

The Fellowship of Reconciliation

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ACTION NEWSLETTER

Editor Ron Young

February 1972

National Action Group Initiates Nationwide Campaign on U.S. Air War

In December, representatives of the major national peace groups met at the FOR office in Nyack to formulate plans for a coordinated nationwide campaign against the U.S. air and automated war in Indochina. The groups, including FOR, AFSC, Clergy and Laymen Concerned, Women Strike for Peace, WILPF, EPF and CPF, met several more times in New York and Philadelphia. Campaign plans have relied heavily on information and resource material supplied by the Indochina Resource Center and Project Air War, and the campaign is viewed as a key component of the program of Peoples Coalition for Peace and Justice.

Fred Branfman, former civilian volunteer and reporter in Laos and founder of Project Air War, describes the current air war as the third and most dangerous phase of the United States war in Indochina. Most dangerous because the Administration believes that if it can end public concern about the war by reducing American casualties it can continue indefinitely the massive bombing and electronic warfare. The article by George Weiss on the enclosed Literature List and the Air War Slides produced by AFSC dramatically portray the character and meaning of the new automated war. Used in conjunction with the articles by Fred Branfman and the Air War Information Packet, the Slide Show can be a very effective tool in beginning a campaign on the Air War in your area. (The cost of \$50 for the slides may seem high, at first, but you can recoup this cost in just a few showings and get others to buy additional sets.) We urge you to order a set of slides and commit yourself to a minimum of three showings a week.

Equally important to education on the Air War is continuing emphasis on the dictatorial Thieu regime in Saigon and the U.S. support which keeps it in power. The United States pays 90% of the Saigon government's domestic budget and almost 100% of the military budget. Obviously, an end to such support is essential to ending the war. The FOR information packet on Repression in South Vietnam can be very useful in developing this emphasis.

Election Year Emphasis: Confronting Candidates, Delegates - Citizens' Action Pledge

As important as the intensive education campaign is, by itself, this is not enough. Combined with the Air War Slides or other forms of education on the ongoing war, we need to help people find concrete action they can take to help end the war. Obviously in an election year many people will view working for candidates and electing convention delegates as the most important work to be done. Millions of Americans still are convinced that the best chance to influence events comes once every four years during the Presidential elections. Whatever your own views are on the importance of direct work for candidates, you can participate in and help organize activities which will continue to press the war issue to the center of attention during this year.

One idea on how to do this is to organize a group to raise the war issue wherever candidates appear. Using the model of the Daily Death Toll, you can organize public "die-ins" at campaign meetings to dramatize how many people (approximately 300) are killed each day in Indochina. You could arrange to show the Air War slides to candidates and/or their staffs or show blow-ups of a few slides depicting air war damage when candidates appear at public meetings.

The Citizens' Action Pledge can be a particularly effective tool during the election year. It is designed to force candidates and convention delegates to take a clear stand on the war by agreeing that

"The President...must immediately stop the bombing of Indochina and set the date for complete withdrawal, including the end of all support for the Thieu regime..."

and that

"The Congress...must cut off all funds for U.S. military involvement and support for military regimes in Indochina."

This pledge fundamentally differs from Nixon's recent proposals in that it includes stopping bombing and an end to support for Thieu, and sets a date for complete withdrawal, conditional only on release of POW's. Nixon's proposals still assert the right of the U.S. to exercise an equal role with the PRG and North Vietnam in organizing elections and a government in South Vietnam. This pledge, based on the principles of the Peoples Peace Treaty, provides a clear and reasonable basis for peace in Indochina.

But the Citizens' Action Pledge doesn't end with the candidates; it demands commitments to specific activities by the citizen, on the assumption that unless people continue to press very hard in a variety of ways, candidates' pledges will mean very little. The Pledge asks each person to get five more signers; it commits each signer "to ask candidates, in person or by letter, if they will sign the Candidates Pledge." The Pledge asks people not to buy Standard Oil products or Wonder Bread, a subsidiary of ITT, because they are two major contributors to the Air War, and to join demonstrations to help achieve the goals of the Pledge.

On a coordinated date, probably in late March, groups nationwide will be encouraged to visit campaign headquarters to ask candidates if they have signed the Pledge. On the same day a delegation of prominent persons will visit offices of Congressmen and Senators in Washington to ask the same question. This will be part of the nationwide campaign on the Citizens' Action Pledge and also helps to build massive demonstrations in April and May.

As of now, plans are developing for demonstrations on April 15 focused on war tax resistance and more broadly on the costs of war. On April 22 NPAC plans marches in New York and Los Angeles. In May the National Action Group is working with PCPJ to organize demonstrations at the time of Standard Oil and ITT stockholders meetings, and with veterans and G.I. groups on demonstrations at air bases.

400 Clergy Join POW Families in Vigil During State of Union Address

On January 20th, during the State of the Union Address 400 clergy and laymen from twenty states, carrying the names of POW's, joined families of prisoners of war in a vigil on the Capitol steps demanding that "President Nixon immediately stop the bombing of Indochina, stop Vietnamization and set a date for complete withdrawal." "It seems a clear fact," said Mrs. Virginia Warner whose son is a POW in North Vietnam, "that only by stopping the war can we guarantee the release of the prisoners and an accounting of the missing."

POW/Clergy Vigil-cont'd

The vigil was sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and Clergy and Laymen Concerned in cooperation with the Committee for Liaison with Families of Servicemen Detained in Vietnam and is viewed as a model of what can be done in local areas.

Leading the clergy delegation to the Capitol were Bishop James Armstrong, Methodist, South Dakota; Bishop Thomas Gambleton, Roman Catholic, Detroit; Sister Mary Luke Tobin, Sisters of Loretto, Denver, Colorado; Dr. David Hunter, Deputy General Secretary, National Council of Churches; Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Reverend William Sloan Coffin, Jr. Chaplain, Yale University.

Families of POW's who participated were: Ms. Valerie Kushner, Danville, Virginia; Ms. Jane Dudley, Washington, D.C.; Ms. Janet Holtz, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Ms. Sheila Cronin, Maryland; Ms. Olie Williams and Ms. Minnie Lee Gartley from Florida. Mrs. Gartley repeated the question she asked the President in a nationally televised interview with Dan Rather on January 2. "Has the Administration offered to set a date for complete withdrawal in exchange for release of prisoners of war?" She said, "President Nixon didn't tell the truth when he answered my question. Why won't the Administration make this offer?"

"This is the fifth State of the Union and the second Presidential election year that my husband has been a prisoner of war," said Valerie Kushner from Danville, Virginia. Dr. Harold Kushner was captured November 1967. "If I thought we were asking a lot, I might understand why it has taken so long, but it seems so easy." "We're not asking that anyone risk their lives--we're asking that the killing be stopped. We're not asking for families to send their husbands and sons far away to bring ours home. We're asking for all our men to be brought home."

In joining with POW-MIA families, the Reverend William Sloan Coffin, Yale University Chaplain, said, "The POW's and MIA's are being used by the President as an excuse for continuing to support the Thieu regime in Saigon." Coffin said, "It should be intolerable to all of us that our government continues the destruction of Indochina and makes these families suffer to keep a regime in power in Saigon that makes a mockery of the freedoms for which Americans are urged to go and risk their lives."

Bishop James Armstrong announced that he and Sister Mary Luke Tobin wrote a letter to all the families of POW's explaining "Why we are joining with POW-MIA families to demand that the President set a date for complete withdrawal." In part, the letter to the families read, "We know that what we do at the Capitol is a small gesture, but we believe it can be a beginning of renewed efforts by all of us working together to end the killing and gain release of the POW's and accounting of the missing."

Many participants in the Washington Vigil said they would plan further activities on this same theme in their local areas. In light of President Nixon's recent statement of Administration policy which guarantees continuation of the war for a long time, these activities are particularly important. Can you join with others in your area to organize a similar vigil carrying the names of American POW's? Lists of the names of POW's are available from FOR. It is also possible that we can suggest a POW family in your area who might be willing to participate.

Harrisburg Trial: Actions Planned for Forty Day Lenten-Passover Period

Why a Pilgrimage? Traditionally a pilgrimage has been a group of people embarking on a journey to a place of hope and renewed promise for the future. In some cases, pilgrimages have traveled to religious shrines; in others, as in the case of the early pilgrims to America, the journey has been to a new land of promised hope.

Harrisburg Trial-Cont'd

The Pilgrimage to and from Harrisburg will also be a journey of recommitment and renewal. Participants will bring energy, ideas, vitality to be shared; they will return to their communities with new strength and confidence to confront war and injustice. Because the Harrisburg trial illuminates the conflict between religious conscience and the amoral use of state power, because of the timing of the Pilgrimage to coincide with the Lenten/Passover season, it will be possible to make use of the rich symbolism of the religious tradition.

Organization of the Pilgrimage:- The nation will be divided into a number of regions or areas that will try to develop a network of local community groups. A regional coordinator will be chosen for each area. The coordinator of each region will be a resident of the area, so that he/she will have a personal interest in the local results as well as the national focus. The regional coordinator will be responsible for the formation of 40-Day Committees and a "core group" caravan that will travel throughout the area during the Lenten season. Ultimately, the regional person will be responsible for the organization of the Pilgrimage from the region to Harrisburg.

The Local 40-Day Committee:- The basic organizing unit for the Pilgrimage will be the 40-Day Committee. Each group will relate to those issues that are important within its own local area. Several actions and activities should be planned focusing local concern on those problems. It will not be difficult to show that the issues raised by the Harrisburg trial relate closely to local problems; despite local differences, a national pattern exists.

An attempt should be made by each local group to develop alternatives to the institutions that are causing the problems. On-going projects should be instituted that can bring about real change in the make-up of each local community. Finally, it is hoped that some members of the local committee will come with friends on the final days of the Pilgrimage and arrive with the caravans in Harrisburg. It should be noted that the theme of "No business as usual" should be applied to people who would hide behind local concerns in the latter effort.

Core Group Caravans:- In each region, groups of people will travel throughout the area during the Lenten season. These people will serve a dual function. First, they will serve as itinerant organizers, putting together organizations where there are none, helping local existing groups to expand and to form temporary or permanent coalitions with other groups. Secondly, the organizers will serve as information resources. Each caravan will have people well versed in many different problems confronting the nation and society. The caravans can be supplemented by the addition of experts in certain fields, defendants, and other speakers as requested by the local communities. It should be noted that the travel of the defendants will be limited by their courtroom requirements.

National Staff:- In Harrisburg, there will be a group of people working in the national office whose sole function will be to service the local communities and regions and to develop a program of activities in the Harrisburg metropolitan area.

For more information contact: Harrisburg Defense Committee
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Igal Roodenko, chairman of the War Resisters League, will be on a national speaking tour March through May. For information on dates when he will be in your area contact War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10012 Tel.: (212) 228-0450.