
Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

Vol. 4 No. 2

June 2001

GPS Works with Congressman Dennis Kucinich Department of Peace Proposal Moves Forward

By John Eriksson and Mindy Reiser

A highlight of our Peace Power 2000 experience last June was the visit with Congressman Dennis Kucinich to discuss his far-reaching proposal to establish a U.S. Department of Peace.

However, since that exciting meeting we heard little about the proposal over the next 10 months. This quiescent period has suddenly changed and intensive planning is now underway to launch the Department of Peace proposal. We are fortunate to have been directly involved in the process.

Our involvement developed as follows:

John sent Congressman Kucinich a letter inviting him to join the "Building Blocks for Peace" event in Cincinnati April 26 (see p. 3).

Mr. Kucinich replied with regret that he would not be able to join us, but invited John and Mindy to visit him in his Washington office.

John and Mindy met with the Congressman on May 10, and returned for two subsequent meetings on May 17 and May 22.

These meetings have put in motion planning to introduce a bill in the U.S. Congress to establish a Department of Peace and to initiate a national discussion and debate on the proposal.

Elements of the plan include the following:

1. A proposed meeting on June 21 in the Capitol Building between Congressman Kucinich and peace-oriented organizations that will be attending a Workshop on Faith-based NGOs and Peacemaking at the U.S. Institute of Peace on June 20. The purpose of the meeting will be to announce the Congressman's plans for introducing a Department of Peace bill and to elicit broad support for the bill.
2. The proposed date for introduction of the Department of Peace bill is July 11, 2001. Congressman Kucinich plans to invite a large number of peace organizations from around the country to an event in Washington D.C. on July 11 to mark introduction of the bill.
3. A major event is being planned in Cleveland, Ohio, the Congressman's home district, on July 22. This event, dubbed "Cleveland Together", is to consist of a large number of small meetings (up to 100 meetings of 10-15 people each) to explore the place of peace and nonviolence in their lives.
4. Congressman Kucinich sees the Cleveland event as launching a series of events around the country to discuss issues relating to violence and nonviolence, peace and war, domestically and abroad, and the consequent need for a Department of Peace.

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Could This Be Peace Service?

Members Reply

Global Peace Services is based on a philosophy of active nonviolence that can be applied in many kinds of conflict. We sent the following account to several GPS members with the following questions:

Do you see the situation as an opportunity for peace service? Why? How would you respond?

On April 18, forty-six Harvard University students and alumni seized the building housing the president's office. Their demands centered on raising the minimum wage of Harvard's janitorial and food service workers to \$10.25 an hour and having Harvard pay for their health insurance.

Harvard reported an endowment of \$19.5 billion in June, 2000. Two years ago, the city of Cambridge, where Harvard is located, adopted legislation calling for all employers to pay at least \$10.25 an hour. The U.S. Government sets the national minimum wage at \$5.15 an hour.

On May 8, after a marathon negotiation session with student protesters, Harvard University agreed to form a 20-member committee that includes student and worker representatives to examine the University's compensation system.

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published quarterly. GPS-USA is incorporated in the District of Columbia and is tax-exempt. Current Board members are: Clara Doyle, John Eriksson, Mary Evelyn Jegen, Bill Price, Mindy Reiser, Tricia Sullivan and Harry Yeide. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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This ended the longest sit-in in Harvard's history. University officials also announced the possibility of retroactive wage increases for custodians and a freeze on new subcontract hires until the committee's recommendations are implemented.

Grace Escobar (Chicago, IL) wrote:

I fully support the students who occupied Massachusetts Hall at Harvard to force the University to pay all custodians, dining hall staff and security guards a minimum wage of \$10.25 per hour. With the high cost of living, the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour cannot meet the worker's needs. It is shameful that the wealthiest school in the country cannot pay their workers a decent wage. The student action was nonviolent and in the tradition of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez.

As Archbishop Oscar Romero said, "There aren't some who are born to have everything, leaving the rest with nothing. Such people cannot taste the happiness that God has created for all."

Frank Romance (McLean, VA) replied:

Justice and peace are inseparable. Consequently, the situation described was an opportunity for peace service. The situation also raises the basic question, "What constitutes a living wage?" It should also remind us that peace grows from just societal structures deriving from religio-cultural values deeply rooted in human dignity, rights, and consciousness. To the extent that the demonstrators forced the university administration to examine its compensation system, they contributed to both justice and peace and the common good of at least that academic community. I ponder other dimensions of justice and peace beyond the economic. How many of those demonstrating for a living wage would also demonstrate for another fundamental just cause, the right to life itself?

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GPS Local Groups Meet in Northern Virginia and Cincinnati

GPS members who had participated last June in our month-long program, Peace Power 2000, organized local GPS programs at George Mason University in Northern Virginia in March and at Xavier University in Cincinnati in April.

Close to forty people gathered in each place for a program that shared both method and subject matter of the June program. Newcomers had an opportunity to join in a discussion about what it will take to displace war with more constructive ways of dealing with large-scale conflicts. There was also a probing discussion of the proposal for a Department of Peace that is being readied for introduction as a Bill in the U.S. Congress. (See page 1.)

Both local meetings explored a range of possibilities for nonviolent action that **prevents** potential conflicts, rather than reacts to them. The day after the Cincinnati event, GPS Board President, John Eriksson, met with the capstone seminar of Xavier's peace studies program and continued discussion with faculty about developing the peace service dimension of Xavier's peace studies program.

The GPS Board is ready to offer both program ideas and organizational help to members who want to organize a GPS-USA meeting in their area.

Looking Ahead

The GPS Annual Gathering will held be in Washington, D.C. on September 29.

Watch for a special mailing with details about this opportunity to help shape the future of our organization. Save the date. And please join us!

Integrating Nonviolence into Professional Training

In addition to training full-time peace service professionals, one of the goals of GPS-USA is to integrate nonviolence training into the standard education for professions. For instance, preparation for careers in social work, medicine, and ministry could begin integrating nonviolence education and action into current curricula.

To experiment with this integrative concept, Tricia Sullivan, GPS-USA board member, recently facilitated a weekend workshop on Compassionate Listening for a small group of seminarians in Washington D.C. These men are preparing for ministry in the church, and so they focused on how Compassionate Listening could serve as a foundation for their future pastoral work.

GPS seeks to test more of its workshops and courses in a variety of settings. If you know of potential sites or participants for this training, please contact GPS-USA.

Nominations Open for New GPS Board Members

Nominations are now being accepted for the GPS-USA Board of Directors. We are seeking people who are actively involved, or would like to be actively involved in the leadership of the GPS movement.

Our first election of board members will be held in September, 2001. Each board member serves for three years. We will fill three openings: one position of a retiring board member and two newly created positions. You may nominate yourself or someone else. Deadline for nominations is August 1. Please send nominees' names to Clara Doyle, 1005 Dead Run Drive, McLean, VA 22101(703)356-8023claradoyle@aol.com

Department of Peace

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So far, our role has been to:
make suggestions for program content of the proposed events;
suggest organizations that could be invited, as well as resource persons; and
identify already planned events around the country that might provide platforms for presenting and discussing the Department of Peace proposal.

As the process evolves and the dates of planned events get closer, the need for more help will intensify. We have already asked other GPS board members to help and will be enlisting the help and support of GPS-USA members and friends around the country.

We can all help build public support for the Bill after it is introduced. This can be done in various ways, including sponsoring meetings in churches, synagogues, and schools, and writing articles for local newspapers and periodicals. We welcome your suggestions for future activities in support of the Department of Peace legislation.

Members Reply

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Louise Lawarre (Cincinnati, OH) answered:

The experience of the Harvard students' sit-in is an exciting example of nonviolent direct action. I see two immediate aspects of how GPS-USA trained workers would be a valuable asset in such a situation.

First, trained in conflict resolution and in the personal commitment needed to be truly nonviolent throughout such a protest, they would be skilled in developing effective strategies and training others to participate effectively.

Second, as part of the community, they might be able to bring the parties in the conflict to the negotiating table before direct action is necessary.

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