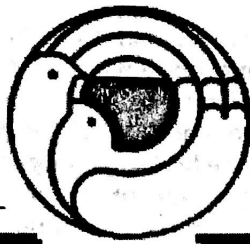


November-December
2023
Vol. 58 No. 5



Newsletter of **LEPOCO**
Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

LEPOCO Letter about Israel-Gaza War

On November 5, The Morning Call published a letter to the editor from LEPOCO's Stop the Wars Committee. The letter was drafted by Janet Ney and approved and signed by members of the committee. It was the lead letter on that date.

Release All Hostages, Stop Violence in Israel, Gaza

The world is a frightening place. Conflicts between nations, conflicts between people within nations, conflicts that threaten civilians have erupted in violence in multiple places. Too often, the only solution offered to conflict is armed combat. But war does not resolve problems.

Today, we are horrified by the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Hamas' deadly attack on Israel. Israel's fierce reaction has deepened the strife. The killing and kidnapping of civilians, young and old, death and destruction in Gaza, and the upheaval, displacement and suffering of civilians have brought grief and despair to people around the world. Too many people, in the thousands, have been killed as many others have been wounded or had their lives seriously disrupted. The community of peace-loving people cannot be silent. We raise our voices to call for a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza accompanied by the release of all hostages and the distribution of humanitarian aid to all who are struggling from deprivation of life's necessities.

Human rights and international law must be honored now and in the future. Love, not hate, will prevail when individuals and families seek to live with others as neighbors.

Janet Ney, Monica McAgon, Mimi Lang,
Pam Brubaker, Susie Ravitz & Nancy Tate

The U.S. & the Israel-Hamas War

"Blank checks" in foreign policy are dangerous. Europe slid into the devastation of World War I due to the unqualified support Germany promised Austria in punishing a Serbian act of terrorism. Last month the U.S. government gave Israel a blank check for punishing the Palestinians after the sudden and savage Hamas attack of October 7.

The punishment began with Israel announcing its determination to eradicate Hamas, and the U.S. declaring its unconditional support for Israel and its right to defend itself. After Biden and Blinken flew to Israel to embrace Netanyahu, and the U.S. moved an aircraft

carrier group to the eastern Mediterranean to assist its ally, Biden asked Congress to pass a \$105 billion emergency aid package to defend Israel and Ukraine, two causes which he linked. The U.S. already provides more than three billion dollars annually in military aid to Israel. Of course, every state has the right to defend itself. The issue is *how* - and the wisdom of an ally pledging unconditional support.

Both sides in the Israel-Hamas war have clearly committed war crimes. The initial Hamas attack, in which 1200 Israelis, mostly civilians, were murdered and 240 taken hostage, violated international laws against targeting civilians and against the taking of hostages. Israel's response to the attack began with a declaration of war against "human animals" and a "complete siege" of the Gaza strip, cutting off all food, fuel, electricity and water. This intensified a sixteen-year Israeli blockade of Gaza, the context of Hamas's attack. Israel's punishment has continued with a relentless bombing campaign that has now killed over 11,000 Palestinians, about 40% of whom are children. Air strikes and artillery fire, supplemented by an evacuation order demanding those living in the north to move to the south, have displaced some 70% of the 2.3 million people living in the Gaza strip. Israeli attacks, which have targeted infrastructure, health care facilities, schools, residential neighborhoods, and even refugee camps, have reduced much of the Gaza strip to rubble. Despite invoking the usual tropes - "Hamas strongholds," "terrorist tunnels," and "human shields" - it is clear that Israel has violated international laws against collective punishment, the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, the targeting of medical facilities, and ethnic cleansing. The air and artillery assault has now been followed by a scorched-earth land invasion producing more casualties and devastation. Biden's "blank check" to Israel means the U.S. has been left without any effective means of restraining its ally.

The U.S.'s unqualified support of Israel was, in part, intended to keep the war from becoming a regional conflict. That danger remains real - with artillery exchanges between Hezbollah in Lebanon and Israel, aggressions by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and Houthi rockets launched at Israel from Yemen. On at least three occasions, the U.S. has bombed Iranian-supported sites in eastern Syria. Hence, U.S. support of Israel could have the opposite of its intended effect and contribute to the danger of an enlarged war.

Beyond strategic considerations, the U.S. has paid a high price in world opinion for its unqualified sup-

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The U.S. & the Israel-Hamas War

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port for Israel. A U.N. General Assembly resolution calling for an immediate and sustained truce was overwhelmingly approved, with Israel and the U.S. among only 14 nations opposed. Diplomatic cables from U.S. embassies throughout the Middle East point out how severely the U.S.'s reputation has been damaged in the Islamic world. A number of European allies have broken with U.S. policy and called for a ceasefire. Some 500 members of the U.S. government have signed a memo opposing current policy, which lacks "clear or actionable redlines." Even Secretary of State Blinken conceded recently that the Israel's attack on Hamas has produced "far too many civilian casualties."

Above all, U.S. foreign policy, which we assume to be based on moral principles, is revealed to be hugely hypocritical. Eight months before the massive new arms deal for Israel, the U.S. president signed a declaration prohibiting such deals to nations likely to use the weapons to attack civilian targets or direct violence against children. So much for that. A proclaimed moral and political foundation of U.S. foreign policy - the defense of a "rules-based international order," used to justify support for Ukraine - has been exposed as a sham. The two-faced character of U.S. foreign policy is also evident in helping Ukraine gather evidence of Russian war crimes - for an International Criminal Court whose jurisdiction the U.S. refuses to recognize - while simultaneously refusing to call Israel to account. Jewish peace groups have been more vocal. Organizations such as IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace are calling for an immediate and lasting ceasefire in Gaza and the start of *real* negotiations for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that recognizes the rights of the Palestinian people.

~ Mick Baylor

Roots of LEPOCO

"Tonight we light the candles one more time. May they burn for those whose new year will never come. Tonight the flame must burn for those who died in the camps of Lebanon. For those who died in the bombing of Iraq, bombing Afghanistan, bombing of the Sudan" (later changed to include bombing of New York). (This song was written after the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon in 1982. The Peace Singers expanded the words to include other tragedies in our world.)

The words of the Middle East Medley sung many times by the LEPOCO Peace Singers reflect LEPOCO's deep concern for peace in the Middle East.

In May 1980, the LEPOCO Action Meeting adopted a position paper on the Problems of the Palestinians. Recounting the troubled history of efforts to reconcile

the differences between Israel and the Palestinians, the statement closed with the following:

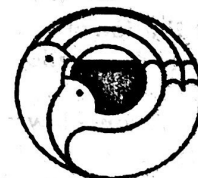
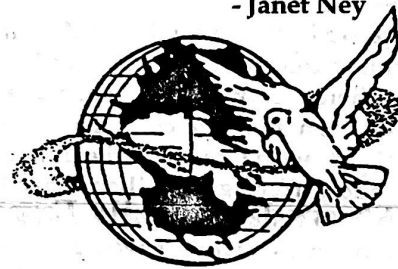
"We must begin to question whether our national principles and interests, as well as those of the Jewish people, are best served by an uncritical support of the Israeli government. Rather than a narrow single-interest policy, we must pursue a democratic foreign policy that accepts the rights of all people in the area."

LEPOCO vigils have supported Women in Black, a group formed by Israeli women in opposition to the actions against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. LEPOCO's opposition to nuclear warfare included support for Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli whistleblower, who revealed information about Israel's nuclear weapons program.

Individual LEPOCO members, including Susie Ravitz, Mimi Lang, and Vince Stravino, undertook trips to Israel with peace-seeking delegations in the early 2000s.

"And everyone 'neath the vine and fig tree shall live in peace and unafraid. And into plowshares beat their swords." (This is another song from the Middle East Medley.)

- Janet Ney



Newsletter of LEPOCO
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The LEPOCO Newsletter is published eight times a year by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern, a nonviolent, non-profit organization dedicated to peace in all forms.

Annual dues are:

Regular Member	\$35
Limited Income Member	\$10
Household Membership	\$45
Supporting Member	\$75

Articles/news should be submitted to one of the addresses above for consideration for the next issue of the newsletter.

Newsletter Staff: Tom Stinnett, Nancy Tate, Amanda Zaniesienko, Carol Baylor, Janet Ney, Rick Dow.

Thanks to all the people who collate and prepare the newsletter for mailing each month.

LEPOCO Steering Committee: Pam Brubaker, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Mohammed Khaku (ex-officio), Monica McAgdon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Stefan Rogers, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

Underground Reels & Spiels

Friday, January 19, 2024, 7 pm

Screening of

"Won't You Be My Neighbor"

This documentary is about the life and guiding philosophy of Fred Rogers, whose public television show for children, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," has been a source of enrichment for generations. Appalled by the violence he saw on TV, he offered children a charming alternative, which simultaneously entertained them with whimsical storytelling, fantasy, and puppetry, but also dared to delve into some of the important subjects that were not being addressed elsewhere in children's television.

This will be an uplifting film for a likely cold and dark January evening.

Directed by Morgan Neville.

2018. 93 minutes.

The program at the LEPOCO Peace Center will begin at 7 pm, on Friday, January 19, 2024, and conclude with a time for comments and discussion.

LEPOCO, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem (18018), Rosemont Lutheran Church campus. Enter at back door with sunflowers.

Second Thursday Vigils Expanded

After the Second Thursday Peace Vigil on November 9, several participants called for weekly vigils at the intersection of Third & Wyandotte Streets, in south Bethlehem, due to the tragic war in Israel and Gaza. We need a place to publicly share our opposition to this violence. Twelve people participated on November 9 and twelve people participated on November 16 - some the same both dates and some different. There will be no vigil on Thanksgiving Day, but vigils will resume on Thursdays, November 30, December 7 and 14. The vigils are 3:30 to 4:30 pm, due to the early arrival of darkness in November and December. If there is not a ceasefire in this horrible war, a decision will be made by participants about whether the vigils should be continued beyond December 14.

Those Fairs & Festivals & Markets

On September 30th, Monica McAghon, Mohammed Khaku, Bill Rosebrock, Nancy Johnston, and Dalton Young, took the LEPOCO display to the annual Buckingham Peace Fair. Light rain started the day that ended with welcoming sunshine. There were many friendly conversations, sharing news about LEPOCO's work and learning about the many groups represented at the Fair. Thank you to everyone who made this possible.

On November 18th, Amanda Zaniesienko, Monica McAghon, Susie Ravitz, Alex Colefield, Nancy Tate, Lynn Fraser and Jim Bloom staffed a LEPOCO table at the Easton Farmers' Market. There were interesting conversations with the Market shoppers on a day that was chilly and quite windy.

At both events we invited people to sign postcards addressed to President Biden. In Buckingham the postcard asked him to lead the way to a ceasefire and negotiations to end the war in Ukraine. In Easton the postcard asked him to work for the urgently needed ceasefire in Israel and Gaza -- in both cases realizing the significant U.S. role in providing arms for war.

Postcards are still available if you would like to sign one or encourage others to do so.

In mid-October Arielle Angel, editor of "Jewish Currents" quoted Puerto Rican Jewish poet, Aurora Levins Morales from her poem "Red Sea."

"We cannot cross until we carry each other,
all of us refugees, all of us prophets.

No more taking turns on history's wheel,
trying to collect old debts no-one can pay.

The sea will not open that way...
This time it's all of us or none."

Holiday Open House

Sunday, December 3rd

1 - 4 pm

LEPOCO Peace Center

1705 West Broad Street, Bethlehem (18018)

Enter at backdoor with sunflowers on
Rosemont Lutheran Church campus.

Fair trade crafts & food

from around the world through SERRV

Snazzy Buttons & Stickers

Beautiful Notecards & Holiday Greetings

2024 Calendars

Carol Baylor's bags with great slogans

made from repurposed materials

(Also, during normal office hours through December.)

Frances Dreisbach: Presente!

In 2014 Mimi Lang wrote about Fran Dreisbach, "There is no better guide to the wonderment of aging with dignity and grace than Fran Dreisbach. In her life's work, Fran has not stopped traveling and questioning and offering compassion and providing a stable presence and being available to small needs and larger ones. We are fortunate to have this wise elder among us."

One of Fran's daughters reported that on September 19, after Fran had stopped eating and drinking the day before, "she asked to be propped up in her bed and she looked out her window and died."

Mimi Lang's words above were written for a 2014 issue of the LEPOCO Newsletter inviting folks to join Fran at her home, named Chrysalis, for her 90th birthday party in September of that year. The gifts she suggested were donations to LEPOCO in amounts that included the number 9 – \$.90, \$9, \$29, etc. It was a fun party. Many years earlier Fran had welcomed LEPOCO members to Chrysalis for a LEPOCO weekend retreat where we were considering directions for the organization as the Vietnam War was ending.

Fran was a "stable presence" in so much of the local work for peace for decades. She was a founding walker in the Nazareth to Bethlehem Christmas Peace Pilgrimage in the 1950s – participating almost yearly for 63 years. She was a founding member of LEPOCO, a strong Quaker example, and a dedicated leader in the Lehigh Valley Monthly Meeting (LVMM). She helped lead Center Square, Easton, demonstrations against nuclear weapons air raid drills in the early 1960s. Their peace witness in Easton was challenged by counter demonstrators who supported the air raid drills.

In 2003 Fran was one of the eleven who sat-in at Representative Pat Toomey's Allentown Office the day after the U.S. war on Iraq had started. The eleven were arrested as the office closed.

The seven year "loving companionship" that developed between Fran and Tom Lloyd over the seven years before Tom died in 2012 was further confirmation that we had two "wise elders" among us.

At a memorial gathering at the LVMM, Fran's "commitment, courage, energy, and spirit of adventure" were praised by speakers from her family, from the LVMM community, and from her fellow peace and justice activists. Her colleagues and students from Kutztown University where she was an associate professor of social work, praised her shining example in this field. Others spoke of her year teaching English in China. Fran's "spirit of adventure was global and lifelong, taking her to many countries and creating lasting friendships. (The quotes in this paragraph are from the LVMM November Newsletter.)

Fran Dreisbach made a deep impression for good and delightful living in our world.

- Nancy Tate with assistance from Donna Hartmann

"Imaginary" Bike/Walk Event Held

It rained on October 14th, the date for this year's LEPOCO Bike/Walkathon. The bad news is that the rain date (October 15th) did not work either because too many expected riders and walkers had previous commitments that prevented their participation.

The good news is that one rider (Rick Dow) completed the route solo later and collected his pledges. And, other walkers and riders found that their pledgers wanted to make their donations even though the event had to be canceled. Hence, we raised over \$1700 from this event due to the work of intended participants collecting pledges!

Thank you to the Bike-Walk Planning Committee convened by Diane Dilendik, that also included Scott Slingerland, Walt Garvin, and Amanda Zaniesienko, this year. The committee distributed the in-kind contributions at their follow-up meeting on November 6th. Thank you to the following organizations and businesses for their in-kind contributions: Aardvark Sports Shop (Bethlehem), Book & Puppet Company (Easton), CAT-Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (Bethlehem), Civic Theatre (Allentown), Lit Coffee Roastery & Bakeshop (Bethlehem), Nature's Way Market (Easton), Saucon Valley Bikes (Hellertown), Veg Out (Bethlehem).

The Planning Committee has set October 5th as the date for the 2024 Bike/Walkathon. Please consider putting this on your calendar for the New Year. This is a fun gathering where you can get to know other peace witnesses and enjoy the fresh autumn air with them.

- Nancy Tate

News about LEPOCO Book Group

The First Tuesday LEPOCO Book Group will hold their last discussion of the year on December 5, at 6 pm, at the Peace Center. The book for discussion will be "Under the Skin," by Linda Villarosa. This book tells the full story of racial health disparities in the U.S., revealing the toll racism takes on individuals and on the health of our nation.

The book list for 2024 is now available with short descriptions for each of the ten books on the list. There will be a list without the full descriptions included with the next issue of this newsletter but contact LEPOCO if you would like the more detailed list that is now available.

Merchants of Death War Crimes Tribunal

The Merchants of Death War Crimes Tribunal launched on November 12th. You can learn more at merchantsofdeath.org. The first episode focused on Israel's aerial bombardment against the people in Gaza. The aircraft, missiles and bombs being used are produced by Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and RTX (Raytheon).

Bits & Pieces

☪ The War Resisters League is celebrating 100 years of resistance to war this year. Founded after World War I, the organization has led the way in nonviolent resistance to U.S. wars. WRL has been a resource and inspiration for LEPOCO many times over the years. You can learn more about the activities being held for this anniversary year at warresisters.org.

☪ In mid-November **Back from the Brink** delivered a letter, "**It's Time to Get Serious About Nuclear Disarmament**," to President Biden signed by 218 mayors, city councilors, county commissioners and state legislators from around the U.S. urging the President to send an observer delegation to the second **Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** and to initiate negotiations with all nuclear weapons states toward a verifiable, timebound agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons from the planet. You can learn more at preventnuclearwar.org.

☪ On November 20, campaigners rallied outside the headquarters of several Chinese financial institutions and embassies in four African countries and in Europe, **demanding that Chinese officials withhold financing for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline**. The 896-mile pipeline would run from Hoima, Uganda to Tanga, Tanzania, and through the basin of Lake Victoria on which more than 40 million people depend for food and water. The pipeline would displace landowners who say they have already faced threats and intimidation. It would run through the habitats of endangered animals, including lions, giraffes, roan antelopes, and sables. It could lead to 379 million tons of fossil fuel emissions obviously threatening global climate goals. For more information see stopeacop.net. Campaigners urge Chinese institutions to be a true ally to the African continent by favoring the

development of people-centered renewable energy to power Africa's future.

☪ On November 2nd, a grandfather named Jerome was arrested in West Virginia for locking himself to a **Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) drill**, shutting down construction on the fracked gas project for over three hours. He said, "I am horrified by what climate change is already doing to all life here on Earth. And I'm even more horrified that we still envision and construct projects like MVP which will only worsen the warming.

"I am a retired white male with lots of privilege. Today, I am using that privilege to fight back. I am the father of three daughters and the grandfather -soon- of five grandsons. To me, this project marks a watershed moment—a tipping point. All the powers of the federal government...are aligned to support the fossil fuel industry in this catastrophic project. If we, as caring humans, let that effort prevail, we invite more ram-rodded fossil fuel projects and generations of continued entrenchment in global warming emissions and deepening social distress."

You can learn more at powhr.org, the website for Protect Our Water, Heritage and Rights.

☪ November 20th was **Universal Children's Day**, first declared in 1954. It also marks the anniversaries of the U.N. General Assembly adopting the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. UNICEF's Executive Director Catherine Russell said that "at no time since the CRC was adopted...have children's rights been in greater jeopardy."

On this date Brad Parker of Defense for Children International - Palestine, wrote that "Israeli forces killed more children in the first month of the war than state and nonstate actors did in other armed conflicts over the past two years combined, according to the U.N. chief's own annual reports."

☪ On October 28, Jewish Voice for Peace shut down **Grand Central Station** in New York City calling for a ceasefire in the Israel Gaza war. 500 people participated in civil disobedience and over 350 people were

arrested, including rabbis, elected officials, elders, and celebrities.

On November 3rd, in Washington, DC, **180 human rights activists** participated in sit-ins in eight Senate offices to call for an immediate ceasefire.

On November 6th, hundreds of Jewish activists and their allies staged a large-scale **demonstration at the Statue of Liberty** demanding that U.S. leaders pressure the Israeli government to agree to an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

*Today I am taking sides.
I am taking the side of Peace.
Peace, which I will not abandon
even when its voice is drowned out
by hurt and hatred,
bitterness of loss,
cries of right and wrong.
I am taking the side of Peace
whose name has barely been spoken
in this winnerless war.
I will hold Peace in my arms,
and share my body's breath,
lest Peace be added
to the body count.
I will call for de-escalation
even when I want nothing more
than to get even.
I will do it
in the service of Peace.
I will make a clearing
in the overgrown
thicket of cause and effect
so Peace can breathe
for a minute
and reach for the sky.
I will do what I must
to save the life of Peace.
I will breathe through tears.
I will swallow pride.
I will bite my tongue.
I will offer love
without testing for deservingness.
So don't ask me to wave a flag today
unless it is the flag of Peace.
Don't ask me to sing an anthem
unless it is a song of Peace.
Don't ask me to take sides
unless it is the side of Peace."
Rabbi Irwin Keller, Oct. 17, 2023*



LEPOCO

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Weekly Peace Vigils

(on Thursdays through Dec. 14)

**November 30 &
December 7 & 14**

3:30-4:30 pm

End the wars. Witness for peace.

**3rd & Wyandotte Sts.,
(south) Bethlehem**

(see page 3 for more information)

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, for more info.

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Screening of

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Join us for the screening & discussion.

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(Enter at back of Rosemont Lutheran Church campus by door with sunflowers.)

(See page 3 for more info.)

Holiday Open House

Sunday, December 3, 1-4 pm

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(See page 3 for more information.)

**War is the certain
use of horrible
means for
uncertain ends.**

**- Howard Zinn
(1922-2010)**