

2010 Annual Report

Twenty Five Years of PEACEMAKING – 1985-2010

The Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives

At the height of the cold war, in December 1985, The Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives was created at a meeting on the 10th floor of the Library at Hofstra University. For twenty-five years, the Alliance has worked for a world where dialogue and negotiation replace war, where nuclear weapons are abolished, where human rights are protected, and promoted, and where the national budget reflects life-giving priorities—education, housing, healthcare and jobs.

That meeting at Hofstra in 1985 explored how to be more effective, more visible, how to communicate with each other and how to coordinate our efforts with religious and educational institutions and the media. The meeting was facilitated by Michael D’Innocenzo, Hofstra Professor and Chair of Hofstra’s UCAM and Margaret Melkonian, Uniondale-Hempstead Nuclear Freeze Committee.

After much deliberation, we called ourselves the **LI Alliance to Prevent Nuclear War**. Our goal was to end the arms race with a public education campaign that would redefine national security and reorder budget priorities. With outreach to colleges, churches, mosques and synagogues and community organizations, we intended to mobilize public support for peaceful coexistence and for social justice.

The Alliance was built on the extraordinary efforts of many groups in the LI Network for Peace and Justice who worked for many years on the nuclear freeze, on stopping euromissiles in Europe, on ending US intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua. This community of peacemakers, which met at the Quakers Meeting House in Westbury, were persistent and committed.

The founding organizations and individuals included the: Hofstra United Campuses Against Militarism (UCAM), Mike D’Innocenzo, Marty Melkonian; South Shore Citizens for Survival, Fran and Bob Boehm; Great Neck SANE, Frank and Betty Phillips, Stan and Shirley Romaine; Physicians for Social Responsibility, Jack and Adele Lawrence, Herb Perr, Ron Stritzler, Jim Bernstein, Mildred and Rudolph Joseph; Suffolk PSR, Yale Solomon and David Goodman; War Resisters League LI Esher Pank; Huntington Peace Center, Merritt Queen, John and Sally Lineweaver; North Shore SANE, Jeannette Edelstein; Merrick Bellmore Freeze Committee, Sue Rosenfeld; South Country Peace Group, Michelle Santantonio, Nancy Arthur; Rockville Centre Citizens for Survival, Mariane Kulick, Nancy Baumel; Interfaith Nutrition Network, Michael Moran; League of Women Voters, Ora Meyer, Phyllis Cohen; Uniondale Hempstead Freeze Committee; Citizens for Global Survival, Mina Block; Westbury Friends Committee, Dick Goodman; Unitarian Universalist Plandome Social Action Committee, LI Catholic Peace Fellowship and so many other peacemakers.

After several more meetings, we found common ground and agreed on a name – The Long Island Alliance to Prevent Nuclear War. We hired a staff and found an office and a home at the Ethical Humanist Society in Garden City. With the assistance of attorney Pat Moore, the Alliance became a 501c3 tax-exempt non profit. We elected a board with Michael D’Innocenzo as our first chair. Megan O’Handley joined us as Assistant Director and for more than twenty years kept the peace business going in so many immeasurable ways.

In the late 80’s, the Alliance with member organizations held ***Town Meetings on Redefining National Security*** in Hempstead, East Meadow and Smithtown, with speakers Richard Barnet, Eugene Carroll and David McReynolds – then as now security was about more than military might but about the rights of human beings to have jobs, housing, food and education. The Alliance conducted a nuclear test in Mineola and held a Rally calling for a test ban. In 1987, we protested Edward Teller, father of the

hydrogen bomb and star wars proponent at Adelphi.

In many ways, the LI Alliance has come full circle as the nuclear issue has once again come to public attention with President Obama's speech in Prague calling for a world without nuclear weapons. On May 1, Long Islanders participated with over ten thousand activists from around the world during the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Conference. Millions signed petitions calling for a Treaty to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons. Through a nuclear disarmament education campaign, coordinated by Director Sr. Mary Beth Moore, three thousand Long Islanders signed petitions at programs, supermarkets and railroad stations. With the current debate on the START Treaty ratification and on over \$80 billion for nuclear weapons modernization, the issue will require vigilant and increased citizen action if we are to achieve a nuclear abolition.

As an outcome of outreach to high schools talking about the nuclear arms race, students formed the LI Student Coalition for Peace and Justice. The Alliance nurtured and provided space for meetings for students to educate themselves and their peers. The students organized the first Peace Day and Walk, walking from Garden City to Eisenhower Park. More PeaceWalks followed as did programs and press conferences.

Along with press conferences and event coverage, the Alliance's media work focused on meetings with *Newsday's* editorial and managing editors. The Alliance also produced quarterly reports that provided both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of *Newsday's* coverage of US-Soviet relations, the nuclear arms race, star wars and the LI military industry. The Alliance promoted a media education campaign that encouraged the public to be more active news consumers.

In 1986, we formed an **Interfaith Peace Committee** which included: (Justice and Peace Office, Rockville Diocese of LI (Sr. Rose Sheridan); LI Council of Churches (Bob Pierce); LI Board of Rabbis (Rabbi Gabriel Maza); Jewish Peace Fellowship (Rabbi Philip Bentley); LI Presbytery (Rev. Ken Graham); United Methodist, Eastern District (Rev. David Parker); LI Episcopal Diocese (Bishop Orrin Walker); and Rev. Hal Lloyd (Valley Stream Presbyterian Church). We worked together on ending the nuclear arms race and calling for a nuclear test ban.

During the Gulf War in 1991, the Interfaith Committee raised religious voices in objection to the war and afterwards called for forgiveness and reconciliation at a Telicare program with Bishop McGann. The Alliance sponsored meetings on LI to mobilize against the war; held press conferences; and organized peace vigils on Old Country and Glen Cove Roads. We supported and involved LI military families who met with LI congressional representatives and went to marches in Washington with LI peacemakers. We worked against sanctions that killed as surely as bombs the people and children of Iraq.

With the end of the cold war, we took a new name and became the **LI Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives**, reinforcing the reality that preventing war means feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, providing universal national healthcare, reducing military budgets, stopping the arms trade and converting the LI economy. The name change reflected our optimism about the world – about ending the nuclear threat, about economic conversion and about the peace dividend. We produced a report with Hofstra University, *“Reinvesting in Long Island,”* and promoted serious discussion with business and academic leaders about a sustainable economy. In 1998, then Executive Director Robert Lepley brought together community members in UPSERJ, connecting militarism to racism and poverty.

Throughout the 90's and the first decade of the 21st century, we educated Long Islanders about foreign policy issues at fall and spring forums at Hofstra University and at UUCSR. Speakers included: Daniel Berrigan, Richard Falk, Jonathan Schell, Noam Chomsky, Eqbal Ahmad, Mary Kaldor, Bill Hartung, Phyllis Bennis, David Wildman, Cora Weiss, Michael Ratner, Phil Berrigan, Daniel Ellsberg, Cindy

Sheehan, Paul Krugman, Frida Berrigan, Tom Engelhardt, James Galbraith, Chris Hedges, Fr. Roy Bourgeois and many others. We continue to hold monthly **STOPWAR meetings** at Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock and collaborate with the Shelter Rock Forum on educational programs.

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Since 2002, the LI Alliance has focused on stopping the war in Iraq, ending the occupation and bringing the troops home. **Ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is the priority focus of the Alliance's work.** As the numbers of casualties have grown and the violence in Iraq has worsened we have mobilized Long Islanders in campaigns to put a face on the war and to hold our representatives accountable. In 2003, LI grandparents tried to sign up at the Hempstead Recruiting station saying "take us, not our children." Long Islanders delivered condolence cards to congressional representatives, mourning the dead and calling for an end to the war. We held meetings with our representatives, sent letters and made calls to bring the troops home. We went together to Washington and to NYC with our call to stop the war. We held demonstrations on Old Country and Glen Cove Roads and at congressional offices.

Organizations held weekly vigils in Great Neck, in Setauket, in Sag Harbor, in Freeport, in Huntington and other LI towns. Recruitment education was coordinated by the Suffolk Peace Network and Pax Christi LI. There were Read-Ins at all five congressional offices on LI, reading the names of the over 2100, who had died in Iraq, and asking representatives to hold town meetings on the war and to take action to bring the troops home. In the summer and fall of 2005, peacemakers joined Pax Christi LI and other LI groups at Camp Casey LI, a vigil outside the office of Senators Schumer and Clinton, calling on them to recant their vote for war.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, the LI Alliance and STOPWAR coalition drafted a People's Agenda that was signed by over 3,000 Long Islanders and presented to candidates. During the last debate at Hofstra on October 15, more than one thousand gathered on Hempstead Turnpike to demonstrate their support for an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and for funding healthcare, education and jobs. Rallies were held in Hempstead and at Hofstra.

In this first decade of the 21st century, we have witnessed the escalation of the war in Iraq and more recently in Afghanistan. Even with the beginning withdrawal of troops in Iraq, 50,000 US soldiers will remain for years. The escalation in Afghanistan has brought increasing US and Afghan casualties and has cost almost one trillion dollars. **The LI Alliance will continue to advocate for an end to war and for peaceful alternatives – for human security and for human rights—for a shift in national priorities.**

Since October 2009, the LI Alliance with member groups has held month STOPBYS at congressional offices providing briefing materials and reading names of those killed in Afghanistan. We have participated in vigils in NY and here on Long Island. In the coming months, we will continue our educational program on a Peace Plan for Afghanistan, calling for a ceasefire and for withdrawal. We will look at the alternatives presented by the Afghan Study Group and many military and academic experts with speakers at both Hofstra and with the Shelter Rock Forum.

As we move forward in the second decade of the 21st century, the LI Alliance will continue to

educate the public and elected officials about the costs and tradeoffs of US wars and their impact on Long Island. In 2011, the Alliance and our LI partners will participate in a national *Move the Money Campaign* advocating for cuts in military spending and for more investments in jobs education, housing and healthcare. In the context of deficit reduction, we will encourage public dialogue and action on meeting the needs of the LI community rather than on cutting vital social programs.

The Long Island Alliance is part of an extraordinary peace community on Long Island. This LI peace community is an ad hoc, independent, democratic, creative, committed, persistent and wonderful community of visionary peacemakers who labor together to bring forth a peaceful and just world for everyone. We are grateful for this gift of community and because of the involvement of so many and so many organizations, the LI Alliance is part of the Long Island landscape. Over these twenty-five years, we have become a visible, professional peace institution on Long Island. Together we have much work ahead if we are to achieve a world without war – so that the next generation can live in peace with each other and with the earth.

Margaret Melkonian, Executive Director—December 2010