

The Enduring Nuclear Threat; A Deeper Look: UFPJ webinar March 30, 2021

“Looking Back/Looking Ahead: Building A Moral Fusion Movement”

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“Somehow we must transform the dynamics of the world power struggle from the negative nuclear arms race which no one can win to a positive contest to harness man's creative genius for the purpose of making peace and prosperity a reality for all of the nations of the world. In short, we must shift the arms race into a ‘peace race’.” – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1964)

On June 21, 1982, at the conclusion of the United Nations (UN) Second Special Session on Disarmament, a million people rallied in New York City’s Central Park calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons, and huge solidarity demonstrations took place around the world.

That day I was among some 1,500 people arrested nonviolently blocking the gates to the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab, one of two U.S. Laboratories that have designed and developed all U.S. nuclear weapons and continue to do so. (The other is the Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico, the site of the original Manhattan Project.)

A comparable demonstration a year later led to my 1983 group trial, with others. In that trial, more than 35 year ago, we presented an International Law defense contending not only that nuclear weapons are illegal under numerous international treaties banning genocide, mass poisoning and targeting civilian populations, but that the Nuremberg Charter, ratified by the U.S., mandates a right of resistance to International Law violations.

In the 1980s fear of a nuclear war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was palpable and it was at the top of most people’s minds in the U.S. and around the world. But, coming on the heels of the many Civil Rights movements, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, the Women’s Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement and the Ecology Movement, the massive anti-nuclear movement that arose was *not* single issue. One only need look at the 61-page **Livermore Weapons Lab Blockade/Demonstration Handbook**, prepared by the Livermore Action Group for the June 21, 1982 nonviolent protest and civil disobedience at the Lab.

The first point in the Statement of Purpose reads:

“The ultimate goal of the Livermore Action Group is to further the cause of (1) global nuclear disarmament, (2) the de-militarization of American society, and (3) a redirection of economic priorities that provides for a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources at home and abroad.”

The Handbook includes extensive background on the Lab, its role in driving the nuclear arms race and nuclear testing in Nevada, the effects of a nuclear weapons use, and radiation health and safety. It calls out the role of the Lab’s management, the University of California, in lobbying for new nuclear weapons. It stresses the inextricable link between nuclear weapons and nuclear power and advocates for conversion of the Lab to research on safe energy alternatives.

The Handbook devotes a page to the 1961 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Prohibition of Nuclear Warfare, quoting from the resolution, that the use of nuclear weaponry “would exceed even the scope of war and cause indiscriminate suffering and destruction to mankind and civilization and, as such, is contrary to the rules of international law and to the laws of humanity”. Noting that this resolution was adopted by more than two thirds of the General Assembly’s membership, and that, “The United States voted against it in the General Assembly and has opposed efforts to withdraw legitimacy from nuclear weapons”, the article concludes: “The first-use and first-strike nuclear weapons that are being developed at Livermore and Los Alamos are in direct violation of international law.”

An article entitled, “U.S. Militarism; The War at Home and Abroad”, is prefaced with: “Many people opposed to nuclear weapons see the problem as a symptom of a pervasive militarism in American policy with far-reaching implications for all world citizens”. It begins: “The U.S. is at war. It has been in a state of war or war preparedness for over four decades. Soon the Reagan administration’s yearly spending will surpass the peak budget of the Vietnam war.”

The Handbook includes a history of nonviolent direct action, a discussion of the dynamics and politics of nonviolence, and nonviolent direct-action guidelines. There is a discussion of feminism and overcoming masculine oppression and information about forming affinity groups and making decisions by consensus.

The 1983 version of the Handbook added a Discrimination Introduction: “In the disarmament movement, it is important not only to struggle against bombs and missiles, but also to struggle against other forms of violence that confront us..... The two forms of violence [racism and homophobia] are strongly interconnected with the creation of weapons of destruction. After all, it is the same system that is responsible: a system based on domination, on the belief that some people have more value than others, and therefore have the right to control others. Because we believe it is the system and all of its forms of violence that we are fighting, we must make a commitment to fight the violence that occurs around us and between us.”

Despite the massive international anti-nuclear movement, following the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons fell off the public’s radar screen. It was almost as if the planet itself breathed a huge sigh of relief. People around the world hoped and believed that they had escaped a nuclear holocaust, and largely put nuclear weapons out of their minds. Most people believed that the threat of nuclear war had ended. But it hadn’t.....

It is increasingly clear that the multiple national and global crises we are confronting, including nuclear weapons, climate change, systemic racism, a growing wealth gap and rising national authoritarianisms arise from the same foundational causes, and that we are unlikely to prevail on any of them as single issues.

We need to come together as never before to build political power through durable, diverse, multi-issue coalitions, networks, and networks of networks based on our shared commitments to universal, indivisible human security.

There is an emerging movement that, I believe, has the vision and potential to bring together such a coalition and to build powerful political pressure from the bottom up - **The Poor People's Campaign; A National Call for Moral Revival.**

Exactly one year before his tragic assassination in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. declared: "I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.... we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, has picked up Dr. King's unfinished work, weaving the interlocking injustices of systemic racism, systemic poverty, environmental devastation, militarism and the war economy and a distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism, into one "moral fusion" campaign.

The Poor Peoples Campaign Moral Budget calls for cutting U.S. military spending by half (\$350 Billion) including by closing 60% of U.S. foreign military bases, ending the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere, and *dismantling and eliminating nuclear weapons.*

With active state-based organizations in 46 states, the burgeoning Poor People's campaign is being supported by an extraordinary range of constituencies including labor unions, faith organizations, racial justice, anti-poverty, environmental and peace groups, and is building political power through its We Must Do M.O.R.E. campaign – Mobilizing, Organizing, Registering and Educating for a movement that votes. United for Peace and Justice is proud to be a national mobilizing partner with the Poor People's Campaign. I urge everyone to find out more about the Campaign and consider joining your State's Poor People's Campaign organization.

As nuclear disarmament advocates, it is our responsibility to share our knowledge of the ever-present and growing dangers of nuclear war with other issue constituencies. Let us work together to understand the common causes of our multi-faceted crises as we work with the Poor People's Campaign and others to build the massive, multi-generational, multi-racial, international, *moral fusion* movement we will need to overcome systemic violence and build a peaceful, just, sustainable and inclusive world.

As Gandhi observed: "The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bombs even as violence cannot be by counter-violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred...."

And he explained how social transformation will come from the bottom up.

"We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice, but for practice by groups and communities and nations.... [Before] general disarmament . . . commences . . . some nation will have to dare to disarm herself and take large risks. The level of non-violence in that nation, if that event happily comes to pass, will naturally have risen so high

as to command universal respect. Her judgment will be unerring, her decisions firm, her capacity for heroic self-sacrifice will be great, and she will want to live as much for other nations as for herself.”ⁱ

ⁱ “The Matahna,” pp. 335-336 [CITE]