

BRONX Peace Times

The Newsletter of
Bronx Action for Justice
and Peace

www.bronxpeace.org

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Continuing Our Work for Justice & Peace



As we went to press, BAJP had just pulled off a successful feeder march on Feb. 15. Rachel Charlop-Powers' sign said it all.

It's been a very busy year for Bronx Action for Justice and Peace! We have been meeting regularly. Our usual meeting schedule is:

1st Thursday Potluck (at a different member's house every month)

2nd Thursday committee meetings (at the church) - 7:30 p.m.

3rd Thursday - study group

4th Thursday - business meeting - 7:30 p.m.

Sometimes, the schedule changes (especially in months that have holidays). If you want to confirm a date, check out our brand new Web site at www.bronxpeace.org or e-mail bxpeace@aol.com. The next general business meeting is on March 13, in the Church, at 7:30 p.m. (see p. 4)

Everyone is welcome to come to this meeting. (Attendance has varied from 5-25; the average meeting prob-

ably attracts 15 people).

We've made connections with students at Fordham University and Manhattan College, and with peace activists in Co-op City and northern Manhattan, and with citywide peace groups, especially the new national coalition, United for Peace and Justice. We attended a citywide conference of neighborhood groups at New School University (in fall of 02). We have a growing list of contacts we reach by mail, phone, and e-mail - and we have an active listserv. And you are reading the third edition of Bronx Peace Times, generously funded by Equity Trust.

Events

In February, March and April of

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Liberties Under Siege, But Resistance Mounting

By John Reynolds

The good news for civil liberties after 9-11 is that in communities across the nation, grassroots movements are springing up to defend the Bill of Rights; and they are beginning to making their presence felt. Bill of Rights Defense Committees are sprouting up in towns and cities across the country. In communities here in the Bronx, resistance to the onslaught on basic rights is rising as well. On Jan. 24, members of Bronx Greens and of Bronx Action for Justice and Peace held their first in a series of ongoing demonstrations at the offices of Congressman Eliot Engel in Riverdale. Complete with casket, pall bearers, and mourners dressed in black, they conducted a "funeral" for the Bill of Rights.

The bad news, and the reason for the

movement to defend our liberties, is that the Bush Administration has mounted an unprecedented assault on the Bill of Rights. In the name of combating terrorism, the government's assault on basic rights and liberties has already been broad and deep; and there are and will be many serious Bill of Rights abrogations which need to be resisted. The devil is in the details, which follow:

The USA Patriot Act

This Act vastly enhances the powers of federal law enforcement agents — powers which apply not only to terrorism cases, but also to *all* criminal, and even to non-criminal investigations; and to citizens as well as to non-citizens. The Patriot Act also abrogates First Amendment rights,

inasmuch as the CIA, whose original charter forbade domestic surveillance activities, has gained broad new authority to conduct surveillance on US citizens (and non-citizens) within the borders of the United States. History has shown that this practice is likely to lead to abuses. Furthermore, the Patriot Act defines "domestic terrorism" so broadly that some non-violent environmental and anti-war groups could fall within that "terrorism" classification.

Government Surveillance and Infiltration of Groups

On May 30, 2002, Attorney General John Ashcroft announced revised surveil-

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Civil Liberties Under Siege

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lance guidelines that removed the three-decades old restrictions on sending undercover agents, or informants, to spy on worship services, peaceful political demonstrations, and other lawful public gatherings (as well as Internet chat rooms); all of which are activities protected under the First Amendment. These new guidelines open the door wide for the government to once again become involved in COINTELPRO type operations and abuses. Currently, in New York City, the NYPD is seeking to lift restrictions (known as the Handschu Agreement) on its ability to monitor and infiltrate political, religious and community groups which are engaged in lawful First Amendment activities.

Attacks on Immigrants

The INS is conducting ongoing massive dragnets, roundups and detentions (without charge or trial) of immigrants from certain targeted countries; these governmental actions amount to racial, ethnic and religious profiling, and a flagrant violation of human rights and international law.

Curtailement of Freedom of Speech and of the Press

The government has mounted an insidious campaign to restrict speech and press freedoms. Unprecedented levels of official secrecy have shrouded government operations from the view of the media, the citizenry and even of the Congress. The refusal of the administration to reveal the deliberations between Vice President Richard Cheney and industry representatives in regard to the formulation of the government's energy policy is only one egregious case in point. Ashcroft has issued an advisory order to all federal agencies to resist, to the maximum extent possible, all requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), a critical tool for citizens and journalists to hold government accountable. Further restrictions on the FOIA are contained in the Homeland Security Act. The Act provides criminal penalties for the disclosure of any information that might reveal vulnerabilities in the nation's infrastructure once a private com-

pany has reported that information to the federal authorities. This provision will severely restrict the ability to uncover the truth about the threats posed by corporate

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polluters, and by the reckless storage of hazardous materials near population centers; potential whistleblowers will now be subject to criminal prosecution.

The government has further attacked the freedom of the press by intimidating libraries, bookstores and their patrons. The USA Patriot Act requires librarians and operators of bookstores to turn over to federal agents the names of their patrons and of the books, reading materials and Web sites which they have perused. The Total Information Awareness System currently being developed within the Defense Department, and the TIPS program of citizens spying and informing on one another could have further chilling effects on what materials Americans will read and discuss.

Finally, the Department of Defense has embarked on a global disinformation and propaganda campaign, which will

inevitably affect news stories reported within the US as well. The ability of the American media to report the truth, and the ability of American citizens to read and hear accurate news regarding the activities of our government and military, will be further impeded.

Local Acts of Resistance

The question of freedom and security has never been posed more sharply, and the nation clearly stands at a crucial crossroads. The Red Scare and Palmer Raids after WWI, the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII, the witch-hunts and blacklists of the

McCarthy era, the harassment and victimization of non-violent civil rights activists, and anti-war activists, in the 1960s are shameful episodes in American history. The ACLU, the CCR and the BORDCs are suggesting that we do not need to go down that dreary path again; and that we can instead reclaim our rightful heritage of safeguarding our freedoms even as we seek greater safety from acts of terrorism.

We can each do our part to ensure that our nation does not succumb to the paranoia and hysteria of those previous eras and the accompanying diminution of our rights. Let's join our neighbors who are demonstrating in defense of the Bill of Rights each Saturday afternoon from 1:00 to 3:00 PM at the war monument in Riverdale. Call the Bronx Greens at (718) 907-6385 to volunteer or if you want more information.

**BAJP is now on the Web
at www.bronxpeace.org**

BAJP now has its very own home on the World Wide Web at www.bronxpeace.org. There you can find everything from meeting times, upcoming peace events, photos, links to alternative media and peace groups, previous newsletters and much more. We need volunteers to help us maintain and update the site. For more info, e-mail mark@bronxpeace.org.



Bronx Says Peace

A bus full of Bronxites organized by BAJP made their way down to Washington in October for the big demo, including Keith Fairey, pictured here. Another Bronx busload returned on Jan. 18.

Continuing Our Work, cont. from p. 11

last year, we held a film series at the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center. The topics/films were: "Panama Deception," "Women and War," and the Military Budget. For each film, a guest expert spoke and contributed to a community discussion about the film and related issues. David McReynolds was one of the guest speakers. Seventy-five to 100 people attended each film showing.

In April, October and in January, we rented buses to take people to Washington DC for peace demonstrations.

The group met with Congressman Eliot Engel in May 2002, and had a second meeting with one of his aides in the fall.

In June, we marched in the Bronx Day Parade with a banner and distributed material

In Oct. 2002, we showed a video of Scott Ritter and Fr. Simon Harak speaking about the possibility of war with Iraq, and Fr. Harak joined us in person to talk with us. Fr. Harak is active with the group, Voices in the Wilderness, which opposes

sanctions against Iraq, and war with Iraq; Scott Ritter is a former Marine and a former chief weapons inspector for UNSCOM in Iraq.

We wrote a statement expressing our concern about the nation's rush to war, and published it as an ad with 100 signatures in the Riverdale Press and the Norwood News.

In October, two weeks before the national march in DC, we held a Rally for Peace in Poe Park, which was co-sponsored by the Vieques Support Network. There were numerous speakers, some music, and a few poets. We estimate that 150 people attended.

Recently, our outreach has included a weekly vigil at the Recruiting Station on Fordham Road. On Saturdays between 2 and 3, we have gathered to witness for peace and distribute literature to passersby.

For more information, visit us on the Web at www.bronx-peace.org.

Submitted by
Margaret Groarke

Peace and Justice Resources

www.commondreams.org

A clearinghouse of progressive opinion from newspapers across the nation.

www.thenation.com

Site of venerable progressive weekly with special section on Iraq action.

www.war-times.org

The bi-lingual newspaper of the movement.

www.fpif.org

Site of Foreign Policy in Focus. Progressive think tank papers on Iraq/Middle East.

www.alternet.org

Original articles and more progressive pieces from papers/mags all over the land.

www.epic-usa.org

The Education for Peace in Iraq Center, led by Gulf War vet Erik Gustafson, with regularly updated policy and action alerts

www.unitedforpeace.org

The on-line peace movement clearinghouse with list of actions worldwide.

www.moveon.org

This site specializes in focusing the energy of thousands of its members via e-mail. Led the charge on raising money on-line for anti-war ads in Times and on TV.

BAJP Mission Statement

Bronx Action for Justice and Peace is a local organization formed in response to the September 11th tragedy. We are appalled, outraged, and profoundly saddened by this horrific event. We feel compassion for the victims and we pledge our ongoing support for them.

At the same time, we are deeply troubled by our government's violent response, which results in the taking of many innocent lives. We believe that violence begets violence; we will explore creative, non-violent solutions in hope of a safer, more secure world.

We are distressed that many of our neighbors -- Arab, Muslims, and others -- are being wrongly persecuted. We are concerned that our government is overextending its powers to investigate and detain innocent people.

We recognize that broad injustices exist in our world. Only through addressing these injustices, locally and globally, can we achieve true peace. We strive to achieve our goals through education, community building and support, concerted action and public events.

Please Join Us!

Bronx Action for Justice and Peace meets regularly on the fourth Thursday of every month @ 7:30 p.m at Epiphany Lutheran Church, 302 E. 206th St. (corner of Bainbridge) in the Norwood section of the Bronx.

However, our next meeting, which is an emergency supplemental meeting, is on **March 13**

We also have a monthly Pot Luck dinner/gathering at differnt members' homes on the first Thursday of each month.

And we have a study group that meets monthly. The next one is on **March 20**.

To confirm meeting dates and times, e-mail bxpeace@aol.com, call 549-4415, or check out our brand new Web site at www.bronxpeace.org.

More *Bronx Peace Times* on the Web

Because of space limitations, we couldn't fit a terrific article about the growing chorus of voices rising against war by Frank Farkas —"Up in Arms Against War in Iraq." But through the wonders of technology, you can read it exclusively on our Web site at www.bronxpeace.org. Just click the button that says "BAJP newsletters." Older newsletters are archived there, too.

Upcoming Events

Vigils every Saturday

We gather every Saturday from noon to 1 p.m. at the corner of Fordham Road and the Grand Concourse.

Check www.bronxpeace.org for updates or e-mail bxpeace@aol.com.

The Bronx Greens also sponsor a regular defense of the Bill of Rights vigil on Saturdays from 1 to 3 p.m. at the at the war monument in Riverdale. Call the Bronx Greens at (718) 907-6385 to volunteer or if you want more information.

Film Series

BAJP will show "A Force More Powerful" on Sunday, March 23 at the Kingsbirdge Heights Community Center at 2 p.m. Check www.bronxpeace.org for more info.

Support Our Work for Peace and Justice

Bronx Action for Justice and Peace is a volunteer organization. We have no staff, so most of our projects are paid for through contributions from members and friends of the organization. If you support our mission, please contribute whatever you can. Checks can be made out to Bronx Action for Justice and Peace and mailed in c/o the Mary Mitchell Center at address below. More information at www.bronxpeace.org.

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