Make more plutonium pits per year? Who wants them?

Three PeaceWorks representatives lobbied Congress during DC Days May 20-22, sponsored by the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA). The three—Ann Suellentrop, Spencer Graves, and Cassie Weck—helped research the nuclear budget and visit congressional members and staff. They learned that the new nuclear weapons parts plant, the National Security Campus (NSC) in Kansas City, MO, may double its budget from 2020 through 2022 for “modernizing” the B61-12 gravity bomb and the W88 warhead for submarine-launched ballistic missiles. More NSC staff and facilities are proposed. Further, the NSC may increase its “component fabrication” for “Plutonium Sustainment Operations.”

What’s that mean? Well, the Trump administration plans production of more plutonium pits—the grapefruit-sized radioactive cores of modern thermonuclear weapons. When compressed by explosives for detonation, the pits (“primaries”) form a critical mass and “begin to fission,” says Jay Coghlan of NukeWatch New Mexico. That induces nuclear fusion in components known as “secondaries.” Coghlan says up to 20,000 “excess” pits and up to 5,000 “strategic reserve” pits are at the Pantex Plant in Amarillo, TX.

Congress is studying H.R. 2500, the National Defense Authorization Act for 2020, with the administration’s request to produce 80 plutonium pits per year instead of the current 20. Given the Pantex stockpile, Suellentrop insists, “Creating 80 pits per year is an idiotic idea!” She and about 60 others at this year’s ANA DC Days lobbied at about 90 congressional offices to share that perspective and tackle other issues.

Plutonium pits — continued on page 7
‘Race Issues ARE Peace Issues’ disrupts apathy

By Jim Hannah

Peace activists gathered April 27 around the theme “Race Issues ARE Peace Issues.” Sponsored by PeaceWorks-KC and moderated by Lucky Garcia, the event fostered networking to more effectively address racism and violence in greater KC. Panelists from human rights organizations made presentations and led workshops.

“We have very intense issues of peace and justice in our area,” Garcia said, noting that people of color often live in fear of both immigration and police personnel. She challenged the mostly white assembly to recognize that “the way to get leadership from persons of color is to commit to the struggles they are involved with.”

Diane Burkholder, co-founder of One Struggle KC, said the violence people of color often experience is not necessarily physical, but “the violence of silence, of apathy.” Discrimination based on race is widespread, she said. “Think about why most people in court are black, brown, or low-income persons. White persons often get warnings, not traffic tickets.” Many fines and arrest warrants, she noted, are little more than a quota system for city income, and they trap people in the prison-industrial complex.

Two representatives (names withheld) spoke for Al-Hadaf, a group dedicated to a free Palestine and to revival of the Palestinian–American community in KC. The spokespersons said that some police training tactics in the US originated in Israel, and that open-air prisons in which the US is detaining immigrants parallel Israel’s restrictions on 7 million refugees in Gaza. Pointing out such parallels, they insisted, is not anti-Semitic: “A government using oppressive tactics can be opposed without that being anti-Semitic.”

Diana Martinez spoke for Advocates for Immigration Rights and Reconciliation (AIRR), organized to empower and uplift the immigrant community. Immigrants, she said, should not have to live in fear of separation or deportation, nor should they have to work in exploitative jobs. In her view, US immigration policies are in effect “kidnapping people and holding them for ransom.” ICE, she said, is holding more than $200 million in bonds from immigrants, “much of which will not be repaid.” And many immigrants cannot post cash-only bonds that range from $1,500 to $5,000 or more. To improve the situation, Martinez said, “We need to move immigration out of the executive branch and into the judicial branch.”

John Tramel spoke for Showing Up for Racial Justice in Kansas City (SURJ KC), organizing white people for racial justice. “White persons need to listen to persons of color,” he said. “Our privilege needs to be questioned. We need to follow the lead of persons of color. We need to take risks, to be willing to be uncomfortable. We need to use our privilege in places where we are needed. We need to form open and accountable relationships with black and white persons.”

The event was perhaps best summarized by a participant who observed that in recent years he has seen a growing solidarity among groups dedicated to equality and justice for people of color in KC. He said, “It’s imperative for white, and black, and brown persons to work together, or we have no chance at all.”

—By Jim Hannah, PeaceWorks-KC Board member
This year PeaceWorks Board member Lu Mountenay planned her fifth line-crossing during the annual Memorial Day peace witness at the National Security Campus, which she dubbed "The Temple of Doom." Four times she had been arrested there to foster a world free of nuclear weapons—both for her beloved grandchildren and for all children everywhere, today and far into the future.

But cancer took her life, ironically on Easter Sunday, April 21. And on Lu's 70th birthday (May 11), a celebration of her life was held in her home congregation within the Community of Christ—Walnut Gardens in Independence—with an overflow crowd of family, friends, and PeaceWorks colleagues. Four grandchildren shared their memories of Lu, as did friends whose remembrances of her brought both laughter and tears.

"As a protestor," one said, "Lu knew there were times to not only speak up but to act up for justice and peace. Yet the driving force for her was not protesting against something but standing for something—what others might call a protest, she considered a peace witness. And that's how I think of Lu—"a peace witness, a justice witness. Most of all she was concerned about the Good Spirit that prompted her dedication to justice and peace in the community of Christ—and how homogeneous we are, how we live in the Good News, how we love one another, how we stand together to say no to and for peace and justice and peace. She was a prototype of what I think of as a peacemaker, one said, "I knew Lu was a peacemaker."
Ninth Memorial Day peace witness draws its largest crowd

In a rebuke to the White House’s attempts to “make America nuclear again,” 17 peace activists were arrested for trespass during the ninth annual Memorial Day peace witness for a nuclear-weapons-free world. Sponsored by PeaceWorks-KC, the annual event this year far surpassed previous years’ participation by turning out some 90 peace activists. Three activists from Europe added another first—representation from a growing and global nuclear weapons abolition movement.

A 10 a.m. rally at the decommissioned Bannister Federal Complex commemorated the 154 employees known to have died from toxins generated at the plant during its 65-year history of nuclear weapons production.

The activists travelled to the new National Security Campus at Mo. Highway 150 and Botts Road in south Kansas City, where some 85 percent of the non-nuclear components of the US nuclear arsenal are developed or procured. A mile-long march to the entrance of the plant was emceed by PeaceWorks Board member Jim Hannah, who urged the marchers to bear in mind not only what they are against, but what they are for.

“As we march today toward this citadel of mass destruction,” he said, “let us also imagine that fine day when the world awakes from the nightmare of nukes, when flowers and soybeans will again grow where now there is only concrete and asphalt, when our grandchildren may one day ask, ‘What’s a nuclear weapon?’ And let us hold to that ancient promise, ‘nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.’”

When they reached the entrance of the plant, the activists read names and maladies of persons who died from toxins at the old weapons plant. Then they laid on the ground in a die-in until the bugle call of “Taps” was sounded. Statements from line-crossers followed, and in unison they stepped across the purple line indicating the plant boundary. After repeated warnings that the civil resisters would be arrested for trespass if they remained, Kansas City police handcuffed, searched, and photographed the activists on-site, then released them with a court summons.

Among the line-crossers were Susan van der Hijden of Amsterdam and Chris Danowski of Dortmund, Germany. Their videographer was Ina Zerr from Vienna. About 140 arrests have been made since the leveling of the land began for the new plant in 2010. More than two million dollars a day is being spent there as the current administration ramps up efforts to “modernize” the US nuclear arsenal of some 5,000 warheads.
Teacher after teacher spoke about the harm of separating children from their parents. Harmful effects of this practice reach well into adulthood, with trauma, anxiety, and lifelong fears. The day-long rally featured union leaders both from the US and from Mexico. I felt proud of my union membership. To hear the speeches, go to teachersagainstchilddetention.org/lessons or go to YouTube and search for “teachers against child detention.”

My favorite quote from the rally was from an ethnic studies teacher from Washington state. He starts every class with this call-and-response poem:

You are my other me. / If I do harm to you, / I do harm to myself. / If I love and respect you, / I love and respect myself. ☞

—Cris Mann, a teacher, serves on the PeaceWorks Board. Note: On June 6, Associated Press said the government reported having 13,200 children in its care, a number rising rapidly.

Stop detaining children
— continued from page 3

deserves to have a public education of good quality. No exceptions!

Poor People’s Campaign calls for better health care policy on Senate floor in Topeka

By Charles Carney

Interrupting legislative proceedings on the Senate floor with chants of “Who’s going to die today?” and “Health care is a human right,” nine people were arrested or detained May 29 in Topeka, KS, during an action sponsored by the Poor People’s Campaign. The protesters, among them three members of PeaceWorks–KC (including me), disrupted the proceedings for over a half hour. The Senate gallery had to be cleared by security guards, but the demonstrators were respectful and nonviolent.

Senate President Susan Wagle, R-Wichita, threatened to ban press credentials of certain journalists for “giving the demonstrators airtime.” On the other hand, some state senators supported the demonstrators from the Senate floor by smiling and waving at them and even singing along with “We are a gentle, angry people, and we are singing for our lives.”

Some demonstrators held signs with the names of loved ones who’d recently died in Kansas due to lack of health care.

“I joined the group because I’m tired of seeing people lack affordable health care!” said PeaceWorks member Lois Swimmer. “I wanted to add my voice because more voices have the power to be heard.” ☞

Here is my annual membership for PeaceWorks

- Membership.........................$40
- Donor...................................$50+
- Major Donor.........................$100+
- Family Membership............$60
- Group Membership...........$75
- Limited-Income Membership..$5+
- Newsletter Subscription........$10
- Lifetime Membership........$1,000
- Sustaining Membership.....$5+/mo.

- Send newsletter electronically

E-mail address: ____________________________

Name: ______________________________________

Address: ____________________________________

City, State, ZIP: ______________________________

Daytime phone: (___)_________ Evening phone: (___)_________
Time to next new nuclear-weapon state

By Spencer Graves

When the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force in 1970, there were 5 nuclear-weapon states. On Jan. 29, 2002, when President George W. Bush identified North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as an “axis of evil,” there were 8. Now there are 9, and another 32 have sufficient fissile material to make nuclear weapons if they wish.¹

The accompanying figure² suggests that the process of creating new nuclear-weapon states has slowed over time.

However, it would seem naive and even foolish to believe the number of nuclear-weapon states will not continue to grow until either (a) a nuclear war destroys the ability of anyone to make more nuclear weapons, or (b) international law is strengthened to provide weaker nations protection against threats from other countries.

When the Soviet Union first tested a nuclear weapon in 1949, it was not just responding to the memories of World War II but also to the anti-Soviet Cold War rhetoric in the US and to the memory of US and other foreign troops on Soviet soil trying to put the tsar back in power after World War I. Similarly, in the first decade of the 21st century, North Korea had reason to fear the intentions of the US after having been described as part of an “axis of evil” and then watching as the US destroyed Iraq and continued to threaten Iran.

To estimate the probability distribution to the time to the next nuclear weapon state, the accompanying plot suggests we consider only the time since the presumed first test by Israel in 1979.³ In those 40 years, the world has seen two new nuclear-weapon states, Pakistan (PK) and North Korea (KP). That gives us an average of 20 years between first tests by new nuclear-weapon states. That suggests there’s roughly a 90% chance of a first test by another new nuclear-weapon state sometime in the next 46 years.⁴

An obvious question is: Which nation will likely be the next? Readily available information suggests three possibilities:

1. Ukraine or one of 14 other Russian neighbors with sufficient fissile material to make a nuclear weapon.
2. Saudi Arabia, which is currently receiving nuclear technology per a decision by President Trump; Saudi Arabia and the US appear to be the two primary recruiters for Islamic terrorism.⁵
3. Islamic terrorists, who might steal a nuclear weapon from, for example, Pakistan, where there is substantial resentment of US military actions in Afghanistan and other countries in that region; a small sailboat could be used as a delivery vehicle. ✶

². This plot uses standard 2-letter country codes, so RU = Russia, GB = United Kingdom, FR = France, CN = China, IN = India, IL = Israel, PK = Pakistan (1998), KP = North Korea (People’s Republic of Korea—2006).
⁴. This will be documented in my Wikiversity article “Time to the next new nuclear-weapon state,” related to my Wikiversity article “Time to extinction of civilization.” This ignores the uncertainty in the estimate of an average of 20 years to the next new nuclear-weapon state. Considering that would increase the chances of being outside the (2, 46) year interval from 20% to perhaps 50%.
⁵. Medea Benjamin, 2016, Kingdom of the Unjust, published by O.R. Books. See also Wikiversity, “Winning the War on Terror.”

—Spencer Graves, of the PeaceWorks Board, is an engineer with a PhD in statistics, a Vietnam-era veteran, and a compulsive fact-checker.
Plutonium pits — continued from page 1

Some in Congress may have listened. On June 3, the US House of Representatives strategic forces subcommittee proposed *repealing* the requirement for the 80 pits per year from the budget and instead called for 30 pits per year.

Next steps: markups of the 2020 budget by the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate. The time is ripe for making a plutonium-pit- &-budget call to your representative and senators. Here’s a sample “ask”: *Congress must not fund the National Security Campus expansion for production of components for unjustified new and refurbished nuclear weapons.* ⚘

—By Jane Stoever of PeaceWorks

The mighty stream is the system and we are the water.
Some days we struggle to swim and flow in a world filled with hate, violence, bombs, nuclear bombs … [let me say that again] nuclear bombs.
Do you, do YOU realize that we dropped 2 nuclear bombs with the intent of harming others only to have it backfire on ourselves? Destroying our environment and our people with toxins, radiation, cancers …

Then again, on some days, it’s easy to be in that mighty stream, the power felt on Capitol Hill, explaining peaceful and just policies. We are the water.

We ebb and flow through the stream of meeting after meeting in DC.
Sometimes we hit some rocks in the stream, get stuck, or take a little detour,

but sometimes, we are white-water rapids, the energy and strength and new things that come with being so young and eager.

To see my 24-year-old eyes looking into another 24-year-old’s eyes … and I think she and I both realized it at once. We are here.
We are not only the future, but right now too.

We have the POWER to say NO to all these things that the system has always pushed, or hidden, or promoted, or purchased.

We are the water.
We are the water of the movement.
We are the tears that come on days that the world seems a little less hopeless, but we are also the sweat that goes into days of walking around

Organizing
Rallying
Researching
Writing
Fighting for justice

The mighty stream is the system
And we are the water

—we are young and we have power ⚘

—By Cassie Week of Jerusalem Farm in KC, MO, who attended DC Days in May.
Artists, apply now for art fair

PeaceWorks’ UNplaza Art Fair will be Sept. 21-22, and the time to apply is now. The fair boasts local artists with reasonable prices. Check out the application at PeaceWorksKC.org. ♫

A new ‘for prophet’ book

Long-time Kansas City peace activist, minister, and PeaceWorks poet laureate Ron Faust has written a memoir about his life. “A Room Full of Shadows” is not just a story I resonate with. It inspires me to action,” says PeaceWorks member Charles Carney. Ron didn’t get fired from one of his pastoral jobs by feeding pablum to passive pew sitters, notes Charles, adding, “From war tax resistance, to standing up against killer drones and nuclear weapons, to giving sermons against the Vietnam War, his witness has been at once loving and challenging. A Room Full of Shadows is not exactly a ‘must read’ but more like a book you cannot NOT read!” The room in the book’s title is Ron’s small office at home, where he ponders, copes, and reaches for books. The new book costs only $20. To order, you can call or text Carney at 913-603-2483 or email donnacharles_1@sbcglobal.net. ♫

Thanks, NCR!

In May, the National Catholic Reporter, based in KC, MO, published a 3-part series on “the toxic legacy of one shuttered weapons plant,” Bannister Federal Complex, KC’s old nuke-parts plant. The “Enemy Within” series is at ncronline.org (click on the magnifying glass in the menu and type “Enemy Within”). ♫

Remember Hiroshima & Nagasaki Aug. 4

Join PeaceWorks-KC in the annual Hiroshima/Nagasaki Remembrance Aug. 4. We begin at 6:30 pm with potluck and have our program at 7:30 pm at the south end of the lagoon in Loose Park, just west of Wornall Rd. and 53rd St. in KC, MO. In our mourning and our hope, we share supper, hang peace cranes from the trees, ring a gong for each year since 1945, meditate, hear speakers, and sing. For info, contact Henry Stoever, 913-375-0045. ♫