

DELAWARE COUNTY PLEDGE OF RESISTANCE



P.O. Box 309 ~ Swarthmore, PA 19081 ~ phone & fax: 610-543-8427

Summer 2004

Pledge Marches for Peace in Swarthmore July 4th Parade

by Bob Small

Delaware County Pledge was again in the annual Swarthmore July 4th parade. The parade was actually held on Monday, July 5. We were joined by members of Brandywine Peace Community, Swarthmore Friends Meeting, and some unaffiliated activists. There were around 35 total marchers for peace and against the war in Iraq.

Pledge marchers included Brad Bradley, Paula Bronstein, Judy Goodrobb, and Bob Small. The marchers used Will Scull's house as a stag-



Pledge of Resistance members John Bradlee (left) and Bob Small lead the Pledge contingent at the annual Swarthmore Fourth of July parade.

ing point. Also helping this effort were photographer Tina Bradley and banner creator Veronica Gledhill. As always, we were received with great enthusiasm, except for one lone dissent.

The parade itself was well-covered

by the Swarthmorean newspaper, though for some reason, photos of Pledge participation were again missing from the Swarthmorean's coverage, as they have been for the last five years. Curious, that.

How Many Wars?

by Bethana Neveln

No one can imagine what it is like to live through five horrible wars in one generation. We were young when the first sirens blew. My parents were in panic at that time. They put some blankets on us and got us out of the house. After a few minutes, we heard the jet fighters striking our city. Then a few days later

the streets were filled with black funeral signs showing mourners the way to the houses of those who were killed here or on the battlefield. It was the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980.

Eight harsh catastrophic years passed. Thousands and thousands of my people were either killed or disappeared. Even now, nobody knows the destinies of thousands of the disap-

peared. When the first war ended, we thought that there would be no more war in Iraq. But alas this dream didn't last long. Because within two years there was another war, more severe and much more destructive. Forty-five horrible fierce, hard days of bombing. We experienced a new thing with this war. We had to leave our house, our city, and our belongings, and flee for our lives.

See "Wars," page 2.

How Many Wars?

continued

The second war ended with the infrastructure destroyed and thousands and thousands of human casualties and with a new hard poverty that Iraqis had to undergo and adjust to—adjust to starving! This was indeed the mother of all battles. The mother of starving, poverty, and hardships. Why did all these wars happen? Who benefited from these wars? Definitely not the Iraqis. Are they suffering from a spell or a curse? We escape from one war only to fall into another.

Twelve years of starving, hardships, and imprisonment. My country is a big prison now. No one in Iraq can travel easily, and its people are outcasts. Why does this thing happen to us? What did we do? O my God and that is not the end of it. There is a big gigantic fierce war awaiting us. The war of liberation and democracy, just to get rid of one man who causes wars, we have to go through another war. But this war is unique. For the first time we experienced the meaning of the word dissecting, as you could see all the butchered, cut

bodies scattered everywhere, even on the roadsides. What can you feel or say when you see a body without a head, or a body cut into two halves, or a pile of mass butchered corpses or a head in two halves, and you don't even know what part belongs to what corpse? What is your feeling if one day you step on a thing, and you discover that this thing is a remaining part of a human body?

Most of the people left their cities. No one stayed behind to bury these bodies, just a lot of flies and hungry wolves and dogs that ate them. My people were the meals for those hungry animals. The people escaped their cities because the cities became a battlefield where the army put the tanks, guns, cannons, and surface-to-air missile bases, and piles and piles of ammunition, and huge black fires here and there set to foil the attackers. In front of my house, there was a big truck carrying a huge missile; there were tanks and young soldiers. I was terrified to see all this. I couldn't believe my eyes. One young soldier rang our doorbell, and

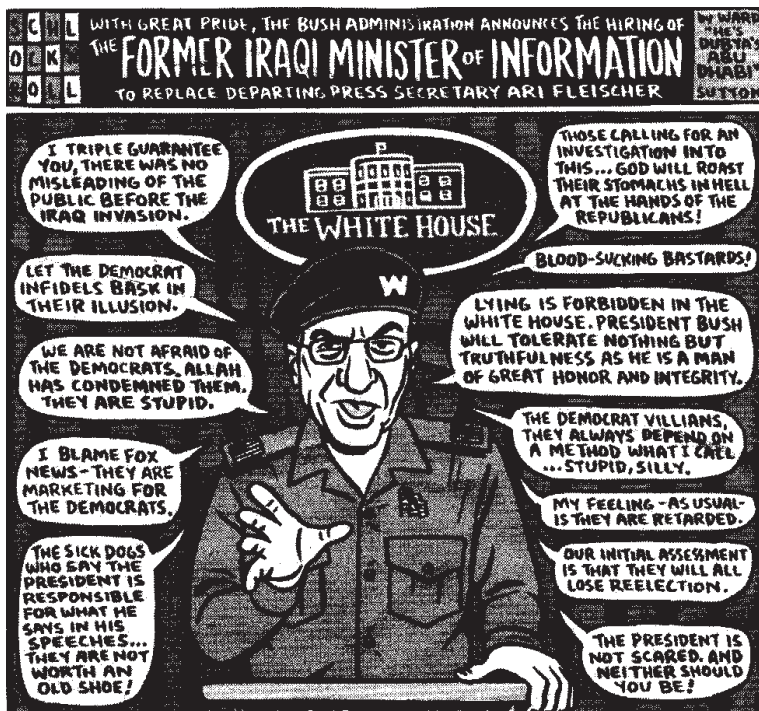
said, "Ma'am I'm hungry." I couldn't believe what I heard. The soldiers were hungry. O almighty God! They were fighting and they were hungry. They were pushed to fight. No one could say no to the conscription. I gave them all the food in our refrigerator, and so did all our neighbors. On this day we left our house after my married sister came with her terrified five-year-old daughter and said, "There was a fierce battle in my city, and all the families have fled for their lives, and some of them even ran without their shoes."

The mission was accomplished, and the war ended. And it was time to return to our cities and villages. On the way back, we saw the destroyed buildings, the burned tanks and cannons, and corpses scattered everywhere. People started to bury the dead, tens and tens of corpses everywhere. Sometimes one couldn't differentiate. "Are they Iraqis or not? Are they the suppressed or the liberators?"

Corpses look the same. God created us equal and now death levels all people. And that's not the end. Now, we have a new war after the war of democracy and liberation. It is the war of car bombing and rocket-propelled grenades. No one knows when they leave home whether they will get back alive. The danger is everywhere, in every street, and every shop, and every square.

A few days ago my best friend survived a car-bombing. Thank God she was just wounded. She works as a news anchor in Baghdad. And you can imagine what a body full of wounds means to an anchor.

So we have many wars. The first war was Al-Qadissiya (the Iran-Iraq war), the second was Gulf War I (the mother of all battles), the third was the war of sanctions and starvation, the fourth was the war of liberation and democracy, and the last is the ongoing war now. What should we name it? The war of No One Safe in Iraq, or the war of Who's Next to be Bombed?



Bethana Neveln is a former Iraqi news anchor, now living in Chester, Pa.

Pledge “Teach-In” Welcomes Friends of Haiti

by John Bradlee

This year marks the 200th anniversary in Haiti of the only successful slave revolt in the Western hemisphere. For the 20 members of the Haitian community and their friends who gathered at the Delaware County Peace Center in Springfield on a warm May evening, it was a good reason to celebrate.

But unfortunately, not that night. Their partying mood was tempered by the February removal of Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and a recent report by the National Lawyer's Guild describing escalating violence throughout the country. For most of the participants, the reasons for Aristide's ouster are no mystery.

“My government is absolutely committed to the destruction of democracy in Haiti,” states Swarthmore resident Peter Barus. Concerned about U.S. administration policy as Haiti's political situation deteriorated in February, Barus contacted his representatives. He was met, he says, with disinterest or outright resistance. “They thought Aristide's removal was a really good idea.”

Ron Coburn, who has worked on medical exchanges between Port-au-

Prince Hospital and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and met with President Aristide during his term in office, concurs. “When Haiti was ruled by dictators friendly to the U.S., American money flowed,” he explains.

According to Coburn, loans and aid stopped with Aristide's election in 1990, resumed with his exile in the early 1990s, stopped when he was reinstalled in 1994, and have apparently been restored with the selection of a U.S.-backed interim prime minister.

For Coburn, it was U.S. economic pressure that weakened Haiti's government and made February's coup possible.

“The U.S. was against the democratically elected government (of Aristide).”

But why would the U.S. government want to see Aristide deposed? One audience member suggested that under Aristide human rights were not fully respected; Aristide was not “a true democrat.”

“Aristide was not a saint,” acknowledges panelist Franz Latour, director of the Haitian Community Center of Philadelphia. “He allowed corruption. [But] the U.S. has dealt with leaders who were corrupt.”

They would not deal with Aristide, according to Latour, because “he brought dignity to ordinary people.” Latour, who says he is from a “lighter-skinned, privileged” Haitian family, tells a story from his youth to illustrate his point.

A peasant woman brought a bag of coffee beans to be weighed by his uncle, the owner of a coffee plantation. When the woman politely disputed the uncle's gross undercount, the man told her, “Let us be clear: You cannot read. You are black. You are ugly.”

Latour's uncle called the local police official (who happened to be a relative) and had the woman arrested for defaming him. When she could not pay the fine imposed by the judge (another relative), the peasant woman was jailed.

The Haitian elite despises the “small people,” says Latour. Because Aristide served the interests of these people at the expense of the landowners and businessmen, he became the enemy of the U.S. and Haitian elite alike.

Rather than tilt his economic policy toward privatization and encouraging foreign investment, as U.S. officials suggested, Aristide implemented educational, medical, and housing programs aimed at the poor. This won him no friends in Washington, the panelists suggested.

Activists seem sure there's a lot of work to be done before they get their full-blown celebration of Haiti's successful 1804 slave revolt.

Democracy Unplugged Hosts Forum on Iraq

by Bob Small

Democracy Unplugged hosted an Iraq Forum on Tuesday, June 29 at Media Borough Hall. This free event brought out 150 audience members to hear a discussion with Lawrence Davidson, WCU professor of Middle East history; John Grant, Delco Wage Peace and Justice and Vets for Peace; Robert McMahon, mayor of Media and veteran; Greg Phillips, 7th Congressional District

Democratic candidate and active member in the U.S. Naval Reserve; and Rocco Polidoro, president, Springfield Independent Republican team and American Legion Commander.

Each Panel member gave a short opening statement, followed by questions from a student panel and the audience.

The June 30 issue of *The Delaware County Daily Times* had a lead article and photo of this event.

Democracy Unplugged has a five-member coordinating committee: Bob Small, Roger Balsom, Lana Brown, David Jahn, and Owen Powell. Democracy Unplugged presented six events over two years in Haverford, Media, and Swarthmore.

The organization is seeking donations, members to join our coordinating committee, venue suggestions, and volunteers. Democracy Unplugged is a non-partisan group that exists to promote free and open forums. We can be reached at 610-543-8427; PO Box 449, Swarthmore, Pa., 190801; e-mail, demunplugged@comcat.net.

Colombia Update: Threats and Promises

by Lynn Biddle

When President Alvaro Uribe Velez was campaigning for president, he promised to defeat the leftist guerrillas plaguing Colombia militarily. Voters were fed up with former President Pastrana's failed attempts to negotiate peace with the largest rebel group, FARC, through the safe haven that he created for them as a place for negotiations to take place.

As governor of Antioquia Province, Uribe had conducted an all-out campaign against guerrillas there. He got so "tough" that his civilian watch program, *Convivir*, was ordered disbanded by Colombia's constitutional court when it began acting as his personal death squad, carrying out massacres, often in coordination with government forces or with right-wing paramilitary armies known as "paras."

FARC had threatened that if Uribe were elected, it would bring the war to the cities. FARC attacked Uribe's August 2002 inauguration ceremony with mortars, and an exodus of city dwellers began. As late as March 2004, the army was reportedly still preparing for a direct assault on Bogota. However, after setting off an occasional bomb, FARC never really succeeded at urban warfare, and they stuck to the kind of fighting they knew best: rural.

AUC, the largest right-wing paramilitary group in Colombia, made its own

threats: if Uribe was elected they would double or even triple the size of their forces. They have not, apparently, been able to fulfill this threat.

Shortly after Uribe took office, he increased the size of the army and announced a new anti-terrorism initiative with mass arrests on suspicion of subversive activities, often made on the basis of unconfirmed allegations by paid or military informers.

Uribe also began recruiting "peasant soldiers," now 12,000 to 15,000 strong. These are peasants who underwent three months of regular army training, were given uniforms and guns, paid army wages—and were then sent back to their home villages to live in barracks and help track guerrillas in the area. According to critics, this sets up the peasant soldiers, their families, and even villages as guerrilla targets. There is also the possibility that they'll commit human rights abuses or side with the paras. The army is also creating a secret network of peasant informers.

Uribe did begin peace negotiations. These talks, however, were not with FARC or the ELN, Colombia's two largest guerrilla forces; they were with AUC, the paras. Uribe even created a safe haven for them. In December 2002, AUC signed a cease-fire with the government that provided for demobilization of 15,000 paramilitary troops by the end of 2005. AUC demanded amnesty and a

g u a r a n t e e that no AUC leader would be given jail time for human rights abuses; instead they would make reparations to their victims. Uribe has not discarded an amnesty as a possibility.

It appears that the Uribe government has an informal amnesty program already in place for high-ranking paras and army officers accused of collaborating with them on human rights abuses. When Colombia's current attorney general Luis Camilo Osorio took office, he immediately fired the prosecutors most active in investigating such cases. He then dropped a case against a General Rito Alejo del Rio, considered one of the most important in Colombia because it alleged widespread collusion between the army and paras. Osorio's office has repeatedly been the focus of corruption scandals and reports of infiltration by paras, guerrillas, and drug traffickers.

Human rights workers in Colombia have become more explicitly targets of both military and paramilitary forces since President Uribe has made public statements calling them guerrilla sympathizers and equating them with terrorists. Large numbers of mass arrests under Uribe's get-tough policy have included innocent social activists. An international campaign, (so far unsuccessful), is pressing Uribe to withdraw these accusations.

Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities are suffering disproportionately at the hands of all Colombia's armed groups, but today it's openly recognized that this is, in part, because transnational corporations wish to displace them in order to exploit rich natural resources concentrated along the swampy Pacific coastal plain where many indigenous communities are found.

Labor unions also continue to be targeted by paras. Today, they are fighting not just for higher wages and better working conditions; workers at the government-owned oil company, Ecopetrol, and its mining company, are fighting privatization of those companies. The oil workers have just recently won their struggle. The government will not be allowed to sell that important part of Colombia's natural wealth to foreigners.

The Uribe administration has begun a campaign to amend the national

See next page, Colombia



Colombian drugs workers.

Pledge Movie Nights

by Will Scull

Our own Bob Small, an amateur movie historian, feels that movies about war tell us about the cultural and social context that existed when the movies were made. So he, with the help of other Pledge members, instituted several Pledge movie nights at the Delco Peace Center.

The first night we had three films to choose from, each treating war in a very different way. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is a science fiction film in which the threat of earthly nuclear war is stopped by unearthly aliens during the Cold War of the 1950s. *Dr. Strangelove*, made during the 1960s, makes fun of the insanity of nuclear war and shows how World War III could happen to end civilization.

The final option, and the one chosen by those present at the first movie night, was *Duck Soup*. This Marx Brothers film, which was made between the world wars, made fun of the silly causes of war and of stupid leadership and the forces of greed and personal revenge. The end shows the costumes from pre-

vious wars but, alas, also shows how little we have learned.

The second movie night featured stormy weather outside and inside, the first Iraq war—Hollywood style—via the movie *Three Kings*. The plot included a little sex at the beginning and a treasure hunt in the middle of the Iraqi retreat from Kuwait. The treasure-hunters leave the U.S. army to confront Iraqi rebels, Iraqi army regulars, and friendly local residents caught up in the mess.

One of our viewers, who had experienced WW II first-hand, left before

the end of the movie—too realistic and too violent! The rest of us were hooked to see how the mess could be resolved. Would humanity prevail over greed? Would any of the central characters survive? Is there any justice in the chaos of war?

The two movies we viewed on the two nights appealed to two different audiences. The first appealed to those of us who are overwhelmed with the serious nature of war and need some humor to combat depression. The second appealed to those of us who get excited by the action and the competing strategies of war, so long as we can separate ourselves from the real horror of war.

Colombia

constitution to permit those in elected government positions to serve more than one term. Supporters say that Uribe needs more time to complete his programs and that true democracy should provide the electorate the possibility of keeping those in office of whose performances they approve. There are two paths to an amendment, and Uribe supporters have made a good start on both. One path requires Congress to vote in favor of the proposed amendment eight times. Before going into recess until July 20, Congress had finished four of these votes. The other path is for a national referendum ("Plan B"). A first petition, in favor of holding a referendum, carried well over the required number of signatures. Supporters now have six months to get signatures from five

percent of the voters on a second petition, then the approval of Congress.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration is attempting to raise the legal cap on the number of U.S. troops and U.S. government contractors allowed in Colombia at any one time. From 400 troops and 400 contract workers, the administration wants the cap raised to 800 and 600. As legislation for 2005 foreign appropriations moves through Congress, amendments are being made for caps at various levels and to eliminate caps all together. The bill isn't expected to come out of the conference committee before September 1. Activists are urging members of both houses to, at least, keep the current 400:400 cap.

And the war on drugs? Just as the Clinton and Bush administrations have

promised, aerial fumigation has decreased the amount of acreage devoted to growing coca and poppies. But drug prices haven't changed and, reportedly, the quality of drugs sold on the street in the USA is even better than before. As predicted, coca production merely moved to other places—Peru and the Colombian Amazonia—and is now being grown on smaller plots in remote places, including mountainous state parks, which are harder to find and fumigate.

It's interesting to note that Colombia's total annual production of coca is about 825 metric tons, while the U.S. total demand for coca is only 250 to 300 metric tons. The war on drugs has a long way to go before supplies to the U.S. are threatened!

CAFTA: Re-colonizing Central America



EARLY CENTRAL AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

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Address correction requested

Community Calendar

Brandywine Peace Community Monthly Potluck Supper* & Program, 2nd Sunday of the month (except August), 4:30 pm, University Lutheran Church, 3637 Chestnut St., Phila., Pa. (*Those attending the potluck supper are asked to bring a main dish, salad, or dessert to share.)

August 6—Hiroshima Day vigil, ceremony, and civil disobedience, Lockheed Martin, Mall & Goddard Boulevards, Valley Forge, Pa. (behind King of Prussia Mall) 8 am - Siren (time of the Hiroshima bombing) - Bell-tolling vigil, noon - ceremony of remembrance & nonviolent direct action (those interested in doing the civil disobedience, call the Brandywine Peace Community by July 30 for information about the preparation meeting).

August 9—Nagasaki Day Sundown Ceremony for Peace, 8 pm, Lockheed Martin, Mall & Goddard, Valley Forge, Pa.

For more information: Brandywine Peace Community P.O. Box 81, Swarthmore, PA 19081; 610-544-1818; e-mail: brandywine@juno.com; website: www.brandywinepeace.com.



Brandywine Peace Community members march in Swarthmore in the July 4th parade.

**Delco Pledge of Resistance
Coordinating Committee Meetings
Every 3rd Wednesday of the month
All welcome**

Contact P.O. Box 309, Swarthmore, PA 19081
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