

# RPEC NEWS

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

January-February 2009

## Inside

Reflections	2
Happenings	5-7
Humor	8-9
Obama, Niebuhr, and Peace Activists	10
Calendar	11

## Support RPEC

Donate a used automobile or other vehicle.

Make your contribution through Vehicles for Charity.

Call us at 232-1002 for more information.



Next Newsletter  
March 10

RPEC  
Web Page:  
[www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org)

## Profiles in Peacemaking

### Through the Heart of Darkness toward Healing

#### Jerzy Nowak and the Virginia Tech Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention

John Williamson



Dr. Jerzy Nowak

Dr. Jerzy Nowak's personal journey has taken him across three continents, and following a recent tragic loss, it is taking him in a new direction with a focus on building peace. Growing up on a farm in Poland, he developed hands-on experience with an integrated approach to agriculture that provides year around income. He went to university in Olsztyn, and in 1973, after completing his doctorate in plant physiology and biochemistry, with help from the university vice-president, he was able to go to West Germany for post-doctoral work. Then, after teaching in Nigeria and conducting research in Germany, he moved to Canada in 1983, eventually taking a professorship at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. While based there, he attended an international horticulture conference at Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, where he "really fell in love with the place."

While living in Nova Scotia, Jerzy met and married Jocelyne Couture, a vivacious and charismatic woman originally from Quebec, who was also teaching at the same college. With their daughters, Francine and Sylvie, they moved to Blacksburg in 2000, where Jerzy became head of the Department of Horticulture. Sustainable/low input agriculture and landscape management became goals of his research, and economic diversification of Southside and South West Virginia was the primary objective of his outreach program. Jocelyne Couture-Nowak, concerned about America's gun culture, liked Blacksburg where she felt safer than in American cities.

The sense of safety proved illusory, though. Violence shattered their lives and many others on April 16, 2007, when a mentally deranged student, Seung-Hi Cho, systematically shot 32 people on the Virginia Tech campus, before killing himself. Jocelyne's classroom suffered the most casualties, with the instructor and 11 students killed and six wounded. In a March 2008 issue of the journal *Traumatology*, Jerzy and his colleague, Dr. Richard

(Continued on page 3)

**RPECNEWS**

is a publication of the  
Richmond Peace  
Education Center

400 W. 32nd Street  
Richmond, VA 23225

Phone: (804) 232-1002

E-mail:  
rpec@rpec.org

RPEC Web Page:  
<http://www.rpec.org>

**RPEC STAFF**

Executive Director:  
Adria Scharf

Asst. to the Director  
Paul Fleisher

Office Manager  
Johnnie J. Taylor

**NEWSLETTER STAFF**

Editor:  
Bill Gerow

Newsletter Committee:

John Gallini  
Shirley Silberman  
Cathy Woodson  
Judy Bennett  
Adria Scharf  
Francis Woodruff  
John Williamson  
Jennifer Lewis

The opinions and announcements in  
RPECNEWS are those of the  
individual writers and are not  
necessarily endorsed by RPEC.

RPECNEWS is published 6 times per  
year and has a circulation of  
approximately 1,250. We welcome  
article and calendar submissions.

Deadline for the next issue is Mar. 10.  
Contact Bill Gerow at  
[mbgerow@comcast.net](mailto:mbgerow@comcast.net).

# Reflections

Adria Scharf, Executive Director

My father's parents were European Jews who escaped the Holocaust. When members of your family have been persecuted by the Nazis, you learn certain lessons at a young age.

For example, you learn that we must prevent state violence from "ever happening again." You learn the importance of speaking out when you see others being persecuted, and of protecting human rights for all.

While my family was not religious, these values, part of a Jewish ethical tradition, were made clear. It saddens me to see Israel taking actions that so fundamentally undermine those moral lessons.

Hearing the nightmarish stories from Gaza this month made me wonder at the seeds of trauma and anger the Israeli defense forces have planted, with their actions, in the next generation.

Military domination will not produce long-term security for Israel and it will not produce reconciliation with the Palestinian people. It's a prescription for continued bloody conflict. Even if Israel's war weakens Hamas, the violence that it inflicts in the process will fuel more rage and resistance.

It is past time for a solution that is just and fair, and that promotes a lasting peace. One group calling for an "International Middle East Peace Conference to Facilitate a Final Peace Settlement" (see [www.Tikkun.org](http://www.Tikkun.org)) for Israel and Palestine argues:

The basic issues can be resolved. No matter how maximalist the fantasies are on each side about eliminating their enemies, the truth is that the majority of the people on all sides of the struggle would embrace peace if they thought it could be established in ways that provided for genuine security from military assault and terrorism for everyone, real justice for Palestinians, and acknowledgment of the wrongs that had been done to each side....

Unrealistic? Not at all. What has proved unrealistic time and again—whether we are talking about U.S. policy in Vietnam and Iraq, or Israeli and Arab policies in the Middle East—is the fantasy that one more war will put an end to wars. The path to peace must be a path of peace.

## **Mark your calendars**

**John McCutcheon Concert for Peace**  
**Sunday, May 17, 4 PM**  
**922 Park Avenue, Richmond**

# Profiles in Peacemaking

(Continued from page 1)

Veilleux, described their memories and reflections. Jerzy describes in painful detail: receiving fragmentary information about a shooting on campus; being unable to reach Jocelyne's cell phone, her failure to pick up Sylvie after school, intrusive calls from journalists, not knowing for sure until late that night that Jocelyne had been among those killed, his conversation with Sylvie, and his regrets about things not said or done before it was too late. He also describes the compassionate response of the community, friends, and colleagues, and the immediate and longer term challenges of coping with a radically changed personal reality.

Jerzy helped organize a non-religious memorial service in the University's Horticulture Garden to celebrate Jocelyne's life, and about 700 participated. Dr. Villeux recalled that her students felt compelled to speak at the service, saying, "They were incredible—sincere, articulate, glowing with admiration for her teaching and classroom persona and determined to pepper their talks with as much French as she would have wanted." She was called "Madame" by her students, and a *CollegiateTimes.com* article cited one of them, John Welch, as saying, "... no matter how tired we were from studying the night before, and how much we didn't want to get up and go to such an early class, we did, because we

know that Madame would be there greeting us at the door with a bright smile on her face and a lively flash in her eyes."

While such service can help start a healing process, how does someone move on after a loss like this, when without warning the world is violently shattered? Jerzy Nowak didn't find easy answers, but he has found ways to move forward that are enabling him to build meaning in the wake of his own and his community's tragic losses. He has helped conceive and develop the Hokie Spirit Garden Trail that will connect new and existing gardens and trails on campus and memorialize April 16<sup>th</sup> victims; it will include Jocelyne's Memorial Terrace Garden integrated into an expansion of the Horticulture Garden. He also threw himself into finishing a backyard garden project that he and his wife had planned.

But the project to which he has most fully devoted himself, the Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention (CPSVP), evolved from an idea of his daughter, Francine. When interviewed by a journalist for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, she was asked what she felt should be done with Norris Hall, where most of the shootings had taken place. She responded suggesting that a portion of the building should be devoted to a peace studies center. When she shared this idea with her father, he immediately agreed,

saying that the center should include attention to domestic crime prevention as well as international issues. He said, "We live in a society where dealing with the effects of crime and violence is much too painful and costly both emotionally and otherwise because the tools of crime are so readily available ..."

Initially, however, the University announced other plans for Norris Hall, but Jerzy was able to convince the Provost to open planning for the space to university-wide competition, and support for the Center began to grow. The proposal for it said that the CPSVP would "develop leaders for the new century, focusing on the formation of task-oriented multidisciplinary teams" and that it would build on the University's strengths in both applied science and outreach. Planning sessions for the Center involved about a dozen friends and colleagues, including Stephen Darr, who had lead the memorial service for Jocelyne. He is the founder and Director of Peacework, a local organization focused on sustainable international development and service.

In December 2007, the University announced that CPSVP would be established in the front wing of a renovated Norris Hall. In July 2008, Jerzy was appointed as its founding Director. He has taken a three year leave of absence from

(Continued on page 4)

# Profiles in Peacemaking

(Continued from page 3)

the Department of Horticulture to develop of the Center. Academically, the work is pulling him into new fields; most of this new collaboration has been with the Departments of Sociology, Political Science, and Interdisciplinary Studies. But he foresees much wider collaboration as the Center develops, and his experience with agricultural issues will be of importance in pursuing sustainable development as an essential strategy for building peace. A particular focus will be on developing resilient communities.

When asked what “peace studies” means, in an interview with *16 Blocks Magazine*, Jerzy described it as preventing and resolving conflict through addressing basic human needs. He said, “Violence prevention is ... a generic approach to human security. ... [W]e use this term, human security, to discuss food systems, energy, shelter, health and education. ... All this we see as a part of human security, security in the sense of not to guard people with a gun, but security in the sense of sustainability. I always link it to human dignity. That’s a basic focus.”

The CPSVP’s mission is, “To create and facilitate transdisciplinary research, education, and engagement opportunities that promote peace, prevent violence, and advance human security on a global scale.”

It seeks bring together expertise from different academic fields to work collaboratively. Incorporating such applied sciences as engineering, architecture and horticulture, along with social sciences is one aspect of the Center that is expected to set it apart from other peace studies programs. It anticipates drawing in students who might not otherwise see building peace as part of their studies and subsequent work.

The Center’s program will emphasize student-initiated research and hands-on, collaborative, interdisciplinary projects. Both undergraduates and graduate students will be involved. Participation will not be limited to those on campus. CPSVP will also organize lectures and seminars and plans to develop certification courses and workshops for K-12 teachers. It is seeking endowments for 32 student fellowships to commemorate those killed in April 2007.

The Center has begun to function in temporary facilities in Wallace Hall, organizing lectures last October that included “Leadership in Conflict Environments,” “Learning from Genocide,” and “Economics and Conflict.” It is also involved in a Youth at Risk Project in Southside Virginia. Once the renovations are completed, CPSVP will move to its home in Norris Hall, hopefully by this spring. Its open layout will allow the space to be configured as necessary to

accommodate student-faculty teams working on different projects. The Center has received a \$383,000 grant to develop a Global Technology Hub that will enable it to build international links and collaborate with projects to build peace. CPSVP will offer a minor in Peace Studies and Violence Prevention as well as post-graduate certificates in Cross-disciplinary Leadership (Leadership for Sustainability).

Currently, the CPSVP staff includes Jerzy as the Director, Connie Wallace (who had been his secretary in the Department of Horticulture and postponed her retirement to assist in developing the Center) as its Administrator, a part-time information technology manager, and two graduate students. More information on CPSVP is available on its website at: <http://www.cpsvp.vt.edu/>.

Jerzy believes the Center’s mission brings with it the moral authority to attract expertise both from within and outside the University. Eventually he anticipates returning to his original profession, but he sees his current work in developing the Center as critically important as well as his moral obligation. It seems that CPSVP offers a path toward healing for him and others in the Virginia Tech community through working to prevent violence and build peace.

# Happenings

## Recent Events

### Edu-Concert – 2009

By the time you get this, the youth of our community will have provided another great evening of entertainment with a peace focus. We hope many of you were able to attend. We will provide a report in the next issue.

### Eyes Wide Open

Adria Scharf

I participated in the American Friends Service Committee retreat in Chicago December 5-6 about the future of the Eyes Wide Open program and the peace movement. Coordinators from 35 state exhibits across the country were there. In some states, where the boots have toured for years, the program will be retired. In others, including Virginia, the exhibit will continue for at least the next year. The retreat included presentations by Raed Jarrar, an Iraqi blogger and analyst, and Peter Lems, who had just returned from Afghanistan.

Raed Jarrar argued against the Obama administration view that the United States should maintain a large residual force in Iraq after it withdraws most of the troops. He began by describing the internal politics of Iraq. The media here portray Iraq as divided between Sunni, Shia, and Kurds. He explained how incorrect that picture is, and how much more complex Iraqi politics are. In fact, the core political divisions in Iraq are between separatists and those who want a unified Iraq. Different

groups of Sunni, Shia, and Kurds fall on both sides of that debate. One of the problems is that the U.S. has been supporting separatist factions (groups who want to break up the country). He argued that the U.S. occupation is forestalling stability and national unification, and that the occupation should end quickly and completely.

Peter Lems described what he learned in Afghanistan. People there oppose the U.S. occupation, and see the U.S. as alien occupiers, not securers of peace. Civilians fear the U.S. bombings. He suggested that we may have to negotiate with the Taliban in order to bring about a resolution. (That raises a lot of questions about prospects for women's rights and human rights should the Taliban join in a power sharing arrangement, obviously.)

That discussion was followed by break-out groups focused on different target issues for the peace movement. I participated in the breakout group about the military budget. We strategized ways to build popular support for deep cuts to the military budget in the context of the economic crisis. AFSC will continue planning campaigns to "End the War and Occupation in Iraq," "Decrease the Military Budget," and "End the War in Afghanistan."

### Racial Justice

Tuesday, January 6th marked the beginning of RPEC's second series of conversations about Racial Justice in Richmond. Modeled after last year's dialogues on race, racism, and racial justice,

the event was attended by nearly twenty individuals and facilitated by new RPEC Board Member Seth Croft and Senior RPEC Board Member Cathy Woodson. The first session of this four part series focused on the participants' individual experiences with racism and analyzed racism as a system of advantage and disadvantage based on race rather than simply individual acts of prejudice. Participants shared their own personal examples of racism and white privilege ranging from someone who was assumed to be using food stamps at the grocery store because of her race to a person who was presumed to not be using illegal drugs by a police officer because she was white. The group will meet three more times, culminating in a final session that will create an action plan for addressing one concrete example of racism in Richmond.

### RPEC Board Members

RPEC is pleased to welcome three new members to its Board of Directors starting January, 2009. Seth Croft and Malik Khan will serve three year terms while Maryam Ghariban will serve one year as a youth member.

Seth attended RPEC's conflict resolution training while working with Equality Virginia. He currently works as Institute for Equality Coordinator for ROSMY. A community activist, Seth brings prior board and grassroots experience.

Malik, a retired engineer, has

*(Continued on page 6)*

# Happenings

(Continued from page 5)

extensive experience with a wide array of local organizations including the Islamic Center of Virginia, RISC, and the Asian American Society of Virginia. Malik, a 2007 graduate of Leadership Metro Richmond, serves on the Family Peace Festival Committee.

Maryam attends Appomattox Regional Governor's School and is a certified conflict resolution leader with RPEC. Maryam participates in the Richmond Youth Peace Project's Martin Luther King Edu-concert. She also volunteers as a Farsi teacher. She is excited about providing a youth voice within the board and expanding RPEC's outreach to teenagers.

Current Board members are Ram Bhagat, Liz Canfield, Christine Clarke, Gordon Davies, Jonathan Mark, Eleanor Meleski, Jeremy Raw, Iman Shabazz, Santa Sorenson, John Williamson, and Cathy Woodson. In addition to fiduciary, policy development, and personnel responsibilities, Board members ensure that RPEC's work remains in sync with its mission.

## Fasters for Justice

RPEC member Nancy Gowen participated in a nine-day Fast for Justice in Washington, DC to close the prison at Guantanamo within 100 days. The group held a two-hour vigil and march each day of the fast from January 11 to 20, breaking their fast at a sunrise service on Inauguration Day.

"With our fast, we join our voices and our bodies with these men on hunger strike in the sincere hope that President Obama fulfills

his promise and ends the injustice that is Guantanamo immediately," remarks Matthew Vogel, one of the fast organizers.

## Upcoming Events

### RPEC's Conflict Resolution Team Stays Active; Seeks More Opportunities

Over the past several months, members of the RPEC CR training team have conducted several workshops for groups of adults and young people. Training participants have included ROSMY volunteers, Americorps trainees, Hanover County child-care providers, and adults who work with the Rappahannock Area Organization on Youth, as well as young people from the Winchester Greens Community Center and a Richmond foster-care program. Several additional programs for youth have already been scheduled for the coming months.

RPEC wants to continue building its CR program. We currently have almost 30 adult CR trainers, as well as about 20 teens, who are part of the RYPP CR training team. These trainers are eager for even more opportunities to share their skills with workplace groups, congregations, schools, youth groups, and others. If you know of an organization that might like to discuss the possibility of offering one or a series of conflict resolution workshops, please have them contact the RPEC office at 232-1002, or [rpec@rpec.org](mailto:rpec@rpec.org).

## Richmond Youth Peace Project News

### 5<sup>th</sup> Youth Peace Summit Set for April 25

Registration is now open for the fifth annual Richmond Youth Peace Summit. The full-day program for young people ages 13-19 will be held on Saturday, April 25 at St. Paul's Baptist Church Southside Campus. The event will run from 10 a.m. to 4:30 PM.

This year's Summit will again offer morning and afternoon workshops on a variety of topics of interest to teens, including topics such as conflict resolution, legal rights, yoga, radio production, vegetarian cooking, hip-hop culture, stress management, and dance. The Summit will also feature a youth-led performance of dance, music and poetry rather than a keynote speaker.

Registration for last year's Summit was completely full, with 120 registrants. This year we hope to expand to accommodate 150 young people. To assure themselves a place and to choose their workshops, participants must register in advance. Participants can register online at the Richmond Peace Education Center's web site—[www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org), by emailing [rypp@rpec.org](mailto:rypp@rpec.org), by U.S. mail, or by calling 232-1002.

RYPP is also seeking proposals for workshops to be offered at the Summit. Topics should in some way reflect a commitment to

(Continued on page 7)

# Happenings

(Continued from page 6)

peace, justice, and non-violence (including various means of positive self-expression through the arts.) Presenters with an idea for a 90-minute workshop for a group of about 15 teens should contact Paul Fleisher at rypp@rpec.org.

## Support RPEC

### Volunteer with the Richmond Peace Education Center

RPEC is run in large part thanks to the efforts of volunteers. We have a number of important volunteer jobs "available," and would welcome your involvement!

1. Office Assistant (5-8 hours per week): Answer phones, respond to queries, data entry, help with mailings, and more.
2. Bulk Mail Deliverer (8-10 times per year): After volunteers have put labels on letters or newsletters, you would drive the trays of newsletters to the Brook Road post office. The trays can fit in a car trunk or back seat.
3. Literature Table Coordinator: Help strengthen RPEC's presence in the community by coordinating and staffing the RPEC literature table at community events.
4. Join the Newsletter Committee: Help review, plan, and create the newsletter
5. Help Find Community Sponsors: Help recruit business and community sponsors for our youth peace summit and spring concert.

And, of course, we invite you to get involved in any of our pro-

grams. Email rpec@rpec.org, or call 232-1002, for more information.

### John McCutcheon Scheduled for May 17

John McCutcheon will perform in a concert to support RPEC on Sunday, May 17 at 4 PM at the VCU Performing Arts Center, 922 Park Avenue in Richmond. John has been sharing his musical message of nonviolence and solidarity since the mid-1980's and each time he brings a new twist to an old message. Tickets available from 232-1002, or at the door.

### Preschool for the Highest Bidder!

Longtime RPEC Executive Director Ken Willis and his wife Linda are offering a pre-school slot to a member of the RPEC community at their Grace Covenant Community School, located at First Mennonite Church, 601 E. Parham Rd., Richmond, VA. The school provides both pre-school and after-school child care and follows the Henrico County Public Schools calendar, so is open September until mid-June and is closed over the summer. Ken and Linda provided this gift (a year's tuition for the Preschool) to the auction, but it received no "bids" that evening. Therefore, the opportunity is still available.

The Preschool meets from 9 AM. to 12 noon. Two grades are offered; 3-year-old (must be at least 2 1/2 or potty trained by Sept. 8, 2009 - the day after Labor Day)

and 4-year-old. You may sign up for the three day option (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) or the five day option (Monday-Friday).

Grace Covenant Community School accepts all of God's children, regardless of race, faith tradition, country of origin, or economic status. The Preschool meets the annual requirements for Religious Exemption as set by the Virginia Department of Social Services which include Background Checks, CPR and First Aid certification.

Do you have or know a child who would benefit from such a pre-school experience? Place a "bid" on this slot. The highest bidder will be able to attend the morning preschool for 9 months, September 2009 through mid-June 2010. Your "bid" will go to support the Richmond Peace Education Center.

Email your "bid," your contact information, and your child's birth date to rpec@rpec.org. Whoever places the highest bid by February 25 will be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

For more information about the school, see <<http://gracecovenantcommunityschool.org>> or e-mail Linda@prsltchr@juno.com or by phone at 804.262.9023.

**Note:** If you are interested in "bidding," contact Linda before submitting your bid to let her know. If your child's birthday or your schedule is not an exact fit, she may nevertheless be able to work with you to make the arrangement work.

(Continued on page 11)

## Is Laughter the Answer to World Peace?

*A longtime member and supporter of RPEC wrote us a letter encouraging us to introduce some levity to the newsletter. Here's our response—a special two-page section on humor and peace, including quotes, jokes, and a cartoon. Enjoy! –RPEC*

You've gotta have fun while you're fighting to fix the world, because first of all, we don't always win, so it might get to be all the fun you'll ever have, and second of all, it's a better way to live. ...Y'all get down toward the end of your road, I want you all to be able to turn around and tell the young women who come behind you, and believe me, as women you are going to go through some special tests, that you just had a hell of a lotta fun raising hell." -Molly Ivins, humorist and commentator (1944-2007)

"Laughter deflects anger and waylays aggressive instincts." —James L. Doherty, *In the Beginnings: Foundations for the Millennium Ahead*

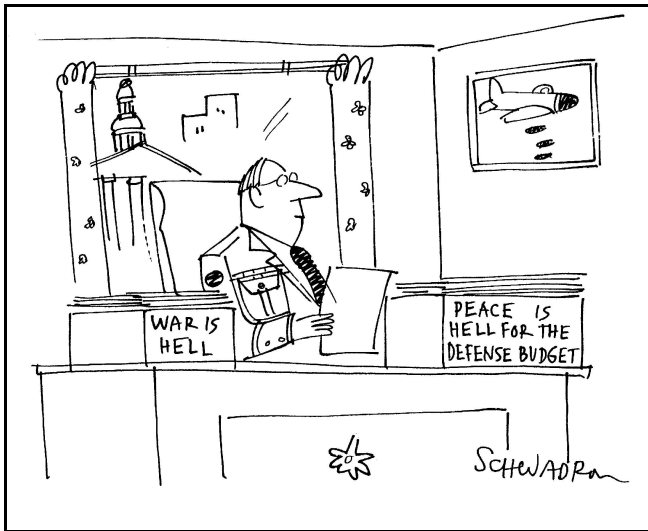
Peace is every step.  
The shining red sun is my heart.  
Each flower smiles with me.  
How green, how fresh all that grows.  
How cool the wind blows.  
Peace is every step.  
It turns the endless path to joy. -  
Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Buddhist Monk

By the way, before I get started, if anybody needs anything else at their tables, just speak slowly and clearly into your table numbers. Someone from the NSA will be right over with a cocktail. -Stephen Colbert at his 2006 address to the White House Correspondents' Dinner. (The NSA or National Security Agency, it has been recently revealed, was secretly monitoring domestic phone calls, e-mails, and other communication.)

"We can't define who we are on a serious note because nobody will listen. The only way to do it is to be funny about it." -Ahmed Ahmed, Muslim-American comedian featured in the PBS documentary *Stand Up: Muslim-American Comics Come of Age*



## Is Laughter the Answer to World Peace?



According to a survey in this week's *Time* magazine, 85% of Americans think global warming is happening. The other 15% work for the White House. -Jay Leno

Satire is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful. -Molly Ivins

Anyone who makes up their mind before they hear an issue is a fool. OK? Everyone is so busy wanting to be down with their gang. 'I'm a Conservative, I'm a Liberal, I'm a Conservative. Be a person. Listen. Listen.'" -Chris Rock, comedian

I would say that I'm a nonviolent soldier. In place of weapons of violence, you have to use your mind, your heart, your sense of humor, every faculty available to you....  
-Joan Baez

"Well, we like war! We like war! We are a war-like people. We like war because we are good at it. We know why we are good at it? Because we get practice. This country is only 200 years old and we've already had 10 major wars. We average a major war in this country every 20 years. So we're good at it! Good thing we are good at it because we aren't very good at anything else anymore." -George Carlin

*This section was compiled with help from interns Trammell Billups and Jen Lewis.*

## Obama, Niebuhr, and Peace Activists

Thad Williamson

Reading the collected literary works of Barack Hussein Obama in the days since November 4 has been an interesting experience. Like many in the Richmond peace community, I volunteered for Obama in the fall, and had paid close attention to his speeches and debate performances since his stunning win in the Iowa caucuses last January. Still, I hadn't actually read his two quite substantial books (*Dreams of My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*).

Reading through those pages now leaves one with three distinct impressions. *Dreams of My Father* leaves one stunned and amazed that a person with this set of life experiences and this degree of social justice consciousness has actually been elected president. *The Audacity of Hope* leaves one impressed by not only the author's familiarity and relatively subtle approaches to a range of policy issues but with his ability to link a wide range of concerns within a coherent interpretive frame.

Finally, one cannot help but be impressed by the degree to which the campaign Obama waged and won was consistent with the vision of politics he lays out in his books. The basics of that vision can be summarized as follows: America is a seriously flawed place, but the basic instincts of its people are good. Our history has often been awful and brutal, but we as a people have the capacity for change. Ordinary people can be the agents driving that change, but that can only happen if we recover a faith in public life—that is, in politics. But that, in turn, can only happen if we reconnect politics to moral values in a clear way.

Obama's vision has already re-made history and opened up new possibilities for America's future political development. But now that his presidency is upon us, it's worth taking a hard look at just what Obama's world view is, and the trajectory it suggests for the next four years and beyond. While Obama repeatedly articulates a small-r republican faith in ordinary people's capacity to shape



the future, it will be Obama himself calling the shots and shaping the agenda. Indeed, contrary to the hopes of many progressive activists calling for sustained mobilization and pressure to push Obama in a progressive direction, the evidence of *The Audacity of Hope* in particular suggests that Obama is not someone likely to bow to pressures of any kind unless or until he himself is persuaded of the wisdom of a given course of action.

So what then is Obama's world view? I will focus here on questions of war, peace, and international relations. *The Audacity of Hope* reveals Obama to be what might be called a progressive realist.

The "realist" part comes in Obama's acceptance of the basic framework of international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That framework is highlighted most obviously by the disproportionate power of the United States, backed by a massive military. Obama thinks the U.S. must play a lead role in world affairs, both to protect American interests and to help solve common problems, and that sometimes that lead role requires use of military force (as in Afghanistan).

Obama's realism is likely to make many peace activists uncomfortable. He does not think war is always wrong, and he does not think that American hegemony is necessarily a bad thing.

But Obama's form of realism is very different from the Bush-Cheney belief that America is both all-powerful and infallible. Obama recognizes that the U. S. historically has often played a destructive role overseas (he cites Vietnam and support for dictators, including in Indonesia as examples). He thinks that the "war on terror" (a phrase hopefully soon to be retired) cannot be won in Iraq or other military misadventures, but only by a more complex strategy in which military force plays a subordinate role. He does not call for cuts in the military budget, but does call for spending less on expensive weapons system and more on personnel and training. And he calls for paying attention to and devoting resources to the dire problems of the developing world, including Africa, for both humanitarian and practical reasons.

Obama's brand of realism is reminiscent of that of the mid-twentieth century Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr was deeply interested in social justice both domestically and internationally, but also very clear that we human beings are deeply motivated by our own self-interest and that justice, reason, and even love itself can never fully tame our tendency to act selfishly, especially when we act as a group via the nation-state. Niebuhr's understanding of the human condition led him away from pacifism; instead he embraced the military fight against Nazism and fascism in World War II. Yet at the same time, Niebuhr wrote favorably of the possibilities for using nonviolent civil disobedience to advance social change, particularly with respect to civil rights, in the process helping inspire Martin Luther King, Jr.

In a world governed by power, Niebuhr believed, those who hoped to advance justice and democracy needed to be willing to use power—hence his endorsement of the basic Cold War framework (one which Obama writes admiringly about). But Niebuhr also warned of the hubris that comes with believing that our own motives are pure and that our

(Continued on page 12)

# CALENDAR

## Meetings of Local Groups

<b>Every Sunday</b>	<b>Food Not Bombs Richmond-Meal Sharing</b> , 4:00 P.M. in Monroe Park. Hotline # 359-4880 for details
<b>Every 3rd Wed. Every Thursday</b>	<b>Amnesty International</b> , University of Richmond campus. Contact Ray Hilliard at 289-8289
<b>Every 3rd Saturday</b>	<b>Richmond Organization for Sexual Minority Youth (ROSMY)</b> , 7:00-9:00 PM. Call support line: 353-2077 for more information; 353-1699 for the administrative line.
<b>Every 4th Saturday Every 2nd Saturday</b>	<b>Equality Virginia</b> , 12:00 noon at the office. A political advocacy group working towards equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens of Virginia. Open to the public. Contact number is 643-4816.
	<b>Pax Christi Peace Community</b> - Call Paula Powdermaker for details - 355-7395
	<b>Walk for Peace</b> - 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM. Meet at the Boulevard entrance of the Virginia Museum. Wear black.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

<b>March 7</b>	<b>March to Stop the New Immigrant Detention Center and Demand Justice</b> —Saturday, 12-5 PM. Farmville, VA (location TBA) Sponsored by a growing coalition of groups. For more info (434) 906-0421 or <a href="http://www.thepeopleunited.org">www.thepeopleunited.org</a>
<b>April 20</b>	<b>Deadline for submissions for the 2009 Peace Essay Contest.</b> Download application form at <a href="http://www.rpec.org">www.rpec.org</a>
<b>April 25</b>	<b>Fifth annual Richmond Youth Peace Summit.</b> The full-day program for young people ages 13-19 will be held at St. Paul's Baptist Church Southside Campus. The event will run from 10 AM to 4:30 PM.
<b>May 17</b>	<b>John McCutcheon will perform in a concert to support RPEC</b> on Sunday at 4 PM, at the VCU Performing Arts Center

## Happenings

(Continued from page 7)

### The RPEC email list is growing. Don't miss important updates!

If you rely only on this newsletter to find out about local peace and justice activities, you're missing many events scheduled after we go to press. Join the 350 other RPEC members who keep track of up-to-the-minute happenings on the Center's email list. Each week they receive several emails telling you about programs, demonstrations

and other opportunities.

To sign up, simply send a blank email to: [rpec-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:rpec-subscribe@lists.riseup.net). If you need assistance, please contact the RPEC office at 232-1002

### 2009 Peace Essay Contest

This year's essays will respond to the theme: "Peace is costly but it is worth the expense." --African Proverb

What are the costs of building a peaceful life, a peaceful commu-

nity and a peaceful world? Think beyond finances. Think about the costs in personal comfort and human effort. What special contributions can young people make in paying these costs? Why would paying such costs of peace be worthwhile?

The contest is open to any elementary through high school student in Virginia. Prizes will be awarded in 4 different age divisions. The deadline for entries is April 20.

Download the contest entry form from [www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org).

*(Continued from page 10)*

power is limitless (just as Obama criticizes many of the side consequences of the Cold War, such as our involvement in coups abroad and the rise of the military-industrial complex at home).

What Obama hopes to do is to craft a broad new national security strategy with the same coherence as the Cold War containment strategy, but without the associated hubris. Such a strategy gives up on the idea we can spread democracy by force, but aggressively seeks to confront real security threats (such as loose nuclear weapons), using force when necessary. Importantly, Obama also recognizes the need to pay attention as well to “promoting peace,” a goal which centrally must include raising the standards of living of the one-half of the world’s population living on less than two dollars a day.

Overall Obama’s vision, if realized, would certainly represent a historic shift of orientation, and his presi-

dency promises a welcome return of the idea that sensible foreign policy must take seriously the perspectives of other countries and their peoples. What role might the peace community play in helping take advantage of the opportunity this presidency represents?

As noted above, I do not think it is realistic to suppose that activist pressure can alter Obama’s basic framework, including his commitment to periodic use of force. Obama has made it very clear he intends to send more troops into Afghanistan (even while pursuing a withdrawal from Iraq), and I don’t think public pressure can stop that particular train.

Where public pressure might pay real dividends is in ensuring that the “progressive” aspect of Obama’s realist outlook is not left on the shelf. For instance, Obama is well aware of the problems of world poverty and the role the IMF, World Bank and global debt have played in accentuating such poverty. Relatively early in his cam-

paign, he called for a doubling of foreign aid. Yet in the vice-presidential debate Joe Biden suggested increasing foreign aid might be one of the items to fall by the wayside as a result of the economic crisis.

Hopefully that was just another example of Biden putting his foot in his mouth. But the peace community and all those concerned with advancing justice need to make our voices heard and assure that the best promises offered by Obama are not sacrificed on the altar of expediency. The danger is that pledges to do something real to help the world’s poor and secure the basis for long-term peace are quietly forgotten while bigger ticket items (Iraq, Afghanistan, the economic crisis) hog the headlines.

That is a danger the peace community can help avert. While we cannot alter Obama’s basic framework for engaging with the world, we can insist that the new administration have the courage to live up to its own best principles.



## **Richmond Peace Education Center**

400 W. 32nd Street, Richmond, VA 23225

Non-Profit Organization U.S. Postage PAID Richmond, VA Permit #1119
---

Address Service Requested