



- A publication of Mennonite Central Committee
- May–June 2000
- Volume XXXII
- No. 3

THE NEXT GENERATION

In this issue, we proudly reprint excerpts from the winners of our first annual high school essay contest. Last year, we asked students to submit essays on one of several public policy topics. Here are the results. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

Youth have often been at the forefront of political and social change. This issue highlights how high school and college-age young people are working to bring about a more compassionate and just world. May their enthusiasm serve as an inspiration to us all.

This article is a condensed version of Josiah’s first-place winning essay. Josiah lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

IN THIS MEMO	
Under Age Influence	2
Youth and Environment	3
Capital Quotes	3
More Winning Essays	4
School Violence	5
Youth Protest SOA	6
Campus Peace Clubs	7
Sound the Trumpet	8

Poverty, Public Policy and the Church

BY JOSIAH GROFF

Poverty is a persistent issue. While poverty rates have appeared to decline in the current economic “boom,” a great many Americans are still trapped in poverty. Government policy has attempted—or claimed to attempt—to address this concern time and time again. What is needed is a new look at poverty in America.

The connections between poverty, race and gender are quite clear. Households headed by a female are below the poverty line at over twice the overall rate. Hispanic households have seen a small drop in their poverty rate, but it is still far above the norm. The poverty rate for black households has held at about 26 percent, far above the national average.

If we are to assess what policies and activities can work towards the elimination of poverty, we must first explore the history of past attempts. Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal marked a new era in American domestic policy. For the first time, government declared itself responsible for the well-being of its citizenry. The successes of New Deal legislation and its long-term effects must not be understated. FDR’s New Deal did not, however, do much to work with sexist and racist dimensions of poverty.

In January of 1964 President Lyndon Johnson declared an “unconditional war on poverty in America.” His “Great Society” plan was bold and hopeful. Sadly it came to an end in 1968. The sheer quantity of bombs needed to destroy Vietnam incurred incredible expenses. Johnson was forced to cut into Great Society programs. However, Johnson’s programs reached much further than FDR’s into the areas of race equality.

In the last quarter of this century, the Reagan administration slashed spending on social programs and began massive unilateral arms spending. House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America” attempted to destroy the last vestiges of New Deal America, cutting benefits for the poorest Americans under the guise of “welfare reform.” Today 12 percent of Americans are locked in the cycle of poverty. Large numbers of Americans are without health care.

We must also look at the attempts of the Christian church to deal with the problems of the poor. With industrialization after the Civil War, great disparities in wealth came about. This led a number of Christians to endorse the “social gospel.” Later, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began to speak out against the racial economic division and called upon government to institute a plan to provide all Americans with adequate income. Our own Mennonite Central Committee became involved in political action

BY J. DARYL BYLER

**How is it that youth—
without the standard
pedigrees of power—
are so effective in
movements for change?**

Under Age Influence

When Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) volunteers came to town to assist with a voter registration drive in the early 1960s, the woman who previously owned our Mississippi home cooked them a spaghetti supper. For her Southern hospitality, the KKK burned a cross in her front yard.

Apparently the Klan perceived this group of student organizers as a serious threat to the status quo. Perhaps with good reason.

Indeed, students played a key role in the Civil Rights Movement. In addition to voter registration drives, they planned sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, ran Freedom Schools, participated in Freedom Rides and led marches. The students worked closely with local leaders. They were well organized. They built strong grassroots networks—without the Internet, no less!

In the United States, young people have been at the forefront of many political and social change movements—protesting the Vietnam War, challenging U.S. policy in Central America in the 1980s, calling for closure of the School of the Americas and denouncing broad economic sanctions against Iraq. Abroad, students have been at the vanguard of recent social and political change in Indonesia, Iran and China.

How is it that youth—without the standard pedigrees of power—are so effective in movements for change? Young people don't control the media. They generally

don't hold high political office. They don't typically have lots of money, a common currency for swaying politicians.

So why are youth so often successful in their calls for change?

Youth bring vision and energy to issues.

In the face of enormous odds—and while their elders may have grown cynical—youth often believe that change is possible. Youth have a robust faith. While all Israel cowered in fear, the youthful David was undaunted by the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17).

Youth are not easily dissuaded. Youth doggedly persist when they believe something to be good and right. Ruth, the young Moabite, had faith that cultural and religious boundaries could and should be traversed (Ruth 1:15–18). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego steadfastly refused to bow to the king's golden statue (Daniel 3).

Youth have a keen instinct for justice. Youth are not easily taken by smooth and sophisticated efforts to mask injustice. Youth see clearly to the core of issues. Perhaps that is why God called the youthful Jeremiah to be a prophet (Jeremiah 1:4–10).

Youth often have less to lose. Youth are perhaps not so concerned about protecting their property or losing their jobs. Still, one cannot easily dismiss the sacrifices that youth have often made. The young queen Esther risked her life to save her people from genocide (Esther 3–8). Many youth died in the Civil Rights struggle.

Youth sometimes get a bad rap for being self-centered or for their lack of commitment. But it might be argued that there have been few successful social and political change movements where youth have not played an active part.

With this issue of the *Washington Memo*, we recognize and celebrate the many positive contributions of young people. ■

WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Staff: J. Daryl Byler (Editorial Director), Christina Leañó, Rachelle Schlabach (Managing Editor), Martin Shupack (Senior Associate Editor), David Whetstone.

To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com

WASHINGTON MEMO (USPS 130-310) is published bi-monthly by Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, PA. Periodical postage paid at Akron, PA. This issue went to press April 17, 2000.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE: Washington Memo subscription rates are \$10 for one year; \$18 for two years. Send request and check to MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500. For address changes, send your old address with your new address to MCC. Allow 2–4 weeks for address change. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501.

For Generations to Come

BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

What sort of legacy will we leave for our children and grandchildren? Will there be forests, clean streams and fresh air to breathe? Or will more acid rain, toxic wastes and smog erase the memory of a healthy environment?

Fortunately, young people today are not passively waiting to see what the older generation decides. They are working to ensure that God's creation will be preserved for generations to come.

Deborah Scott, a junior at Goshen (Ind.) College, recently won first place in the college's annual Peace Oratorical Contest with a speech entitled, "A Vision for a Greener Campus." In her presentation, she listed the pesticides and herbicides used on campus, discussed their effects on human health and the environment, and suggested some possible alternatives. "The land is a gift from God, and we must do our part to preserve it," she emphasized.

Like Deborah, first-year student Rebecca Waltner-Toews is a member of Goshen's environmental club. The club organized an "Earth Week" in late March. Activities included a "children's day," to help local elementary school students learn more about the wonders around them. Rebecca also sits on the college's space-planning committee, where she advocates for environmental concerns.

Senior Thad Miller heads up the recycling program at Bethel (Kan.) College. He and fellow senior Robin Linscheid are co-coordinators of the student environmental club. The club sponsors annual Earth Day celebrations and maintains a number of bikes for free use by students. The lime-green bikes are a visible reminder of earth-friendly modes of transportation.

The club has also gotten involved in direct advocacy at both the local and state level. Last year, the Bethel campus community worked together to protect an area of undeveloped land near the college. When students caught wind of the city's plans to put a concrete path through the area, they circulated petitions and met with the city

manager to express their concern. They were able to work out a compromise—the path could go in, but only with woodchips, not concrete. And just a few months ago, more than twenty students wrote letters to their state legislator, asking her to support a water quality bill.

The efforts of students like these can help ensure the environment will be preserved—not only for their generation, but for generations to come. ■

Pontius' Puddle



CAPITAL QUOTES

"But women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also often better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it. . . . When ethnic tensions cause or exacerbate conflict, women tend to build bridges rather than walls."

—Kofi Annan, U.N. Secretary General, March 8, 2000

"I have no illusions that the task of breaking down barriers that have produced disparities in income and wealth will be simple. It remains an important goal because societies cannot thrive if significant segments perceive their functioning as unjust."

—Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve Board Chair, March 22, 2000

"The \$400 million cost of helicopters alone for Colombia would provide treatment for 200,000 Americans addicted to drugs."

—Rep. Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., March 21, 2000, debating the merits of sending military aid to "fight drugs."

How Public Policies Can Help Limit Gun Violence

BY TYLER JANTZEN

Tyler's essay won second price in our high school essay contest. His is from Tucson, Arizona.

In 1996 there were over 34,000 gun-related deaths in the United States. Every fifteen minutes [in the United States] a human being is killed by a gun. Other industrialized nations have much stricter gun control laws, resulting in fewer gun deaths.

Ideally, the underlying problems of the human tendency toward conflict and violence should be solved. This would resolve the problem at the source. However, of the many aspects of the problem, only the gun dealer part can be remedied through legislation.

The Brady Bill and other legislation [mandate] background checks, waiting periods of up to five days, and positive identification for gun buyers. However, none of these regulations control private sales. Anybody can place an advertisement in the classifieds and sell a gun to anyone else. The buyer could be a convicted felon or a minor. After payment there would be no record of the transaction.

Many of these private sales occur at public gun shows. The four guns used in the Littleton massacre were traced back to gun

shows. David Koresh of the Waco incident stockpiled more than 200 weapons purchased at local gun shows.

The complete elimination of firearms in our society is unrealistic. A more realistic, immediate solution is legislation that would regulate all sales of guns, whether by a private citizen or licensed dealer. The law [should] require a permit for every purchase of a firearm. This permit would have to be renewed every five years. The applicant for the permit would also have to take a course on gun safety and current gun laws. The database of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms would allow each seller, licensed or private, to perform a background check on any buyer. An additional way to prevent accidental deaths would be to require trigger locks with all gun purchases.

Both new legislation and stricter enforcement are needed. Gun violence in the United States can be reduced through the passage of laws. These types of laws could drastically reduce the number of gun-related deaths, and save thousands of lives. ■

Alternatives to War in Lands of Conflict

BY ANDREW DUTCHER

These remarks are excerpted from Andrew's third-place essay. Andrew lives in Sugar-creek, Ohio.

In our world, violence is prevalent. If something is done the "wrong way," we retaliate. [When] a country's leader or military abuses power, we wait until the damage has been done, then bomb them. Christ gives us an alternative, the way of peace.

Because the United States and its allies ignored the violence [in Kosovo] for so long, many opportunities were lost that could have been used to build peace instead of hate.

An American missionary in Nis, Serbia said, "Where was the church ten years ago when we still had time?"

NATO failed to involve the United Nations [in Kosovo]. Instead, NATO was a participant [in the violence]. The UN could have encouraged a peace process, then supplied a peacekeeping force approved by both sides. Mediation would have been more appropriate because it would have saved lives.

Our government can also help [prevent conflict] through economic development [of poor countries].

Our Congressional representatives will not work for peace unless we encourage them. As Mennonites and citizens of the world we need to do our part even if it is not popular. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). ■

School Violence

In public school a group of young men attacked me, and NTAs (non-teaching assistants) stopped the attack. Other students were trying to prevent the NTAs from stopping the fight. [The young men] thought I said something about them. . . . NTAs prevented me from getting back into the fight. I didn't want to retaliate. I would have preferred to talk things out.

Once the fight was over, there were other students who told the attackers to leave me alone. [The attackers] got three days' suspension . . . basically, their popularity increased. The school police said they couldn't do anything . . . They said I could go to the police station and have pictures taken and ask my parents to press charges.

Kids here [at Philadelphia Mennonite High School] are slower to anger. . . . We're all the same kids, but the atmosphere is different. Kids here may want to see a fight, but they don't want . . . any real harm done to anybody.

I think those who live by the sword die by the sword. You live by fighting, you die by fighting. I try to be meek and quiet.

You've got to have support from adults to make programs work. Society as a whole can stop promoting violence, stop putting it in our faces. That's what they think we want; that's what they trained us to think—that money, success and power are the important things in life. Adults need to show true love for all kids.

Philadelphia Mennonite High School uses problem solving and conflict resolution interventions—including Damascus Road training and Temple Law School's LEAP (Law, Education, and Participation) program—to empower its students for peace-making. Youth have recently testified to Congress and federal agencies on ways to improve responses to violence. ■

BY JONATHAN COFER

These comments are excerpted from a recent conversation with Jonathan Cofer, a senior at Philadelphia Mennonite High School. The interview was conducted by David Whettstone.

Poverty, Public Policy and the Church

continued from page 1

when it saw that the root causes of poverty were not insufficient charity but excessive militarism.

Poverty rates have risen and declined throughout American history not as a result of enthusiasm for generosity by Christians, but because of broader economic and political forces that dwarf the churches' charitable efforts to deal with them. Johnson's Great Society failed because its funds were transferred to the Defense Department for the war in Vietnam. Today the United States spends \$306 billion on current military expenses with another \$321 billion to cover military expenses from the past. U.S. military spending exceeds that of all logical enemies combined.

The United States does not lack the resources to eliminate poverty within its borders, but rather chooses not to do so. Past efforts of Christians have had meaningful effects on government policy. We must as Christians move increasingly into the political sphere. We must challenge the established distribution of wealth and call for strong federal action against poverty and racism. We must be witnesses to government. Each Christian must also question how her or his life contributes to the structural injustices in our nation. As people of faith, we must act to encourage the policies needed to end poverty and injustice. ■

Mennonite Youth Protest School of the Americas

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

I've been to Guatemala and met people who suffered from the violence brought about by the School of the Americas; it's a personal thing for me," explains Jonathan Lantz-Trissel, a student at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in Harrisonburg, Va. Lantz-Trissel and 39 other EMU students traveled to Fort Benning, Georgia last November for the annual mass demonstration against the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA). About two-thirds of the group engaged in civil disobedience by crossing the line into the Fort Benning military base.

The SOA trains Latin American military officers. It is notorious for having used class materials providing instruction in human rights violations. Many Latin American dictators and human rights abusers were former SOA students. A nation-wide movement seeks to close the School, and last year the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut off its funding. Lacking Senate approval, this legislation did not become law. Nevertheless, momentum continues to grow.

Mennonite young people have been exceptionally active in anti-SOA activities. EMU students began attending the Fort Benning protests in 1997. Goshen (Ind.) College students have also attended for the past three years. Seventy-five participated in 1999, as did a group from Bethel (Kan.) College. While many university campuses are now represented at the annual protests, Mennonite students were among the first college groups to participate.

According to Tim Godshall, a Goshen College student, the annual November protest is "not just a symbolic act." He went on to explain that, "the SOA is a linchpin in U.S. policy toward Latin America. We want the U.S. government to know that there's a lot of resistance to the SOA. That can be a good starting point for change."

Mennonite high school students have also traveled to Fort Benning to call for closing the SOA. In 1999 twenty-one students from Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite High School and Ephrata (Pa.) High participated, as did

several students from Bethany Christian High School in Goshen, Indiana.

Josiah Groff, a student at Lancaster Mennonite [see page 1], explained that the "very Christian" orientation of the SOA campaign made relating to it easy for Mennonite youth. Lantz-Trissel of EMU noted that it was unusual for a social protest movement to have such a clear faith-based foundation. Because of this, the SOA campaign has "changed people's ideas about protest movements" and drawn a larger number of Mennonite students.

SOA activities also draw Mennonite student participation because many have traveled to Central America and are familiar with the history of U.S. militarism and human rights violations there. Besides attending the November demonstrations, students have addressed the SOA issue through educational forums, vigils, bringing in outside speakers, and writing letters to Congress.

The students also credit university faculty and local churches for encouraging their peace activism. EMU's cross-cultural program helped create connections with Central America. College Mennonite Church in Goshen held a peace studies forum on the SOA in 1997. Community Mennonite Church in Lancaster has sponsored speaking tours from Chiapas, Haiti and elsewhere. In March, Lancaster Mennonite Conference and the Mennonite Church Peace and Justice Committee presented Josiah Groff and fellow student and organizer Susan Wenger with the annual Peace Mug Award. Students also cite their parents' social commitment as a factor in their own peace and justice advocacy.

"Some people went initially [to the SOA protest] because it was the popular thing to do," notes Godshall. "But they had a valuable educational experience and developed a genuine commitment to working to close the School of the Americas." And that, it seems, is why the movement keeps growing. ■

"We want the U.S. government to know that there's a lot of resistance to the SOA. That can be a good starting point for change."

Peace Clubs on Mennonite Campuses

IN OTHER'S WORDS

Peace clubs are an integral component of Mennonite colleges. They serve to keep alive the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition of nonviolence and peacemaking in a contemporary, academic setting. As such, these clubs struggle continually with what it means to be both faithful and relevant.

In one capacity, peace clubs direct their energies toward the needs of the student pursuing justice and peace on campus and in the world. The clubs serve as an information source for the seeker, a space for discernment and discussion, and as a spark for action. They forge the link from study to advocacy. Undergirding each of these roles is an affirmation of club as community. Mennonite college peace clubs recognize that peacemaking is best sustained not through individuals acting alone, but through the support of community. In another capacity, peace clubs at Mennonite colleges serve their wider campus, bringing current issues to public attention and providing information for those not actively seeking it.

Though each peace club has its own distinct mission, there exists a continuing tradition of cooperation between the clubs from each of the Mennonite colleges in the United States and Canada. The Inter-collegiate Peace Fellowship (ICPF) conference, organized and hosted by a different group each year, is perhaps the most obvious evidence of this. Across a wide range of themes, the ICPF draws upon keynote speakers, workshops, panels, meals, and other activities to connect students from Mennonite colleges to each other and to peace issues. This year's conference was held in March at Columbia Bible College in British Columbia, and focused on the issue of "playing war" in video games and other media.

The Bethel College Peace Club—with all its intentions, struggles, and "successes"—may serve to illustrate how one peace club operates from within a Mennonite institution of higher learning. Information gathering and sharing has become the distinct emphasis for our group. We believe that

the power of conviction is fueled by an understanding of an issue and an awareness of its complexities.

Forums open to the public are a prime mechanism for gathering and sharing information. To begin our year-long focus on Iraq, for example, several club members presented brief research on the history of U.N. sanctions, the U.S. and British bombing campaign, and the Oil-for-Food Program. A professor then shared ethical considerations for intervention and advocacy, and discussion followed.

Our group spent a week in symbolic solidarity with Iraqi sisters and brothers. Approximately half of the club's members ate only the limited food available to Iraqis under the Oil-for-Food Program. They also wrote letters to our lawmakers during meal times and lined a block of Newton's Main Street with posters calling for an end to sanctions. At the end of the week, we gathered over a simple meal to pray, remember, and reflect.

Several Bethel Peace Club students have also participated in national actions on particular issues, including the national Jubilee 2000 rally in Washington, D.C. this past April.

Many times, however, we struggle with how to translate our knowledge into appropriate, concrete actions that will make a real difference. Actions that will change the course of events. Actions that are informed, politically relevant, and consistent with Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions. ■

BY ELISABETH TOEWS
HARDER

Elisabeth Toews Harder is a senior at Bethel College. Last summer, she served as an intern in MCC's Washington Office. She is from Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

Our group spent a week in symbolic solidarity with Iraqi sisters and brothers.

NEW STAFF MEMBER

We welcome Christina Leaño to the MCC Washington Office for a special 16-month assignment, which began in March.

Christina previously served with MCC in the Philippines, with the People's Task Force for Bases Clean Up. In that role, she participated in studies concerning the health hazards from toxic wastes on abandoned U.S. military bases, and communicated these findings to both the Philippine and U.S. governments.

In her new role, she will work with the Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solutions (FACES), to organize and advocate for the clean up of the toxic wastes.

Christina grew up in Green Cove Springs, Florida and graduated from Yale University in 1997 before beginning her work with MCC. She is a member of Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Green Cove Springs.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the topics discussed in this issue of the *Washington Memo*, see the following websites:

Poverty, School Violence:
www.childrensdefense.org

Environment:
www.webofcreation.org

School of the Americas:
www.soaw.org

Iraq Sanctions:
<http://leb.net/epic>

Jubilee 2000:
www.j2000usa.org

SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
Hunger Relief Act, FORK Act	The Hunger Relief Act calls for several expansions in the food stamp program to benefit working poor families. A related bill, the Food Stamps Outreach and Research for Kids (FORK) Act, would improve food stamp outreach services by local and state agencies.	Please ask your representative and senators to co-sponsor both the Hunger Relief Act (H.R. 3192, S. 1805) and the FORK Act (H.R. 2738, S. 1800).
Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act	The bill outlines a comprehensive approach for police accountability and building community trust. It would create national minimum standards and federal aids to investigate and stop police, INS and Customs Services misconduct—such as deaths in custody, racial profiling, and other abuses.	Please ask your Representative to co sponsor and support H.R. 3927.

USEFUL ADDRESSES



MCC U.S. Washington Office
 110 Maryland Ave NE
 Suite 502
 Washington DC 20002
 (202) 544-6564
mccwash@mcc.org

Senator _____
 United States Senate
 Washington DC 20510
 (202) 224-3121

Representative _____
 House of Representatives
 Washington DC 20515
 (202) 224-3121

President Bill Clinton
 The White House
 Washington DC 20500
 (202) 456-1111
president@whitehouse.gov

PERIODICALS
 POSTAGE PAID
 AT AKRON, PA



21 South 12th Street
 PO Box 500
 Akron, PA 17501-0500