

Peace and Justice news



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Peace and Justice Committee

EASTERN DISTRICT CONFERENCE
FRANCONIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE
Mennonite Church USA

An occasional newsletter for local
church peace representatives

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ANNOUNCEMENTS ENCLOSED:

(see web links on page 4)

- **Who is My Neighbor and Why
Should I Care?** (Sept. 15)
Immigration workshop
- **Getting in the Way: Nonviolent
Peacemaking** (Oct. 13)
Peace and Justice fall gathering

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Water and Food

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide them with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You cover the year with your bounty; the tracks of your chariot overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, The meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy. -- Psalm 65:9-13

The psalmist rejoices in God's gifts of food and water – and so should we! But increasingly, the our wasteful habits contribute to hunger and thirst for many of the world's people. This issue of PJN examines briefly two current environmental topics – the cost of bottled water and proposed alternatives to imported petroleum..

Just Add Water

As many of us have become more conscious of the health consequences of excessive consumption of soft drinks, the bottling companies, such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Nestlé, have been remarkably successful in persuading gullible consumers to pay exorbitant prices for drinking water in plastic bottles.



Water Safety

In the U.S. there are very stringent safety standards for tap water, regulated by the EPA (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). Water companies are required to test for 96 contaminants and report the test results to consumers. Bottled water, regulated by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration), is generally safe, but standards about water quality are less stringent, and test reports are not readily available. According to the National Resources Defense Council, about 25% of bottled water is just tap water -- sometimes with additional filtering, and sometimes not. The FDA standards for bottled water currently lack strict limits for contaminants such as arsenic, E. coli, other parasites and pathogens, and synthetic organic chemicals such as "phthalates"

PepsiCo recently responded to complaints about misleading labeling of its Aquafina bottled water – a blue mountain-top logo, with the notation "P.W.S.". Pepsi 's new label spells out that the drink comes from a "Public Water Source"– the same source as tap water. Also, Nestlé has announced that new labels for its Pure Life water will indicate whether the water comes from municipal supplies or ground water.

For anyone who has concerns about the taste or safety of local tap water
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Just Add Water (continued from page 1)

the cost of a water filter is far less expensive than reliance on bottled water.

Environmental Costs

Plastic water bottles are a petroleum product, and most of the bottles end up in the garbage - one of the fastest growing sources of municipal waste. Also, bottled water is usually transported many miles from the source, resulting in the burning of massive amounts of fossil fuels, releasing carbon dioxide (a "greenhouse" gas) and other pollutants into the atmosphere.

Human Rights Costs

Many school systems and universities have now banned the sale of Coca-Cola products or cold/soft drinks from other vendors because of the adverse environmental impact and abusive labor practices at international bottling plants.

In the fields just outside a Coca-Cola plant at the village of Mehdiganj, India, little has grown since 2000, when Coca-Cola began to discharge liquid effluent into the fields behind the plant. The Indian Resource Center reports that when the company started dumping sludge into the fields around the plant, people began to develop sores on their feet after they walked through the discharged water that had been flooding their fields. Mosquitoes became a serious menace and malaria cases increased. Some hand-pumps in the area have been emitting foul, non-potable water. A small landowner who owns a bigha (2/3 of an acre) of land just next to the boundary wall of the plant said that rice and wheat used to grow on his small plot of land, but now nothing grows there.

Several bottling plants in India have also been accused of substantially lowering the local water tables. At Mehdiganj, the community living around the bottling plant has experienced severe water shortages as well as polluted water as a result of Coca-Cola's operations there.

There have been protest marches against several Coca-Cola bottling plants in India, and recently a community in the southern Indian state of Kerala has received government support to take soft drink giant Coca-Cola to India's Supreme Court on the grounds of pollution and over-exploitation of local resources resulting in water shortages.

Coke is facing a lawsuit for allegedly allowing death squads in Colombia to murder eight pro-union employees. In the U.S., Coke paid a record-breaking \$192 million to settle a racial discrimination case brought on behalf of 2,000 employees.

Coca-Cola is not alone in its human rights problems. Nestlé which controls a third of the American bottled water market and sells water under 70 different brand names has been the target lawsuits for depleting groundwater in U.S. communities and has been criticized for its aggressive marketing of infant formula in countries where potable water is scarce.

Tap Water or Bottled Water?

Local governments invest approximately \$43 billion a year for pure drinking water and treating wastewater high quality, so that safe drinking water is already available at most public locations



In 2006, at least four billion pounds of plastic bottles ended up in city waste streams.

Estimated annual cost of disposal fees is more than \$70 million, not including the costs of collection, trucking and litter removal.

US consumers spend more than \$11 billion a year on bottled water; at a cost per liter of about 1,000 to 10,000 times more than tap water

More than a quarter of bottled water is sourced from municipal tap water.

In the U.S. the plastic bottles produced for water require 1.5 million barrels of oil per year, enough to generate electricity for 250,000 homes or fuel 100,000 cars for a year.

Excerpted from a resolution adopted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors Annual Meeting June, 2007. See <http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/cms/page1523.cfm>



**Christian
Peace Witness
for Iraq**

On March 16th, 2007, many Pennsylvania Mennonites were participants in the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq; in Washington, D.C. – and the witness continues. On September 16th, there will be a continuous witness in local churches and public spaces across the United States, insisting that the occupation of Iraq must end and that our nation must address the growing violence, poverty and desperation that truly threaten our communities.

Local activities may include worship, visits with congressional representatives or other public action, choir sings, and vigils. Alpha Mennonite Church has announced a silent Peace Witness on September 16th

See the calendar on page 4 or the CPW web page for details: www.christianpeacewitness.org .

Ethanol and the Price of Tortillas

Whether motivated by global climate change or by the world-wide rising demand and dwindling supplies of crude oil, there has been much attention to reducing our consumption of imported petroleum. If the “problem” is defined as U.S. dependence on foreign oil, then the “solution” is to replace foreign oil with domestic energy sources, which might include coal and nuclear power, as well as renewable biofuels, wind, and solar power. But if the “problem” is defined more broadly to include climate change and a variety of other environmental and human rights issues, the “solution” requires more reflection.

In his 2007 State of the Union address, President George Bush called for increasing U.S. ethanol production five-fold to 35 billion gallons a year by 2017 – enough to replace about 15 percent of U.S. gasoline consumption; and the European Union has ruled that by 2020, member states must ensure that a tenth of all fuel they use comes from biofuels.

Various organizations which are looking at the consequences of these policies, however; have raised some disturbing questions – and have also proposed some alternative ways to sustain our planet.

Why Ethanol?

Recent growth in ethanol production -- primarily from corn in the U.S. or from sugar cane in Latin America – has allowed ethanol to replace the fuel additive MTBE. MTBE is an oxygenating gasoline additive, widely used for several years to reduce smog, but now banned in several states because leaking storage tanks have polluted ground water. MTBE is believed to be cancer-causing.

For many years, farmers who grow corn or soybeans and other commodities have depended on government subsidies to break even, because production often exceeded consumer demand. Now that ethanol production for use as a fuel additive has been rising rapidly, so has the demand for corn and other biofuel crops. Most cars today can use gasoline containing up to 10 percent ethanol, and gasoline engines could be adapted to use much higher concentrations of ethanol.

Ethanol – the same kind of alcohol found in alcoholic beverages -- unlike MTBE is not carcinogenic. However, there are other problems with its widespread use as a motor vehicle fuel. Ethanol contributes to corrosion of steel storage tanks, and when blended with gasoline, it causes the leaking gasoline to propagate several times faster into the ground.

Fuel or Food

About 97 percent of ethanol production in the U.S. comes from the sugars and starches of corn kernels, and the production process – fertilizing, cultivating, harvesting, transporting, and distilling ethanol from corn require intensive energy inputs – now primarily from fossil fuels. It would take over two-thirds of U.S. farmland growing corn for ethanol production to replace the 200 billion gallons of diesel and gasoline we consume every year. Ethanol

production from cellulosic fibers, including corn stalks, wood chips, and grasses, is likely to be much more efficient – but not anytime soon, because nearly all investments in ethanol production are focused on corn.

Although U.S. corn farmers no longer need to rely on farm subsidies to survive, the rapid increase in ethanol production is beginning to show up in supermarket prices since corn – including corn syrup and corn oil -- is used in many food products.

Mexico and Guatemala

Tortilla prices in Mexico jumped by more than 50 percent at the beginning of 2007. Mexicans protested these sharp increases, since tortillas are the basic food staple of Mexico’s poorest people. In some states a kilogram of tortillas accounts for as much as one-third of the daily minimum wage. President Felipe Calderon responded to the protests by promising to punish speculators and calling for increased corn imports. He also negotiated with the largest tortilla producers to cap the price of tortillas at 8.5 pesos per kilogram – a 40 percent price increase. In practice, local tortilla vendors have often been charging more than 8.5 pesos. The primary beneficiaries of Calderon’s negotiations are the large corporations that dominate the industry, and the U.S. transnational companies that supply Mexico with corn.



Mexico's farm employment has dropped by 30 percent since the implementation of NAFTA. According to a study by the International Relations Center, between 1999 and 2004 the price paid Mexican corn farmers fell by about half as U.S. imports flooded Mexican markets. For centuries Mexico's campesinos have produced maize and other basic staples, but now their lands are increasingly privatized or abandoned and they are forced to migrate in search of better opportunities.

There is a similar story in Guatemala where the basic staple diet is maize and beans. Guatemalans have been devastated as prices for maize have roughly doubled world-wide in the past year.

Colombia

Afro-Colombian peoples who have long been guardians of the country’s biodiversity are already among the casualties of the exploding demand for biofuels. In Colombia’s coastal lowlands, along the Pacific in the department of Nariño, oil palm plantations are spreading through lands where Afro-Colombians have lived for nearly five centuries. The government has proposed to expand production of export crops, including oil palms, to seven million hectares by 2020.

Paramilitaries linked to the government of President Alvaro Uribe and other wealthy landholders have systematically displaced millions of people and assassinated thousands of community leaders in order to create the mono-culture plantations which are replacing the rich mangrove forests.

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Peace and Justice Calendar*

September 15, 2007 (Saturday) 8:30am-12pm Allentown, PA
Who is my neighbor and why should I care? – a workshop on immigration reform at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 8th and Walnut Streets in Allentown. Registration is free, but please pre-register by Sept. 12th. (See www.ppj.org/neighbor for details.)

September 16, 2007 (Sunday 3 pm:-7:pm) Alpha, NJ
Christian Peace Witness for Iraq at Alpha Mennonite Church. All are welcome to come and pray in silence for an end to the war in Iraq. Come and go as you feel led (3-7pm).

September 22, 2007 (Saturday 2:00-5:00 pm) Alpha, NJ
National Day of Peace celebration for Colombia. Activities will include singing, a short movie on Colombia, and a simple Colombian meal. For more information on either event, contact Monica at 609-731-1655. Location: Alpha Mennonite Ch., 901 East Blvd., Alpha, NJ 08865. www.alphamenno.com

September 21-22, 2007 (Fri.-Sat.) Kempton, PA
Pennsylvania Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living Festival A comprehensive regional festival and conference on sustainability and green living at the Kempton Community Center, Community Drive, Kempton, Berks County, Pa. See www.paenergyfest.com for complete program.

September 29, 2007 (Saturday), 1:00 pm - **Roundtable on Healthcare** at Center in the Park in Germantown to discuss the Rendell Plan and the Home/Business Security Act (SB 300 and HB1660), featuring good speakers on each side.

September 29, 2007 (Saturday), 11 am - 4 pm - **The Peace Fair** at 202 & 263 in Bucks County just south of Peddler's Village. Live Music, Poetry, Bucks County Art Show, Workshops & Exhibits, Childrens' games! For more info call 215-750-7220, ext. 19 or go to <http://www.Quakerpeacefair.org>.

September 30, 2007 (Sunday) Salford Mennonite Church, 480 Groff's Mill Rd., Harleysville, **John Paul Lederach** Professor of International Peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame, will speak about his **international mediation and peacekeeping** ministry at the 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. sessions and a fellowship meal will follow. www.salfordmc.org

October 13, 2007 (Saturday) 8:30am --1:30 pm , Blooming Glen. Annual **Peace and Justice Fall Gathering**, with **Peggy and Art Gish**, who are frequently in Palestine and Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams. There will also be leadership resources for local church peace and justice work, and participant discussion time. (see efjpc.ppj.org/calend07.htm)

October 27, 2007 (Saturday) - **National Mobilization to End the War in Iraq** sponsored by United for Peace and Justice. – ten massive demonstrations for Peace across the U.S. Go to <http://www.unitedforpeace.org> for more info.

November 3, 2007, (Sat. 1:30-4:30 pm) American Friends Service Committee Annual Public Gathering at PA Convention Center, 1101 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA. Keynote speaker is Joan Countryman, founding headmistress of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy in South Africa. Free and open to the public.

November 4, 2007 – Peace Sunday Resources for Peace Sunday observances are posted on the MCUSA PJN web page. see peace.mennolink.org/resources/psunday07/

Feb. 8-10, 2008 Spruce Lake Winter Peace Retreat.
Adult program: Muslim-Christian Dialogue with **Evie and Wally Shellenberger**, who have spent three years in Iran with a Muslim-Christian exchange program jointly hosted by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute.



Youth Program: Living with Diversity, led by pastor **Scott Hutchinson** who has worked in Nicaragua and El Salvador and organizes an annual youth workshop on peacemaking.

February 22-24, 2008 (Thurs. pm - Sat.) **Anti-Racism Analysis Training** (Damascus Road). Philadelphia, PA. See www.mcc.org/damascusroad or email: damascusroad@mcc.org or contact Sharon Williams, SharonW@DesignForMinistry.com (610) 277-1729.

* This calendar includes a sample of leadership training events, including events sponsored or co-sponsored by the EDC/FMC Peace and Justice Committee. Please contact us for further details about any of these events (see contact info. on page 1).
Note: The special issue on military, draft, and conscientious objection has been postponed – but see links to extensive resources on our web page.

Ethanol and ...Tortillas (continued from page 3)

Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples won legal recognition of their land rights when Colombia's constitution was rewritten in 1991, but new laws now require commercial exploitation of these lands. Plan Colombia, which is still up for debate in the U.S Congress – would lead to more abuses, including removal of the remaining legal protections for land inhabited by Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities.

In Brazil, the increasing production of biofuels, including soybeans, which supply 40 percent of Brazil's diesel fuels, is closely correlated with the destruction of the Amazon rainforest

In Malaysia, palm oil plantations are destroying 7 percent of the remaining rainforest every year, and in Indonesia palm oil plantations are expected to consume 98 percent of forest cover by 2020.

Conservation is still our most effective tool for reducing the economic and environmental impact of non-renewable fuel consumption, but there are also better alternatives than ethanol for fueling motor vehicles: In the short term biodiesel (from food waste or natural gas) and battery-powered electric vehicles or even electric-gasoline hybrid vehicles (batteries charged preferably from renewable wind or solar) are much cleaner and produce fewer greenhouse gases than ethanol derived from corn.

See our web page (efjpc.ppj.org) for links to many resources with more details on the cost of ethanol and viable alternatives.