

SPC E-newsletter August 22, 2021

Dear SPC Members and Friends,

First, an appreciation for your patience. For the last two months we have been sending out much shorter, event-driven e-newsletters, and the timing has been irregular. As more people had gotten vaccinated, the organizing options started opening up and with that, we had less time to put into maintaining what the e-newsletter had become so had to adapt. Now, with the increase of the Delta variant locally, the energy is changing again, and we'll see how activism (and the e-newsletter) continues to evolve.

Through this all, SPC has recognized the incredible importance of maintaining connections among people, and we have tried to do that. As we continue changing with changing circumstances, we would appreciate any feedback you have on what would be helpful to you.

This issue focuses on SPC updates - on what SPC's projects and the coalitions SPC is a part of have been doing - and ways for you to participate.

We also have resources on Afghanistan. Our hearts go out to the Afghan people - for what they have been through for 20 years, and for what they are going through now. The Syracuse Peace Council opposed the US invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. We have continued to oppose militarism and war as the solution to terrorism and oppression, and have long called for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, as President Biden has recently done. The speedy and frightening consequences of the US withdrawal are leading many to believe the US military should have remained in Afghanistan. But we disagree. We are working on a more complete statement on the situation, which we will send out as soon as it is done.

Here's what's in this week's e-newsletter:

1) Resources on Afghanistan

2) SPC Project Updates

- a) Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON)
- b) Justice for Palestine
- c) Nuclear Free World
- d) Beyond War and Militarism Committee
- e) E-newsletter/E-communications
- f) Steering Committee
- g) Plowshares Craftsair
- h) Intern for the Fall 2021 Semester

i) Please consider donating

3) SPC in Coalition (we're in several other coalitions, but don't have reports on them; in particular, we are part of AGREE [Alliance for a Green Economy] and ACTS [Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse])

- a) Urban Jobs Task Force
- b) CNY Solidarity Coalition
- c) SPAARC (Syracuse Police Accountability and Reform Coalition)

4) Presentes! Mourning the recent passing of two dear friends - John Fitzsimmons and Jack Ramdsen.

1) Resources on Afghanistan

Statements from other peace and social justice groups have started coming out. Read statements by Stop the War (UK), Brooklyn for Peace, Massachusetts Peace Action, Ban Killer Drones, and United National Antiwar Coalition.

ACTIONS TO TAKE. [CodePink's website](#) has a **great list of actions and more resources:**

- [Hold Biden and Blinken and the U.S. accountable for Afghanistan.](#) This email to President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken contains an excellent list of what we urge them to do, concluding with "The U.S. must learn from this debacle by investigating, and holding people accountable, for 20 years of epic failure. The U.S. must cease its military interventions around the world and cut the runaway Pentagon budget. We must stop destabilizing the Middle East and Southwest Asia, including lifting sanctions on Iran, stopping weapons export to the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, and the UAE, and pulling our troops out of Iraq and Syria."
- [Tell your Senators to support the National Security Powers Act.](#) This Act contains three parts: war powers reform, arms export reform, and national emergencies reform. See the website for more details.
- [Demand your Rep. support Barbara Lee's bill to cut the Pentagon budget.](#) H.Res. 476 would redirect \$350 billion from the military to increasing the U.S.' diplomatic capacity and domestic programs.
- [Support women refugees.](#)

RECORDED WEBINAR. [Afghanistan: Who's to Blame and What Next](#) with:

- Retired colonel and former State Department official Ann Wright, who helped open the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan in 2001

- Former Marine and State Department official Matthew Hoh, who resigned from his post in Afghanistan in protest over the U.S. escalation of the war
- Dr. Zaher Wahab, who was born in Afghanistan and served as a senior advisor to Afghanistan's Minister of Higher Education in Afghanistan for five years from 2002-2007, and was instrumental in designing and teaching the only Masters Degree program for teacher education faculty throughout Afghanistan.
- Phyllis Bennis, is the director of the New Internationalism Project at Institute for Policy Studies, and focusing on Middle East, U.S. wars and UN issues.

The panelists respond to a recording of Pres. Biden's recent speech, providing analysis and suggestions on how to hold the U.S. accountable, and what the U.S. should do at this point.

For a good, short analysis, check out [Washington's War in Afghanistan Is Over. What Happens Now?: President Biden was right to withdraw US troops:](#) by Phyllis Bennis. Phyllis explains that "Despite 20 years of occupation, the United States couldn't 'win' militarily either—**because there is no military solution to terrorism.**" Also, the U.S. and its allies tried to create a whole new government in Afghanistan which was "completely at odds with Afghanistan's long-standing cultural and political traditions," so the military the Pentagon created was supposed to be fighting for a government that most of its soldiers never supported. She also addresses the bleak situation of Afghan women - that no political entity in Afghanistan fully supports women's rights - not the Taliban, the remnants of the Afghan government, the warlords or the militias. The U.S. must be held accountable, and she concludes with a list of next steps:

"It won't be easy for Afghans going forward, but the withdrawal of US troops is a necessary, if still insufficient, precondition for ending that war.

- Make the end of the recent bombing/drone raids and CIA death squad activities permanent.
- Support UN and other international efforts to create a humanitarian corridor and guarantees of safe passage for Afghan and international humanitarian workers.
- Fund a massive international Covid assistance program for Afghanistan.
- Expand qualification categories for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers to come to the United States, reduce paperwork required to qualify, and add 20,000 new slots to match Canada's commitment to accept 20,000 additional vulnerable Afghans for resettlement.
- Given the legacy of US actions in Afghanistan, begin the process of officially acknowledging US responsibility for the war's impact on Afghan people."

[Reckoning and Reparations in Afghanistan](#) is Kathy Kelly's argument that the U.S. owes reparations to Afghan civilians for 20 years of war and impoverishment. Kathy has been to Afghanistan many times.

ARTICLE. Brown University's Cost of the War Project graphically **shows the costs of the war in Afghanistan**, in terms of both [money spent](#) and [Afghan civilian's lives](#) from 2001-2021. Spoiler alert: From 2001-2021, the U.S. costs for war in Afghanistan (which includes operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan) was **\$2.261 trillion** - with little of that going to development or to the needs of the Afghan people. And about 241,000 people have been killed in the Afghanistan and Pakistan war zone since 2001. More than 71,000 of those killed have been civilians. Read these pieces (and a related paper, [Afghanistan's Rising Civilian Death Toll Due to Airstrikes, 2017-2020](#)).

[Afghanistan papers: A Secret History of the War](#) by Craig Whitlock is a powerful investigative report put out by the *Washington Post* in 2019. The **documents were generated by a federal project examining the root failures of the war**, including more than 2,000 pages of previously unpublished notes of interviews with people who "played a direct role in the war, from generals and diplomats to aid workers and Afghan officials. In the interviews, more than 400 insiders offered unrestrained criticism of what went wrong in Afghanistan and how the U.S. became mired in nearly two decades of warfare." Craig has written a book, *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War*, which will be published this month. You can also listen to [his recent 15-minute interview](#) *Democracy Now* August 19.

In [U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan Was a Recipe for Collapse From the Start](#), Stephen Zunes argues that yes, Biden miscalculated horribly about what would happen in Afghanistan when the U.S. pulled out, and there should be an investigation, as well as plans to open the U.S. to Afghan refugees. But it was still correct to pull out. Stephen writes that **we must acknowledge the long-term responsibility in creating the crisis over the course of 20 years**. He doesn't see it as "a military victory by the Taliban. It was the political collapse of the U.S.-backed regime.... [Biden has] unfortunately failed to acknowledge how the United States was largely responsible for setting up and maintaining that decrepit system ... The United States allied with warlords, opium magnates, ethnic militias, and other unrepresentative leaders simply due to their opposition to the Taliban and with little input from ordinary Afghans themselves."

[Bernie Sanders, Barbara Lee Call for Opening US to Refugees From Afghanistan](#) by Sarah Zhang talks about the refugee crisis and that **the U.S. so far has not announced any mass refugee resettlement plans**. Bernie stated that, "After 20 years of U.S. effort Afghanistan was left with a corrupt government and an ineffectual military. At this moment, we must do everything we can

to evacuate our allies and open our doors to refugees.” And Rep. Barbara Lee wrote, “Let’s be clear: there has never been, and will never be, a U.S. military solution in Afghanistan. Our top priority must be providing humanitarian aid and resettlement to Afghan refugees, women, and children.” Meanwhile, U.S. defense contractors profited greatly from the war.

[Blood in the Sand](#) by Jeffrey Sachs **puts the war in Afghanistan in the context of other U.S. military interventions**: “What these cases have in common is not just policy failure. Underlying all of them is the US foreign-policy establishment’s belief that the solution to every political challenge is military intervention or CIA-backed destabilization ... So instead of alleviating suffering and winning public support, the US typically blows up the small amount of infrastructure the country possesses, while causing the educated professionals to flee for their lives.” He then gives details of how much the U.S. spent for what - and less than 2% went to the Afghan people for basic infrastructure or poverty-reducing initiatives.

2) SPC Project Updates

a) Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON)

This has been a very active summer for NOON.

In July, NOON and other allies supported and worked with elders and youth from Onondaga in organizing a 6-mile “Every Child Matters Walk” from Onondaga to the so-called Columbus Circle to commemorate and remember all those who died and those who were cruelly treated in the so-called “Indian Boarding Schools.” It was a powerful testimony - view a video of the rally [here](#).

NOON, in collaboration with Women of Italian and Syracuse Heritage ([WISH](#)), has been making and distributing, "Celebrate Diversity, Replace Columbus" [lawnsigns](#) for free throughout Syracuse. Even though Mayor Walsh has said that the Columbus Statue will be removed, there are political and financial forces that have mounted a serious push back campaign to keep the statue where it is. Some Syracuse residents of Italian descent strongly disapprove of the Mayor’s decision, and the Monument Corporation has filed a lawsuit contending that the Mayor does not have the authority to remove the statue. We need to continue to show that the majority of Syracusans want the statue out of the downtown Circle, and favor the development of a Heritage Park. Help get the statue out of the Circle.

- [FAQ on the Columbus Statue Removal from the Circle](#)
- [Where to pick up a lawn sign](#) (delivery is also an option). Contributions to defray cost welcome, but not necessary.
- Buttons and window signs will be available soon.

At Mayor Walsh’s invitation NOON members participated in the Heritage Park and Circle Commission, to help re-name and repurpose Columbus Circle after the statue is removed.

NOON also helped with fundraising efforts to support the traditional Chiefs and Clanmothers of the Gayoghó:no' (Cayuga) Nation. And we are working with our partners from Onondaga in the [Witness to Injustice program](#), in which Native and non-Native friends are continuing to raise awareness and knowledge about the history of the attempted genocide of Native Peoples and their powerful, and continuing resistance and resilience. If you know about organizations who would like to experience this program, you can contact Cindy at cindysquillace@gmail.com. Note that there is an online version of the program available.

--Cindy Squillace and Jack Manno

b) Justice for Palestine

The Justice for Palestine (JFP) committee has been working to build support for the Palestinian Children and Families Act, H.R. 2590 in Congress. This legislation would prohibit US military aid (taxpayer dollars) to Israel from being used to fund a) the military detention, abuse, or ill-treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention; b) the seizure and destruction of Palestinian property and homes in violation of international humanitarian law; or c) Israel's unilateral annexation of Palestinian territory in violation of international humanitarian law. [Please sign and share the petition](#) for our members of Congress to cosponsor the bill (Rep. Katko) or introduce companion legislation (Senators Schumer and Gillibrand).

JFP has also been supporting the work of the Good Shepherd Collective on their Defund Racism campaign, which calls on NYS Attorney General Letitia James to open investigations into the tax-exempt status of NY-based organizations that directly sponsor Israeli settler organizations working to displace and dispossess Palestinian families in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. [Learn more and sign the petition to AG James here](#). If you are part of an organization that would like to endorse the campaign, [you can fill out the endorsement form here](#). Our members also have a presence at the intersection of Erie Blvd & E. Genesee St. in DeWitt from 4:15-5:00 pm on Tuesdays and Fridays to hold signs in support of the Palestinian people living under siege in Gaza and military occupation in the West Bank.

If interested in getting involved, contact michaela@peacecouncil.net.

-- Michaela Czerkies

c) Nuclear Free World

On Friday, August 6 (Hiroshima Day), the Nuclear Free World (NFW) Committee of the SPC held banners on the Spencer Street bridge over Route 81. The banners read "Step Back from the Brink of Nuclear Disaster" and "Hiroshima August 6, 1945--Never again!"

On Monday, August 9, NFW gathered in front of the State Office Building on E. Washington Street to commemorate the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan 76 years ago. The commemoration is part of the [Back from the Brink Campaign](#), a national campaign NFW is

organizing around locally. The campaign calls on municipal, county and state elected officials to sign a letter to President Biden and Congress asking them to implement five common-sense policies to prevent nuclear war. Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh and County Legislator Mary Kuhn have already signed, and spoke at the event, which you can see on SPC's Facebook page [here](#) and [here](#).

[Sign our petition asking local elected officials to sign on to the letter here.](#)

[See the letter and a list of the signers across the country here.](#)

By getting endorsers for the Back from the Brink Campaign, you can help the Nuclear Free World Committee build grassroots support to pressure Congress to reform our nuclear policy. We must build a nationwide movement to bring our world back from the brink of nuclear disaster.

If interested in getting involved, contact drswords@gmail.com.

-- Margrit Diehl and Diane Swords

d) Beyond War and Militarism Committee

The challenges are many for the *Beyond War and Militarism (BWaM)* Committee, a joint committee of SPC and NY Solidarity Coalition. The group's mission is to challenge the never-ending wars and to resist the increasingly militaristic culture of the U.S. We see the work of the committee as the very essence of the Syracuse Peace Council, through education and advocacy.

Since culture – our beliefs, values, and way of thinking – is akin to the water in which fish live – most people don't even think about it and it is extremely difficult to change, especially when powerful government, military, and economic structures support it. The past year-and-a-half of COVID-19 has made it doubly difficult to organize educational events for the general public, to speak to students in colleges and high schools, and even to have a presence for resistance on the streets!

We have had several webinars, including one on the 800+ U.S. military bases around the world and another focusing on the environmental impact of the U.S. military (huge!). As we move into looser COVID restrictions, *BWaM* will be considering how to work more closely with national and international organizations such as *World Beyond War* and *Veterans for Peace*, to support anti-war and anti-militarism projects and to make them relevant to the Central New York region.

Right here in Syracuse, we are ground zero for war making, with Hancock Field Air National Guard's 174th Attack Wing, where drone pilots are trained to drop bombs, and weapons manufacturers like Lockheed Martin are key to a war economy. The opportunities are many for

expanding local citizens' awareness of this support of militarism and its negative impacts, as an insidious part of our local community.

--Julia Ganson

e) E-newsletter/ E-communications Update

As things continue to evolve with COVID restrictions and guidelines and the Delta variant, and with SPC's finances and capacity, we unfortunately will not be returning to our print *Peace Newsletter* (PNL) in the near future. While we've loved the PNL, it does cost money to produce and is challenging to mail out without doing an in-person mailing party. So for now, we'll continue to put out e-announcements and e-newsletters like this one to keep folks looped in on our work and how to plug in.

The large e-newsletter we'd been doing for the last year plus was put together by a team of three people, and won't be sustainable for us to do on a weekly basis moving forward. If you have any suggestions for e-newsletter content or format(s) that would be most useful for you as an SPC member, supporter, donor, or ally, please don't hesitate to get in touch! Contact carol@peacecouncil.net or michaela@peacecouncil.net.

Follow SPC on social media:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Twitter](#)

f) SPC Steering Committee

SPC's Steering Committee has continued to lead SPC through this last challenging year and a half, but we are a small group. We welcome new folks from all different parts of the community to contact us if you may be interested in supporting the Peace Council by serving on the Steering Committee - email spcsteeringcomm@peacecouncil.net.

The Steering Committee is primarily responsible for the organization's structural and financial sustainability, as well as its overall political direction. We meet monthly to discuss and make decisions regarding SPC's activities in these areas, working to ensure that SPC staff and volunteers can effectively carry out our Statement of Purpose. [Learn more about Steering Committee member agreements and qualities here.](#) Ideally, we're looking for folks who can attend the monthly meetings in addition to helping with short or long term projects, and can commit to at least two years.

g) Plowshares Craftsfair

In the summer, we put out applications for Plowshares, received many responses, and went through the jurying process. Currently, we are unsure if we will be able to have the craftsfair in person. We are still awaiting word on use of the Nottingham space and exploring alternative location options. There is also the issue of health implications of holding a large gathering. If we cannot hold a normal craftsfair, we intend to again offer a virtual version as we did last year; information on this option will be communicated separately when the time comes. However, we are remaining hopeful as well as proactive, and have decided to plan as if things were proceeding as they normally would. More info to come as things evolve.

h) Intern with SPC for the Fall 2021 Semester

SPC is seeking interns who are enthusiastic and passionate about working to create a world of peace, freedom, equality, and social justice and who are motivated to take action to end military aggression, imperialism, and all forms of oppression. We have several possible focus areas for interns for the Fall 2021 semester:

- Nuclear Free World Committee
- Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation Committee
- Social Media & E-Communications
- Plowshares Craftsfair Organizing & Promotion

[See details and instructions to apply here.](#) Please share with anyone you think might be interested!

i) Please consider making a donation to fund this important work for peace and justice - no amount is too small. [You can donate to SPC online here](#), or mail a check made out to "Syracuse Peace Council" to:

Syracuse Peace Council
2013 E. Genesee St.
Syracuse NY 13210

Keep an eye out for SPC's **summer fund appeal letter** coming by snail mail and available on our website soon!

3) SPC in Coalition

a) Urban Jobs Task Force

This summer, in coalition with the New York Civil Liberties Union, the Urban Jobs Task Force (UJTF) organized the community so it could raise its voice around the Environmental, Economic and Racial Justice issues of the I-81 project. Our efforts were many-pronged: designing and using a cell phone alert system, neighborhood tabling, speaking at panels and to the press, holding signs and leafletting on busy city streets, organizing a march through the affected areas of the Southside followed by a press conference at the State Office Building, turning people out

for a very visible “Justice Presence” at the Draft Environmental Impact Statement Hearing (DEIS) at the ONCenter, and finally, helping and encouraging people to flood the NYSDOT with comments about Justice until the comment period deadline on September 14.

Currently, the UJTF and the City are meeting with the New York State Department of Transportation about a mandated percentage of the I-81 project’s work hours for city residents. Keeping a steady stream of comments going to the NYSDOT website I81opportunities@dot.ny.gov is critical. [Here](#) is a link to the UJTF Guide on DEIS comments and our talking points on Economic Justice. The UJTF is grateful for the support from its members, allies and the community-at-large. Together, we will make the I-81 project a JUST one!

-- Aggie Lane

b) CNY Solidarity Coalition

CNY Solidarity Coalition, over the past year, has continued to meet virtually, and engaged in the following actions:

- Held regular rallies and sent messages and calls to legislators in support of S.1: For the People Act, and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, among other reform bills.
- In collaboration with statewide Invest in Our New York Coalition and Syracuse DSA, advocated for raising NYS taxes on millionaires. Successful in raising \$5 Billion in taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers.
- Worked with Families for Lead Freedom Now, Legal Services, DSA, and others advocating for lead testing, code enforcement and other help for families.
- I-81 Project: ongoing work with NYCLU, Urban Jobs Task Force, and others to promote economic, environmental, and social justice in the replacement of I-81
- Supported marchers for racial justice following George Floyd’s murder. Worked with ReBirth, NAN, SPAARC, Center for Community Alternatives.
- With NY Health Care Coalition, advocated for passage of the NY Health Care Act.

In-person meetings have tentatively resumed with precautions.

Join our mailing list at our [website](#). Follow us on Twitter: [@CNYSolidarity](#) and [@IndivisibleNY24](#) and Facebook: www.facebook.com/cnysolidarity/ and www.facebook.com/groups/IndivisibleNY24

-- Peter McCarthy

c) SPAARC (Syracuse Police Accountability and Reform Coalition)

SPC is an active member of SPAARC, contributing information and analysis about militarization of the police, and interconnectedness between the wars abroad and the wars at home. This last month SPAARC helped with Black Lives Matter Syracuse’s ice cream social and recognition of

Black August. SPAARC is also working on a report to act as a counterpoint to the City of Syracuse's Police Reform and Reinvention Plan.

--Carol Baum

4) !Presentes!

We mourn the recent passing of two dear friends, John Fitzsimmons and Jack Ramsden. "¡Presente!" is Latin American Spanish indicating the spirit of the deceased remains alive among us.

John Fitzsimmons, ¡Presente!

After a brief hospitalization our quiet but feisty friend, John, died on April 25 at the age of 91. He will remain in our memories as a grassroots justice and peace activist with a dry sense of humor.

We first knew John when he joined the CNY SOA Abolitionists working to close the notorious U.S. Army School of the Americas. He would annually join us in our annual treks to Fort Benning, Georgia to protest the anti-insurgency and torture tactics being taught there.

Before frailty set in, John was a steadfast "street heat" demonstrator against the NYS National Guard's 174th Attack Wing at Hancock Airforce base, home of the MQ9 reaper drones.

An event we fondly recall is a Pastors for Peace caravan that we accompanied to the international border Peace Bridge in Niagara, NY. The U.S. Customs denied its truckload of computers for Cuba entrance to Canada. A phalanx of State Police in riot gear blocked our presence. In the tense and unruly situation, John, unintimidated, and one other person confronted the troopers. Eventually we found ourselves carrying the computers, one by one, across the long bridge.

John was a regular financial supporter to SPC and the Syracuse Center for Peace and Social Justice. And he was ready to volunteer when needed... We remember he alone painted the ramp in front of the Center.

To learn more of John's interesting life, please [read his obituary here](#).

-- Ann Tiffany

Jack Ramsden, ¡Presente!

The Peace Council, and particularly our Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation project, are deeply saddened at the passing of Jack Ramsden.

Jack was a kind and caring man who generously shared his time and talents with his loving family and the community at large. A native of Marietta, NY, Jack returned to Syracuse with his

family in the 2000s and became active first with NOON and then more broadly with SPC. He was not someone to jump into the spotlight, but a hardworker who was happy taking on a wide range of tasks.

Perhaps Jack's greatest contribution was the scores of hours he spent researching fracking leases and recruiting and training others to join in that work. That dogged research, turned into compelling maps, demonstrated that fracking was a danger here in Central New York. These images fueled much of the organizing which spread from here elsewhere in NYS, leading to the groundbreaking fracking ban which has protected our water, air and communities.

Jack also spent hundreds of hours organizing and staffing outreach tables for NOON, picking up and cutting the PNL for many years, working persistently for a full cleanup of Onondaga Lake and more. As we came to know one another, Jack, who was in the US Army and then worked as a US Park police officer and park ranger, shared his recollections of arresting protesters at events in Washington, DC. He recognized that he was now working with some of the folks he had arrested in prior life, a history which troubled him.

Jack's obituary said he was "proud to be affiliated with" Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation and other groups and encouraged donations to the Peace Council in his honor. Jack's work lives on in our collective efforts to protect Mother Earth and all its beings.

Read Jack's own reflections on his life and evolution, written for the *Peace Newsletter* in 2009 [here](#).

--Andy Mager