

## What Happened?

Danny and I busted our butts during this last election!

We canvassed numerous weekends and held canvassing launches from our home. We hosted a lovely New York State woman who stayed with us to canvass the Allentown area. I spent several Friday afternoons making hundreds of sandwiches for out-of-town canvassers. I wrote postcards. I never wanted to feel that, Italian Catholic guilt thing I was raised with, that says if only you had done more.

I worked harder than I ever have on a campaign and still, he won. I even made (strongly encouraged) two of my daughters to canvass a turf. It was easy to see that they were not as enthusiastic as I thought they should be but I didn't want them to regret not working to avoid a tragedy. But through this whole process I wondered, "Where are the people? Why aren't they opening their doors ready to discuss the issues? Why aren't we seeing Republicans out hitting the pavement?" In all the weeks prior to the election I didn't see one Republican canvasser.

With the Harris - Walz ticket, I felt we had a real chance, and I must admit that I was shocked to watch Trump capture votes from state after state. His electoral college votes might have been great but the popular vote indicates that the election was pretty close. Trump won 49.8% and Harris won 48.3%. 1.5% more Americans made the incredible decision to vote for an incompetent, dangerous felon who in six weeks has changed our country so that I no longer recognize it.

I did learn something very powerful from this last election. I AM OLD! I see the world in a way that is foreign to how my daughters view and experience this world. On a recent visit home, one of my daughters who canvassed, begrudgingly, told me she knew all along that our contributions and hard work didn't "fit" the way young people acquire their information. She talked about podcasts, Tik Tok, X and other social media platforms that young Americans use to receive their news. She knew, when I sent her and her sister to canvass, that it was a waste of time.

I learn a lot from my children. I can only hope that as a country, we learn to change and grow so we can fix this and get it right before we lose our democracy.

- Ronnie Arena

## We Gather April 26 \_\_\_\_\_

LEPOCO friends will meet on Saturday, April 26, 2025, at 3 pm, for our Annual Gathering to enjoy a program featuring a talk by a peace poet, refreshments, singing, and camaraderie. The occasion will include reflection on two anniversaries: this December will mark 60 years of peacemaking by LEPOCO and just four days after the Gathering will mark 50 years since the end of the Vietnam War.

LEPOCO's Annual Gathering will feature the poetry and insights of W. D. Ehrhart, poet and peace advocate. His message is entitled, "Politics, Poetry & Peace." Bill Ehrhart, a veteran of the American War in Vietnam and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, is the author or editor of more than two dozen books, including *Vietnam-Perkasie: A Combat Marine Memoir* and *Thank You for Your Service: Collected Poems*. He has been awarded the President's Medal from Veterans for Peace and Excellence in the Arts from Vietnam Veterans of America.

Bill holds a PhD from the University of Wales at Swansea and retired as a Master Teacher of English and History after a late career at the Haverford School for Boys, where he received the Rafael Laserna Outstanding Teacher Award and was the 21<sup>st</sup> Hallowell Literary Lecturer, the only faculty member ever to be accorded that honor. He continues to be a regular contributor to the *LA Progressive*, the *VVAW Veteran*, and the *New Hampshire Gazette*. A 1966 graduate of Pennridge High School, he and his wife of 44 years live in Bryn Mawr, PA. They have one adult daughter.

As always, the Annual Gathering will include the election of Steering Committee members, a performance by the LEPOCO Peace Singers, the drawing for the LEPOCO Art Raffle, and light refreshments.

We will meet in the auditorium of the Steelworkers Union Hall, 53 East Lehigh Street, Bethlehem, the building that is also the new home of the LEPOCO Peace Center. Parking is available on two levels.

This year's Art Raffle will include contributions from Lee Buck, Michelle Sheehan and Sue Verbalis, Ellen Buck, Monica Sommerville, and Ronnie Arena. We are always grateful for their beautiful donations.

Please find the flyer for making your reservation for the gathering and the Art Raffle tickets enclosed.

- Janet Ney



## Reels & Spiels Series

### Even War Has Rules: An Introduction

Margot Hillman will do a presentation on *Even War Has Rules: An Introduction to International Humanitarian Law from the American Red Cross*, on Friday, March 28, at 6:30 pm, at the LEPOCO Peace Center, as part of the Reels & Spiels Series.

As war dominates the headlines, this is an opportunity to learn about the rules that govern armed conflict around the world. In this overview of the basics of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), you will learn the four fundamental principles of International Humanitarian Law and be able to apply these principles to understand the rules governing conflicts around the world. There will be time for questions and discussion.

Margot Hillman is known to most of us as an active LEPOCO member. She has also been an International Humanitarian Law instructor for the American Red Cross since 2003.

The Peace Center is at 53 East Lehigh Street (Lower Level), Bethlehem, in the Steelworkers Union Hall building. Parking is available on both levels.

### Tax Day, April 15 \_\_\_\_\_

The Stop the Wars Committee of LEPOCO will leaflet on Tax Day, Tuesday, April 15, 2 to 4 pm, outside the Lehigh Valley Post Office in the Industrial Park. The Committee welcomes assistance with this effort. Call LEPOCO (610-691-8730) if you can join us. The theme will be: Taxes for People & Peace; Not for Billionaires & War.

### Opposing the Wrecking Ball

Lehigh Valley folks concerned about the wrecking ball being taken to our government are carrying their concerns with signs and a picket line to the offices of Rep. Ryan Mackenzie, Noon to 1 pm, on Mondays. Mondays with Mackenzie are sponsored by Lehigh Valley Democratic Committees, Indivisible Lehigh Valley, PA Working Families, and more. The larger gathering is held at Rep. Mackenzie's main office in Lehigh County, at 1125 South Cedar Crest Blvd., Allentown.

In Northampton County people gather near his 2151 Emrick Blvd. office. The picket line forms on the sidewalk on the northwest corner of Freemansburg Ave., and Emrick Blvd.

### Flowers From the Mud \_\_\_\_\_

Over 30 people gathered at the Peace Pole in Rose Garden Park in west Bethlehem, on Saturday, March 15, "to acknowledge the pain many are experiencing" with the wrecking ball actions coming from Washington, DC, at this time. The planners from Lehigh Valley

Monthly Meeting (the Quakers) and LEPOCO wanted to provide ways, both small and large, that people can take action towards healing our communities and ourselves as we experience these concerning actions.

Songs were sung, stories were told, and small rocks were painted and placed around the Peace Pole.

On Saturday, May 24, at 10 am, people will gather at the Peace Pole again to plant the flowers.

The planners for these events are Donna Hartmann, Amanda Zaniesienko, Karen Maurer, Lori Jo Jamieson, and Jan Christine.

### Peace Camp 2025: July 21-25

Peace Camp Planning is well underway. With some very productive planning meetings under our belts so far, we are gaining momentum on all of the many tasks that build toward Peace Camp. Already, we have received camper registrations and have secured some solid volunteers. We are currently busy preparing and mailing letters to previous campers and volunteers.


We recently visited Freedom High School to try to convince some young people to get their community service hours with Peace Camp. We will soon be preparing for further outreach to gain new campers. We do need help, though. We hope to gain more community and parent volunteers this year, than we have had in recent years. Peace Camp is a unique, positive, and unforgettable experience for everyone involved. Please consider giving us some of your time!

Call the LEPOCO office at 610-691-8730, to request a volunteer interest form and Peace Camp registration flyers.

Newsletter of LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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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: Dianna Walls, Kellyn Slingerland, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Monica McAgnon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

# A Bipartisan Disaster: U.S. Policy in Gaza

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For the moment, President Trump's repugnant imperialist fantasy of the U.S. "owning" the Gaza Strip, expelling its more than two million residents, and then clearing and rebuilding it as the "Riviera of the Eastern Mediterranean," is in abeyance. Egypt and other Arab countries have offered a more reasonable plan of reconstruction, although much in it, including the sources of the massive funding required, remains unclear. In the meantime, as of this writing, the fragile peace agreement between Israel and Hamas has stalled at the end of its first phase. Israel is now suddenly seeking to change the terms of the agreement. Phase two calls for Israel to withdraw its army from Gaza and for the ceasefire to become permanent. But Israel, which has again blockaded humanitarian aid to Gaza, refuses to leave Gaza. This violation of the peace agreement means that Israel's brutal war could soon resume.

The important Jewish thinker, Peter Beinart described Trump's bizarre fantasy as imagining you can do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century what was done in the 19<sup>th</sup>, "which is to basically destroy entire populations of people because you view them as subhuman." Beinart went on to say, "Donald Trump views Palestinians as subhuman, and therefore wants to oversee a mass ethnic cleansing, which would be one of the greatest crimes of the century."

It would be wrong, however, to ascribe the crimes of U.S. policy in the Middle East only to Trump. Unfortunately, we are witnessing a bipartisan failure of massive proportions, one rooted in the refusal of both major parties to recognize the rights of the Palestinian people.

Trump at least has the honesty to describe accurately what has happened. He called the Gaza Strip a vast "demolition site." The Biden administration refused to acknowledge what Israel's fifteen-month military campaign of Gaza's destruction has done. In December 2024, the respected human rights group Amnesty International concluded after a lengthy investigation that "Israel has committed and is continuing to commit genocide against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip." The report asserted Israel's military "caused unprecedented destruction, which experts say occurred at a level and speed not seen in any other conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, leveling entire cities and destroying critical infrastructure, agricultural land, and cultural and religious sites. It thereby rendered large swathes of Gaza uninhabitable." The Biden administration supported Israel's specious claims that this appalling level of destruction was justified because Hamas "used human shields" and had "embedded" itself in a civilian population. With such assertions — like those seeking to justify the destruction of Gaza's hospitals by asserting they were all Hamas "command and control centers" — the Biden

administration concurred. For the arms funding, heavy ordinance, political support, and diplomatic cover the U.S. has given Israel since 2023, it is fully complicit in the genocide that has taken place.

Trump may imagine his fantasy of taking over Gaza can be furthered by withdrawing the U.S. from the U.N.'s Human Rights Council and dismantling the U.S. Agency For International Development (USAID) — moves that might help conceal ethnic cleansing and pressure the Palestinians to submit to relocation. But, again, Biden's policies paved the way. Already in January 2024, a full year before Trump took office, Biden ended all U.S. funding of the most important U.N. agency providing aid to the Palestinians, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Since 1948, UNRWA has provided Palestinian refugees with necessary food, housing, and medical, educational and other services. The U.S. cut funding after Israel accused 12 UNRWA workers — out of 13,000 in Gaza and 30,000 in the dispersed Palestinian refugee camps — of involvement in the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack that started this round of violence. UNRWA investigated the charges and fired nine employees. Nevertheless, before any investigation, the U.S. cut all support of UNRWA. More recently, Israel, long opposed to UNRWA's work, has forbidden the U.N. agency from operating in Israeli territory.

So, as dubious as Trump's real estate dreams for the Gaza Strip are, he is not the first president to commit the U.S. to a disastrous policy in the area. The U.S. is fully complicit in the devastation and genocide that has taken place in the occupied territory of Gaza. This complicity, in violation of international humanitarian laws as well as the U.S.'s own laws on the transfer of arms to a force committing war crimes, is a bipartisan policy that is both shameful and will long stain the reputation of the U.S. in the rest of the world. A longer-term solution to the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians must involve one of two options, either the creation of two independent and secure states or one democratic state where both peoples have equal rights. Either one requires, first off, the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

~ Mick Baylor

**Death Penalty Repeal?** A bill to repeal the death penalty in Pennsylvania has been proposed. Rep. Russ Diamond, R-Lebanon County, introduced HB-888 which, if passed, would end the death penalty and mandate life imprisonment without parole for a person convicted of first-degree murder. The bill's sponsors include both Republican and Democratic representatives.

No laws amending the death penalty have been approved since 1978. Gov. Josh Shapiro continues to observe a moratorium on capital punishment and supports an end to the death penalty.

Source: "The Morning Call," March 14, 2025.

# The Struggle Shared

*"Let us be enraged about injustice, but let us not be destroyed by it."*

- Bayard Rustin

WOMEN CROSS DMZ has released a report, "Women's Rights Under the Division System in Korea." The report cites dangers to Koreans, especially women, from landmines and unexploded ordnance left behind from a war that has never had a signed peace agreement.

Women live under threat of sexual violence and exploitation in camp towns near United States military bases; farmers struggle for a livelihood as their land has been taken for those bases. The separation of families has been and continues to be a source of great hardship for Koreans on both sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel dividing the peninsula.

"Women in Korea have been living in the shadow of unresolved war for more than 70 years, bearing the burdens of militarization, division, and separation," said Jung-ah Lee, Standing Representative of Gyeonggi Women's Association United and a contributor to the report. "Their voices must be heard if we are to create a sustainable and lasting peace."

New Hampshire Peace Action will present, "A Peace & Justice Conversation: The Feminist Path to Peace in Korea," on Monday, March 24, at 7 pm, on zoom. You can register at [nhpeaceaction.org](http://nhpeaceaction.org).

YOU CAN STAND WITH CONGRESS for a global arms embargo on Burma's military. Rep. Bill Huizenga (R, MD-4) and Rep. Seth Moulton (D, MA-6) have co-sponsored H.Res.106 which calls on the United Nations Security Council to immediately impose an arms embargo against the military of Burma. If imposed, the embargo would deprive the Myanmar junta that seized control in a military coup four years ago of the weaponry needed to remain in power. The

Rohingya are denied citizenship and basic human rights; as a result, people who have not fled the country are forced to live in harsh conditions, denied basic necessities and strapped under strict limitations. "Two years ago, the United States State Department made the formal determination that what is happening to the Rohingya is genocide." Contact your member of the House of Representatives to urge their support. Source: [rohingyacampaign.org](http://rohingyacampaign.org).

## PROTECT PALESTINIAN

CHILDREN NOW - Canada's Just Peace Advocates, Mouvement pour une Paix Juste, has called for Canada to impose a full, immediate arms embargo on Israel. The organization is calling on members of the Canadian parliament to "condemn Israel's killing, injuring, and detaining of Palestinian children..." The current effort is a continuation of their "No Way to Treat a Child" campaign in 2018 that called for holding Israel accountable for its treatment of Palestinian children. More than 100 Canadian organizations have endorsed the campaign. See [www.justpeaceadvocates.ca](http://www.justpeaceadvocates.ca) for more information.

FEED THE CHILDREN - The United States Department of Agriculture estimates that 14 million children in the United States are suffering from food insecurity. They are part of a population of 47 million Americans who are struggling for food. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) in Washington, DC, has provided statistics on the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) in Pennsylvania. Fourteen percent of households in Pennsylvania participate in SNAP - that's 2,010,298 people. In 2022, 591,190 children received food through SNAP; their families' participation in the program also quali-

fied these children for the school lunch program. FRAC calls on everyone to oppose any SNAP cuts contemplated by Congress. For more information see: [frac.org](http://frac.org).

## FEED THE WORLD'S CHILDREN -

Save the Children speaks for hungry children. The organization reports that roughly 35 children around the world were born into hunger, minute by minute, in 2024. Malnutrition accounts for the deaths of half of all child deaths worldwide. At the same time, "Oxfam has estimated that eradicating world hunger entirely would require nations to contribute \$31.7 billion more to global efforts to combat food insecurity - a fraction of the collective wealth of the planet's 2,682 billionaires." Source: [commondreams.org/news/child-hunger-billionaire-wealth](http://commondreams.org/news/child-hunger-billionaire-wealth).

TAX THE RICH - Pennsylvania's Independent Fiscal Office released a report that documented that people with higher incomes benefit from lower effective tax rates. As reported in *The Morning Call* on January 4, 2025, people with incomes of \$50,000 or less paid taxes at a rate of 10.7% while those with incomes of \$1,000,000 paid at a 6.9% rate.

Stephen Herzenberg, executive director of the Keystone Research Center recommends a "fair share" tax approach that would establish different tax rates for different types of income including capital gains, dividends, royalties, rents, and other non-wage income.

Similarly, an organization called "Patriotic Millionaires" works for tax law that would challenge the policies that enable excessive wealth concentration in the hands of the richest Americans. According to Bob Lord, Senior Vice President, Tax Policy at Patriotic Millionaires, "But while the rich have no duty individually to pay more in tax, the Patriotic Millionaires believe that collectively America's rich have a duty to work for a tax system that prevents obscene accumulations of wealth, promotes a vibrant economy, and allows all Americans to share in the country's prosperity."

- Janet Ney

# Catastrophic Attack on LGBTQ+ Rights Under Trump

Project 2025, the blueprint for Trump's 2<sup>nd</sup> Administration, is the culmination of decades of strategic planning and action to create a right wing social and political nation in which avowed Christian white men set the boundaries of conduct and thought for the United States. Although a 900+ page tome was published detailing with great specificity the aims, purposes and paths to this radical right-wing state in advance of the election, the electorate nonetheless elected Trump to a second term.

There is absolutely no ambiguity in the goals of this Administration to eradicate the civil, personal and political rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Because this community is only the first target in the eradication of civil rights, even those not engaged with LGBTQ+ rights must lend support to the challenges facing them. The eradication of all "rights" which are inherent and can be invoked and the replacement of rights with "privileges" which can be bestowed is undoubtedly the end game of the radical right.

It is important to understand the political tool of "othering" being employed by the right-wing extremists. A chief reason that same sex marriage was largely accepted in the US after the Obergefell Supreme Court decision in 2015, it is suggested, is that Americans understood that the gay community was integral to the fabric of our modern life. We saw that those who identified as LGBTQ+ were our sons and daughters, our fathers and mothers, our siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, our neighbors, our co-workers, teachers, clergy, shopkeepers, and political leaders. Today, the radical right is launching invective that these same communities, especially the Trans community, are ungodly, perverted, unnatural and most of all dangerous. A new national narrative has begun that American citizens must be protected from these (implicitly unAmerican) LGBTQ+ people. They are other, not like us, even less than human.

And so, an immediate erasure of LGBTQ+ is the agenda and full removal of terms such as "sexual orientation" "gender identity" etc. from all federal documents from contracts to legislation. Expungement of websites providing assistance or marking historical events, such as Stonewall, has occurred. There is a directive to end anti-discrimination rules based on gender identity/sexual orientation in the Affordable Care Act. In addition, the extreme right seeks to revoke workplace protections against discrimination (under Bostock) from LGBTQ+ employees while redefining "sex discrimination" narrowly as a biological binary consistent with a Christian Nationalist view.

Restricting healthcare for transgender people utilizing Medicaid or Medicare and eliminating all healthcare related to transgender services to children have been ordered. Trans military members have been

ousted and those in federal prisons have been endangered with gender inappropriate housing while also losing healthcare services. Trans people are discriminated against in federally funded services for the unhoused. Erasure from education, including sweeping bans on books and other cultural materials is mandated. Perplexingly, cutting HIV health funding is also a new strategy.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it demonstrates the assault on LGBTQ+ rights by the radical right is extensive and extreme.

The federal assault on LGBTQ+ rights has instigated numerous actions in state legislative bodies which mirror or expand restrictions to free expression, public accommodation, barriers to accurate IDs, healthcare and student/educator rights. The widespread attempt to define sex and gender according to Christian Nationalist biblical ideas and to accord discrimination broad religious exemption is particularly worrying in the campaign to erase our LGBTQ+ neighbors.

We are not powerless. Raising voices in support of our neighbors and friends is important, including attending and supporting events. Contacting state and federal legislators to inform them we see them and we see our LGBTQ+ community is also important. The ACLU, LAMBDA Legal and similar organizations lead litigation and need financial support. Unflagging attention is also required to this issue. Because, first they came for the LGBTQ+...

- Martricia McLaughlin

## Resistance to Trump Is Everywhere

As we live through a firehose of disruption, destruction and chaos in our federal government it has been so heartening to witness the amazing array of resistance actions. A national analysis which carries that heartening news was published by "Waging Nonviolence" on March 13, 2025. The author, Rivera Sun, opens, "It's been a long six weeks since Donald Trump was sworn into office amid a Nazi salute and machine-gun barrage of 89 executive orders. We've been struggling for our lives, our country and our world ever since.

"From boycotts to mass noncompliance to street demonstrations, the response to the Trump administration's policies has consisted of an impressive range of nonviolent tactics.

"More than just outraged protests, people are thwarting raids, refusing to obey unjust orders, standing up to bully politics and taking risks to do the right thing...

"And while there have been a deluge of unjust policies coming out of the administration, the hundreds of thousands of people taking action are showing that resistance is not futile..."

You can find the article at [waging nonviolence.org](https://wagingnonviolence.org). See "Resistance to Trump Is Everywhere."



# LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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## Weekly Peace Vigils (Thursdays)

March 20, 27 & April 3, 10, 17, 24 / 4-5 pm

3<sup>rd</sup> & Wyandotte Sts., (south) Bethlehem

*Ceasefire Israel-Gaza war. End the wars. Witness for peace.*

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

## Peace Camp: July 21-26, 2025

See page 2 for information on volunteering.

Many helpers are needed & it is fun!

## Reels & Spiels

"Even War Has Rules"  
with Margot Hillman

Friday, March 28

LEPOCO Peace Center

At 6:30 pm

(See page 2 for more info.)

## LEPOCO Annual Gathering

Saturday, April 26, 3:00 pm

Steglworke Union Hall Auditorium, Bethlehem

Speaker: W.D. Ehrhart: "Politics, Poetry & Peace"

(See page 1 & insert for more information.)