors had lived for centuries. He was not timid about calling it an ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Rabbi Rosen supported Abusharr’s telling of these facts by citing Israeli historians’ reports of 1940s military papers that were finally opened by the Israeli government in the late 1990s.

Abusharr’s family has lived in Jerusalem for over 500 years. He retired as Director General of the Jerusalem International YMCA in 2001, having worked there for 46 years in many capacities. In 1992, the Jerusalem International YMCA was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the Austrian Parliament as a result of the work initiated by Dr. Abusharr working with Jewish and Arab youth towards peaceful coexistence in that troubled land.

Abusharr was specifically chosen for this tour because he is a Presbyterian elder and the dates of this tour were specifically set to coincide with Presbytery of Missouri River Valley’s October meeting. In Jerusalem, Abusharr served for 30 years as Session Clerk of the Church of Scotland (known in the U.S., as Presbyterian) and he also served as Clerk of the Presbytery of Jerusalem.

In 2014, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.’s national General Assembly voted to divest its pension funds from three American-owned companies—Hewlett Packard, Motorola Solutions and Caterpillar—because their products are utilized by Israel in maintaining its oppressive security infrastructure, as well as for destroying homes, olive tree orchards and other lands owned by Palestinians. The Presbyterian resolution passed by a very small margin, after many years of deliberation. The Presbyterians have experienced a lot of backlash over these years of deliberation and are again under pressure to rescind this 2014 divestment vote.

Abusharr reiterated the vital importance of continuing to support divestment, because monetary pressure may be the only tool which will pressure the Israeli government to end its apartheid laws and practices. Rosen also made a point of thanking Presbyterians for the divestment vote—echoing Abusharr’s comments that economic pressure is a nonviolent form of resistance promoting a more equitable society.

Rabbi Brant Rosen, who has been a rabbi for 20 years, was raised in Los Angeles, in a family of Reform Jews. He has relatives who have lived in Israel for many years and he visited them often. In college he participated in a ‘study abroad’ program for two years, as a result of which he even considered moving to Israel. Although he was raised on the belief that Israel represented the ‘promised land’ for Jews—especially because of the Holocaust and other forms of discrimination suffered by Jews in Europe and the Soviet Union—he was nonetheless troubled by...
On December 16, 2015, New Delhi’s Supreme Court banned registration of luxury diesel cars and SUVs with an engine capacity more than 2,000 cubic centimeters in the National Capital Region until March 31, 2016. It also imposed a one-time pollution tax on small diesel cars.

On the same front page that it reported the final negotiation of the Paris world climate accord, the Sunday Times of India said that pollution in the Delhi area had reached the worst levels of the fall and early winter, as cooler than average weather drained downhill off freshly fallen snow in the foothills of the Himalayas. Delhi was described by the newspaper as “gasping for breath.” In some areas, bonfires were being lit for provide warmth for the poor and homeless.

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A lively debate has exploded in the public press over what do about Delhi’s pollution. Coal-fired power and the dung-fueled stoves used by 600 million (for the most part rural) Indians seem mainly off-limits. People need to eat, and at least 300 million in India have no electricity at all. That leaves ‘four-wheels’—private cars and trucks.

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One proposal in Delhi echoes Beijing’s restrictions on driving when pollution reaches asphyxiation levels, based on odd-and-even last numbers on license plates. This one was implemented in the Delhi area January 1, 2016, amidst howls of protest from the rich, one of whom had three drivers and three cars—all with license plates ending in odd numbers. India’s Economic Times Magazine devoted a cover story to solutions for increasing density of traffic. It pointed out, among other things, that while the rate of car vehicle ownership in Delhi has doubled between 2000 and 2015, the proportion lags many rich countries: India’s car ownership in 2014 was 13 per 1,000 people, a rate that is 617 in Japan and 439 in the United States.

Climate change has India in a paradoxical bind unlike any other on the planet. Already the third-largest carbon-dioxide source in the world, it still has 300 million people who lack electricity and 600 million who cook with cow dung (a major source of CO2 as well as air pollution). Its major energy source is low-quality, high-ash coal, which is usually strip-mined.

India’s government plans to superintend a doubling of India’s coal consumption from 565 million tons (in 2013) to more than a billion in 2019, mainly to provide power, regardless of climatic consequences. At the same time, India’s federal government has pledged to expand solar power.

Solar power creates opportunities for decentralized
The Paris Climate Conference
An on-the-ground report by Matt Gregory

Nebraska Farmers Union office manager, Guardians of the Aquifer representative and NFP State Board member Matt Gregory was in Paris this past December for the United Nations “Conference of Parties 21” (COP21) climate negotiations. This is his report on the event.

The Thursday of my visit to Paris started at the “Peace Wall” (located at “Military” metro station, naturally). I was there to attend a demonstration put on by “It Takes Roots”—a U.S.-based activist group that is a coalition of disenfranchised groups and communities. I heard Native women from New Mexico and a woman from coal country in Eastern Kentucky, to name two. With a fog-capped Eiffel Tower a short distance down the road, the hundred or so of us marched and chanted to keep warm.

Later on in the afternoon, I headed to the Le Bourget COP21 Visitor’s Center. The newly built plywood complex that was intended to be modern and hip came across as fake and trying too hard. Attractive young women and old men in expensive suits exchanged business cards, at times a scene indecipherable from any number of expos I have attended. It resembled a mall in places, but instead of shops there were business displays, NGO info tables and even a food court. There were contemporary, shiny meeting rooms with all the latest technology, but they were geared towards high-level officials, not ordinary people concerned about climate change. The most interesting spot there was an area called “The People’s Summit” that presented indigenous voices, but it was a small tent that was always filled to capacity when I walked by it. There were a lot of NGOs/nonprofits there that I like and support, but there were also displays sponsored by fossil fuel companies and, worst of all, there wasn’t an immediacy in the air and everyone seemed a little too chipper to be addressing a climate emergency.

I was getting ready to leave but I thought I’d pop into the best-sounding panel discussion going on at the time. The title of the panel posted in the hall on the monitor was: “Fighting for climate justice: concrete solutions to integrate human rights in climate actions.” For an ironic cap of the day, the panel never showed up.

I headed over to the Climate Action Zone (ZAC)—an art hall converted into a meeting place for thousands of activists located halfway between the center of Paris and Le Bourget—for the daily general assembly (modeled after the Occupy Movement) where I learned that all human rights language had been stripped from the latest draft of the agreement. That was December 10th: “Human Rights Day.”

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While language acknowledging human rights was later reinserted back into the text, the final agreement to come out of the COP21 negotiations falls far short of addressing climate justice, human rights and actually lowering emissions. An agreement that is not legally binding and cannot or will not be enforced should not be considered a success. Some could claim it was going to be a disappointment before negotiations even started due to comments made by Secretary of State John Kerry and the Republican-controlled Congress promising to reject any treaty. And while the agreement is monumental in that the world’s countries came to a climate agreement for the first time in COP’s history, it falls far short of what is needed to keep low-lying island nations above water. It should be said that there are a lot of good parts and language to the agreement, but unfortunately it’s usually preceded by verbs such as “recommend” and “urge” and ends with the adverb “voluntarily.”

Under the agreement, rich countries pledge $100 billion annually for 10 years, but this is far short of the support needed. In order to have a decent chance of keeping warming under 1.5°C, we need to keep at least 80 percent of known fossil fuels in the ground, put a moratorium on the exploration and extraction of new sources, stop deforestation and reduce other greenhouse gases such as methane.

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as methane. However, the Paris agreement contains no mention of the words ‘fossil fuel’—no ‘coal,’ no ‘oil,’ no ‘gas.’

The science is clear that a 2°C rise spells disaster for island nations and with a likely increase of 2.5-3.5°C, there will be climate changes of catastrophic proportions. But yet, the mainstream media and the establishment would have us celebrate the agreement.

Many climate-vulnerable nations fought hard for the right to compensation, but the U.S. and European Union were dead set against it. As Asad Rehman of U.K.’s Friends of the Earth puts it, “the E.U., the U.S. and the umbrella group of rich countries have imposed a clause which absolves them of the legal, moral and political responsibility for the carbon pollution that they’ve created and that has devastated the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.”

There is also no language in the deal to give it precedence over trade agreements such as the “Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership” (TTIP) and the “Trans-Pacific Partnership” (TPP), which will give corporations the power to overturn environmental regulations that affect their profits. This has hit close to home as TransCanada announced on January 6 that it is filing a $15 billion NAFTA claim to recover costs and damages of the rejected Keystone XL pipeline.

Later on Human Rights Day, after the general assembly, there was a panel discussion on just this very topic and there was even discussion of how TransCanada would react to the rejection. Now we know. Naomi Klein, author of last year’s This Changes Everything: The Climate vs. Capitalism, was the keynote on the panel that consisted of a representative from the Sierra Club national office in San Francisco, a German activist who occupied a lignite mine outside of Berlin, a Filipino activist whose home is slowly disappearing and the French moderator. The unified message was that trade agreements like TPP and TTIP affect climate change agreements and they allow richer, Western countries to exploit poorer, global South states.

But there is reason to be hopeful: the world’s governments have now announced their intentions. What needs to happen, after everyone is done patting each other on the back, is for activists and anyone who cares about the future habitation of the planet to get back to work holding our elected officials’ feet to the fire to hold them to those promises.

The big takeaway from the week of events, the general assemblies, the final agreement and all climate summits going forward is that the governments of the world—especially rich and Western ones—won’t make the changes that we need. It’s on us as citizens and activists to make those changes. The Keystone XL pipeline was rejected because of people organizing and standing up for their rights. It wasn’t the government acting out of the kindness of its heart. It was the farmers, landowners, indigenous people and climate activists that made it happen, and the politicians reacted accordingly. That is how we are going to address climate change and make a better world.
Bridging the Racial Divide

by Jack Dunn

Omaha civil rights activist and NFP State Board member A’Jamal Byndon asked me to write about my experiences as a ‘white’ man dealing with U.S. racism. I put ‘white’ and ‘black’ in quotes to emphasize the fact that these are ‘folk’ categories bounded largely by the user’s imagination.

Speaking from my own experience, I have always been supportive of ‘black’ liberation. But for most of my life I would not have been willing to talk to ‘white’ people about racism without feeling hypocritical—without an uneasy feeling of not having explored my own racism in any depth and having only a third-hand, literary appreciation of what ‘black’ people go through in this country.

A’Jamal was a good guide for my beginning journey. Others like Willie Hamilton and his crew have been wonderful friends as well. A lodestar for me has been the suggestions given by Lois Mark Stalvey in her book The Education of a WASP (i.e. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant).

Quoting from memory: “Go to meetings of black organizations. Work with them on their projects. During the meetings don’t give advice, don’t try to take over the meeting; focus on developing relationships and getting to know the participants. Experience being a minority. Volunteer to do the crappy jobs like cleaning up after the meeting. Begin to make friends. After some time you may begin to understand the community and the players. Support black leadership, don’t try to substitute for it.”

This of course works best for people who live in or near areas where ‘black’ people (or any minority) live. Otherwise, reading helps, I guess. But a lot of ‘whites’ view the world in sort of a tribal fashion and reading doesn’t get us physically outside of our ‘white’ world. Facts help somewhat, but relationships are what count. To the extent that you and your relationship with a group is important to them, you can help them recognize a kinship with human beings who may look different. Preaching and lecturing are of course useless. But simply being a good person who stands up for your principles in a non-demanding, grounded way can be effective.

I’m starting to think of how county agriculture extension agents learned to influence farmers to change their planting practices during and after the Dust Bowl, to practice soil conservation. The Ag extension agents identified local opinion leaders—the farmers whom other farmers respected and listened to. They then connected with those farmers and asked them to change their planting practices in a sample part of their field. If that went well, the opinion leaders generally saw the positive results and converted their entire operation. This led to the other farmers gradually changing their practices.

In rural and suburban areas, we would probably be looking at the Chamber of Commerce, church leaders, respected school teachers, etc. to identify these opinion leaders. To the extent that those individuals could be given an immersive experience and develop relationships (along with facts and rationales for dealing with their own racism), they could then influence the people around them.

Any of us ‘white’ people, however, can call out (gently but firmly) friends or acquaintances who tell racist jokes, make racist observations, etc. As with most things, when it comes to changing behavior, we have to have the will to begin.

Similar gulfs often exist between peace activists and the working class. Becoming members of organizations where we may find different opinions is generally a good organizing tactic. The same principles would apply—don’t proselytize as much as develop relationships. Proselytizing comes later when others have come to know who you are and are willing to engage you on a human level. This is long-term, ground-breaking work, so be sure to also have a support group.

For further ideas and discussion, contact A’Jamal Byndon or Karen Abrams at office@prineb.org.

Jack Dunn, MSSW, is a long-time social activist and former Executive Director of Policy Research & Innovation, and Omaha Policy Research Center.

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CHANGE THE SYSTEM, CONCLUSION

efforts to produce things, and standards of living have benefitted. However, capitalism has some weaknesses as well. First, it requires both a continual growth in the economy’s surplus and the capture of a substantial portion of that surplus by the profit-seeking capitalists who undertake the business and financial activities that drive the accumulation of wealth. If growth stops, an economic crisis usually develops because capitalists stop investing when expectations of losses rather than profits dominate their expectations. It can take years for an economy to emerge from such a crisis. Since the time of Marx, many economists have suggested that economic crises are inevitable.

Indeed, today we face several potential inconsistencies in our global capitalist system that are likely to generate crises:

1. The failure of demand for output to grow in tandem with the growth in output.
2. The precarious nature of expectations, which drive the decision-making process of capitalism.
3. The lack of population and natural resources to produce more capital.
4. The lack of viable new projects to invest in for the continued growth of wealth.

The U.S. and European economies face high unemployment and poverty because of insufficient demand for the output these economies are capable of producing. In part, the insufficient demand for output is due to the stagnation of workers’ wages, a problem that was for some decades postponed by inducing consumers to take on more and more debt to increase their consumption. But now, that accumulated debt has become so large that even the capitalist financial firms are reluctant to provide additional credit for fear of default.

The drivers of economic growth (investment and innovation) are always precariously based on uncertain expectations of the future—we do not have time machines to examine how things will turn out. So capitalist accumulation is tenuously based on what John Maynard Keynes called ‘animal spirits’ or the confidence that things will pan out. Keynes, of course, advocated constant vigilance and active responses by government to keep aggregate demand for the economy’s production constant even as investment fluctuates, but today governments have largely surrendered such policy power to the neoliberal creed of balanced budgets and small government. The neoliberal paradigm takes increasing total government expenditures to keep total demand for output in line with the economy’s productive capacity off the table. The only demand—sustaining government expenditures that can be increased without fear of opening the door to socialism are military and security expenditures—which of course also assist in creating overseas chaos in any budding socialist nations overseas.

At the same time, monetary expansions, such as the recent ‘quantitative easing’ that put several trillion newly printed dollars into the financial sector, is more politically acceptable, but it has had little if any effect on output and employment. The reason for this failure of the massive creation of money by the Federal Reserve was perfectly predictable: Because modern capitalist economies always allow their banking sectors to create as much money as they like (yes, it is private banks—not the government—that creates most of our money!), any trustworthy loans for investment have already been made, which means that the additional money injected by the Fed merely stays in the financial sector to inflate the prices of financial assets.

The third problem is more difficult to deal with. Several hundred years ago, the new capitalist economies of Europe embraced colonialism to find more resources, and the U.S. followed suit in the 1800s as it colonized the entire North American continent. Today, the private corporations that dominate the capitalist system embrace globalization to exploit foreign labor as well as resources. Colonialism and globalization ultimately brought the world’s resources into the capitalist system, effectively internalizing the problem of resource limits into the globalized world we all inhabit. And, the globalization of the labor market has lowered incomes of workers and reduced aggregate demand for output, thus making the first inconsistency of capitalism even more acute.

Finally, the ‘financialization’ of modern capitalism (which is the translation of any and all business projects into an accounting framework that focuses purely on the financial costs and benefits of all projects) has slowed the rate of technological progress and innovation. Unless there is a quick return, research projects are not undertaken. So we get repeated updates of iPhones, but there are fewer paradigm shifts to drive major technological booms. And, with the exhaustion of using debt to fuel consumption or to engage in financial manipulation to gain income with money created by the Fed’s now-suspended quantitative easing, capitalists are desperately looking for the privatization of public services, like the post office, healthcare, retirement funds, prisons, education, etc., to invest in for future profit. This theft of future benefits of such traditionally public investments by capitalist investors using money created by the Federal Reserve and the banking sector itself means that the standards of living of most people will not rise much, if at all, in the future, and income inequality will continue to grow.

With stagnant consumer and gov-
the Israeli government’s discrimination against Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories which he had witnessed. It was the horrific attack on Gaza in 2008-2009, known as “Operation Cast Lead,” which was the last straw needed to break his willingness to overlook the systemic nature of the injustices inflicted upon these people who were natives to this land.

Rosen believes that the discriminatory policies of the Israeli government in no way reflect the beliefs of Judaism. In Kearney, a Jewish student in the audience asked him, “Isn’t having Israel as the Jewish homeland critical to Jews’ self identity?” Rosen said that historically Jews have been in diaspora for nearly two millennia and that, in fact, their identity was based not on any given land or nation, but on their ability to practice the tenets of their faith wherever they were.

The most important of those tenets is to promote justice and mercy and walk humbly with their God. That can and should be done anywhere. Rabbi Rosen has now made this his life’s work, partly by becoming the Midwest Regional Director of the American Friends Service Committee and by being the founder and rabbi of “Tzedek Chicago,” a non-Zionist synagogue, which had 300 in attendance at the celebration of their high holy days this fall.

The large, diverse audience at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, that included Palestinian Americans and Israeli Americans from the area as well as the students, engaged openly in a constructively toned dialogue. At the College of St. Mary, Muslim, Jewish and Christian voices along with secular ones were heard. At all events the strengthening of the BDS Movement was advocated by both speakers.

Rosen encouraged religious bodies to question the State of Israel’s discriminatory policies toward Palestinians as a growing number of rabbis are doing, while assuring these non-Jewish groups that doing so is not ‘anti-Semitic,’ but, in fact, is an act of promoting the basic values of the three major religions found in Israel/Palestine.

Abusharr reminded everyone that Palestinians, like all humans, want to live in peace with hope for the future. For nearly 70 years, keeping that hope alive while being subjected to overwhelming military attacks and political shenanigans has often seemed impossible, he said, especially because the U.S. government has provided so much financial, political and military aid to Israel.

The Situation Is Reflected in our Political System

Keep these ideas in mind as you listen to the Republican candidates for president and former Senator Clinton on the Democratic side. Listen carefully because they are effectively telling us that they will start more wars to depose ‘unfriendly’ governments, they will prepare public institutions for more privatization, and they will continue to let the financial sector do what it wants. The current president and previous presidents from both parties have effectively done that. Woodrow Wilson entered the senseless World War I after campaigning against involvement; Harry Truman began manufacturing the Cold War before World War II had even ended; Lyndon Johnson destroyed his progressive reputation by killing four million Vietnamese for no real reason other than that Vietnam was ‘communist’; and Barack Obama escalated an illegal war as soon as he entered office before starting further wars in Libya, Syria, Yemen, etc. One cannot help but wonder if it will ever become possible to actually change the system?

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'appropriate-scale' technology, especially in countries with large rural populations. India is a prime prospect with its average of 210 days a year of nearly direct sunlight, large rural population, and tradition of local, basic, small-scale problem-solving stemming from Mahatma Gandhi, who turned homespun cloth from a small spinning machine into a powerful political symbol vis a vis the centralized weaving industry controlled by the British.

Several thousand villages in India that had no access to conventional electric power grids are now drawing electricity from banks of photovoltaic solar cells. Using the same model of small-scale, locally controlled technology, photovoltaic modules and solar cooking stoves are being used increasingly in India’s villages. Many villagers also use biogas digesters that convert the dung of cows and other animals to energy. The resulting methane is burned as energy before it bubbles into the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas. New technology also allows dung to be turned to an energy-rich sludge without smoke and fire.

Will restrictions on who can drive what, and when, together with small-scale solar power stall climate change by reducing the rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases? Already, India’s annual monsoon has become more erratic, often intensifying drought, threatening the livelihoods of small farmers and the food supplies of India’s 1.2 billion people. Temperatures are rising in areas that already reach nearly lethal levels in summer. Bursts of rainfall, when they do occur, have been incredible. Mumbai had three feet of rain in one day in 2005. In early December of 2015, Chennai was swamped with deadly deluges. Nature is taking no breaks as CO2 levels rise.

Bruce E. Johansen is Jacob J. Isaacson Professor at UNO and author of the just-released book, Eco-Hustle!

**Your Foundation Speaks**

*by Loyal Park, Nebraska Peace Foundation President*

Congress has enacted changes in the tax code that allow tax-free Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) up to $100,000 annually from traditional IRA accounts for those over 70½ years of age. For those who meet this age requirement and have a traditional IRA account, this can possibly be a tax advantage when making a charitable contribution.

With traditional IRA accounts, usually any withdrawal is taxable. However, with this tax code change the QCD withdrawal is tax free. Consider making your yearly Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA as a donation to Nebraska Peace Foundation through a QCD withdrawal.

**“WHY I ACTED”**

**CONCLUSION**

with my conscience and my spirit and that my property destruction was a useful form of nonviolent direct action. I do not stand in judgment of folks who feel uncomfortable using such methods. Nonetheless, I want to stand beside them, asking them to develop and apply their own means to expose the lies of Northrop Grumman & StratCom, be it through education, research, writing letters, public discussions, public vigils, rallies and marches and, yes, even civil disobedience.

Blood is pouring through the streets of many nations in the Middle East. People are dying all over the globe, masses of human beings are being dislocated, and the environment is under attack; all this through our U.S.-led global war-making ways. There isn’t a continent on the planet free of a U.S. military presence; there are U.S. military bases in over a hundred countries. People all over the planet are resisting the U.S. global military presence in hundreds of places. I just returned from Jeju Island where Catholics and South Korean peace activists are resisting a South Korean/U.S. Navy base being built.

We all have our part to play. Here in the heartland of America, we who seek peace must make efforts to dismantle the U.S. military dominance of space from the top down, by publicly and nonviolently resisting the joint Northrop Grumman & StratCom missions.

This is why I acted. You do not have to act as radical or dramatically as I did, but please make a statement in your own way against government-funded companies who focus on war and destruction.

Peace,
Jessica Reznicek
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Before we jump on one or another easy solution to the ISIS problem, though, we should recall four things:

1. First, as long as almost everyone in the world has access to guns, civilian militias and lone wolf turmoil will be endemic—whether sponsored by ISIS, al-Qaida, right-wing American militias or the CIA (as with the mujahedeen in Afghanistan prior to 9/11).

2. Second, politically, ISIS comes out of the Sunni search for a powerful Sunni militant movement in the Syrian area comparable to the Iranian-sponsored Shiite Hezbollah and Sunni Hamas near Israel, and its rise is related to the shrinkage of al-Qaida and to Israel’s accommodation with the Sunni tyrannies in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, post-Morsi Egypt, the Gulf states) while both the Sunni states and Israel compete with Iran. Sunni state officials have recently secretly met with Israeli leaders, and their intelligence agencies exchange information with Israel’s intelligence agency, leaving those Sunni militants schooled to cry against Israel high and dry without an official state leader. ISIS is now organizing to attack Israel from Gaza as it wrests leadership in the Sunni world from a Saudi Arabian royal family in disarray after the death of the late king.

3. Third, religiously, ISIS comes out of a fundamentalist apocalyptic worldview that holds the expectation of needing to prepare for the last battle and to shed blood in that last battle on the plains of Syria in the cause of God. This fundamentalism is not greatly different in its endorsement of militarism from the apocalyptic fundamentalism spouted by Christian figures on the right, who are often allied with the Israeli right wing. In this context, the President’s effort to limit ISIS’ territorial expansion so that it cannot credibly claim caliphate status makes a great deal of sense.

4. Fourth, economically and psychologically, ISIS takes its appeal from a promise of a job and a marriage to the 25 percent or so of Middle Eastern youth—especially male youth—who are unemployed and without an adult household. It makes its appeal to Western youth on the basis of a quixotic quest for an easy kingdom of God.

The pundits and the candidates will bellyache on with easy solutions, but:

- The world awash with guns will not change as long as the gun manufacturers and their lobbies find it profitable to flood the world with them. (The U.S. is the chief profit-maker from this gun flood).

- The Sunni search for an effective Sunni militancy will not diminish until Sunni nations and Sunni people feel that they are respected and that their sovereignty and dignity is observed; coups like that which overthrew the duly-elected Mohammed Morsi in Egypt only tell Sunni activists that they have to turn to groups like ISIS for power and legitimacy.

- The apocalyptic hope will continue as long as ISIS spreads either in the Middle East or elsewhere, and until Iran and the Saudis, the Russians and the Americans, and the peoples of the region sit down to negotiate a political settlement.

- The economic and psychological impulses that feed ISIS will only be managed when the nations of the Middle East begin to build post-fossil fuel economies based on investment in their people instead of their nabobs.

The world is full of demagogic solutions to these complex problems, but some hopeful signs have appeared: the talks between Secretary Kerry and Mr. Lavrov of Russia on the Syrian issue are crucial and helpful; the Iranian nuclear treaty that disentangles us from unilateral support for the Sunni tyrannies likewise; the appearance and growing power of “Jewish Voice for Peace” in this country may free up our foreign policy. In the future, we need a ‘Marshall Plan’ for the Middle East to rebuild the economies destroyed by the Gulf War and endless civil war. We need plans for a gradual modifying of the Sunni tyrannies to become republics. We need the major powers in the region to speak out against a Zionism that would leave Palestinians without a place to live, but also against extreme Salafism, Wahhabism, and the forms of Christian and Islamic apocalypticism that seek to use a final regional war to unleash God.

I would hope that you, as a member of Nebraskans for Peace, would think through these issues thoughtfully and individually, come to your own personal analysis of the problem (not necessarily mine), and write to our representatives and senators in a collected and civil way. They need to be addressed by citizens and not by a mob.
Speaking Our Peace
by Paul Olson, NFP President Emeritus

Cheering Like Crazy for an ‘Almost War’ vs. Actually Solving Problems

The foreign policy ballyhoo in the presidential race is likely to focus on ISIS even though China and the Trans-Pacific Partnership are far more consequential for the future of our species. In the next few weeks, we will see herds of presidential hopefuls sticking out their chests to tells us how much ‘better they would’ve handled the war’ on ISIS, all the while avoiding committing themselves to American boots on the ground. Many in the mob listening to them will cheer like crazy for the ‘almost-war’ in which they can imagine that they bloodlessly served and pound their chests for American exceptionalism.

The cheering is understandable. People are scared. ISIS now has positions in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, France, Belgium and the United States. In the United States, its followers have shown a capacity to act in San Bernardino, Philadelphia, Sacramento, Houston and several other places. The civil wars in Syria and Iraq have killed about 800,000 people. ISIS’s recruitment propaganda reaches the far corners of the globe, and its success in organizing both lone and militia rebellions throughout the world is correlated with the decline of the nation state that I wrote of in my last column. Though foreign policy almost never decides elections, it may have a role in this upcoming one in relation to the threat of terrorism.

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