# VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

April 2012

Dear Friends

Earlier this year Voices delegates were in Afghanistan, tasting a little of the bitter and deadly winter there and visiting with the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers. From Kabul, Kathy Kelly wrote:

Since January 15th at least 23 children under 5 have frozen to death in the refugee camps, the largest of which is across the road from a huge U.S. base. A few days back filmmaker John McHugh described his twelve-day stint embedded with "Operation Mace" in Afghanistan's Nuristan province: "Over the course of my stay on Mace, I witnessed the truly awesome firepower that the U.S. military brings to a fight. Between their helicopters and jets they had dropped 19 bombs, fired two Hellfire missiles, 205 rockets, 500 rounds of 20 millimeter, and 210 rounds of 30-millimetre cannon. They also discharged 3,750 rounds of 50 caliber machine gun ammunition. And yet, only once, could they confirm that they had killed a single Taliban fighter" (Al Jazeera "The Winter War," February 9, 2012).

Kathy had diverted to Kabul after being denied a visa to enter Bahrain and witness the one year anniversary of Bahrain's courageous, brutally repressed Arab Spring uprising. Voices delegate Brian Terrell did successfully join the small U.S. delegation, "Witness Bahrain," organized in cooperation with the International Solidarity Movement and a group mobilized by

U.S. activist Medea Benjamin. The Bahraini government had already barred self-announced human rights monitors and journalists from entering, but eleven of our delegates were able to enter on tourist visas, only to be arrested and deported when they were discovered witnessing abuses by police against protesters. In this newsletter, Brian writes about his experiences on Bahraini streets and among villagers. Please let us know if we can help arrange speaking engagements and interviews regarding the delegation's experiences in Bahrain.

A few weeks later, Kathy and Brian were both in Syracuse, NY with 36 codefendants, on trial for having staged a diein at Syracuse's Hancock Field, home of the MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicle. On trial for having dramatized the crime scene, they took the opportunity to continue putting drones and drone warfare on trial. As the U.S. prepares to turn the world into one large undifferentiated battlefield, we look forward to a summer and fall caravan project being organized by Nick Mottern which will carry a large facsimile of a drone to communities across the U.S., along with various speakers many of whom are Voices activists. For more information go to www.knowdrones. com. Please also note that the Upstate Coalition to Ground the Drones will hold an action at Hancock Field on April 22nd, 2012.

As the site for the 2012 NATO summit,

May 20th and 21st the city of Chicago will spend \$55 million to host the officials responsible for immense destruction and carnage in Afghanistan and many other parts of the world. Voices is going to walk from Madison to Chicago from May1-18, bringing the public's demand for peace and humanity to the runaway military organization. We're entitling the walk "At a Global Crossroads: Turn Against War," and we will be marching for the removal of the NATO-ISAF troops from Afghanistan, for rejection of the Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan, for an abrupt halt to drone strikes, and for appropriately massive reparations to the suffering and desperate Afghan people. Please consider joining us as we counter the agenda of war with one of cooperation, sane humanity, and peace.

Plenty of work to do!

Thank you again for your support. Our efforts would not be possible without you.

Sincerely.

Kathy Kelly, Mary Dean, Gerald Paoli, Brian Terrell, Sallamah Alia, Buddy Bell, and Joshua Brollier

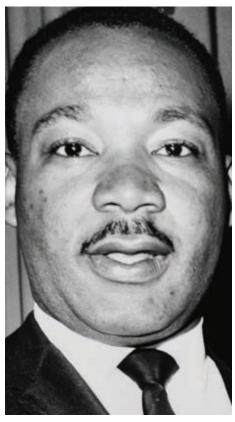
# Gandhi, King and 99% Spring

#### by Brian Terrell

99% Spring has been declared. "This spring, we will ... rise up in the tradition of our forefathers and foremothers. We will not be complicit with the suffering in our families for another year. We will prepare ourselves for sustained non-violent direct action." The organizers of this effort list the many economic injustices and perils faced by America today and propose to train 100,000 activists "to join together in the work of reclaiming our country" with methods of nonviolent direct action. "We will take non-violent action in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi to forge a new destiny one block, one neighborhood, one city, one state at a time."

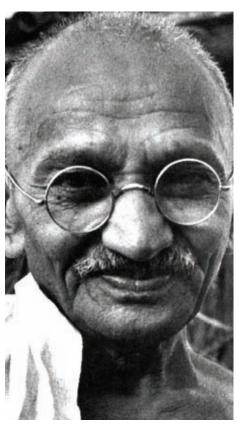
99% Spring will address such crucial issues as shrinking pension funds, skyrocketing student loans, foreclosures, budget cuts to schools, a poisoned environment, diminished collective bargaining rights, all "a result of rampant greed—the deliberate manipulation of our democracy and our economy by a tiny minority in the 1%, by those who amass ever more wealth and power at our expense." Some other critical matters, however, will not be addressed by 99% Spring.

The organizers of 99% Spring do not find room in their list of our country's problems to include the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, spiraling military spending, new nuclear weapons built, or the role of militarism and colonialism on the economy and the toll it exacts on America's working people in general. They pledge that they "will not be complicit with the suffering in our families," but do not express the same refusal to be complicit in the suffering



of families in Afghanistan, Colombia, Palestine or the many other nations blighted, threatened and murdered by the same forces that 99% Spring decries here at home. Not to give the war as much as a footnote is a startling omission, especially as recent polls show that a growing majority of Americans are against it. This omission may define 99% Spring more clearly than the proclamations surrounding it.

I know that neglecting to mention militarism might be justified to the satisfaction of many as a deliberate strategic choice. Of course, no one can do everything and no one can address every injustice. I accept, too, that in building a coalition that includes some labor unions that promote armaments con-



tracts and organizations like MoveOn. org that regularly support candidates for office with decidedly pro-war agendas, silence on the threat of the military industrial congressional complex is required for the sake of unity. However prudent it may seem, though, this omission raises serious questions.

What is all the more disconcerting is that 99% Spring claims the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi. Neither of these teachers held that justice at home was possible in a country engaged in murder and thievery abroad. Gandhi's life work was to free his country from British colonialism and he warned his English opponents and friends that they would never enjoy peace and prosperity at home while

holding and tormenting India and their other foreign colonies. Is it conceivable that in this country today a movement can take action in Gandhi's spirit without using the most decisive and clear language and action against US imperialism?

In 1967, Dr. King was asked why he, a civil rights leader, criticized the Vietnam War, a move that threatened to polarize the civil rights movement. "Now it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war," King said from the pulpit of Riverside Church in New York. He had come to realize that it was not possible to condemn the violence and oppression suffered by America's poor without "first speaking clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today- my own government."

If it was true in 1967, as Dr. King noted then, that "America can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of (people) the world over," is it possible that 45 bloody years later, America can destroy the deepest hopes of the people of Afghanistan and yet be saved? Has something fundamental changed,

so that unlike in Dr. King's time, a movement can now be concerned for the integrity and life of America and yet ignore the present war?

Along with the spirits of Gandhi and King, 99% Spring invokes the example of Occupy Wall Street, a movement in which, in many ways, the words and work of these two prophets do resonate. In their 'Declaration of Occupation of New York City,' adopted by General Assemblies around the world, OWS lists these among the crimes of corporatism: "They have perpetuated colonialism at home and abroad. They have participated in the torture and murder of innocent civilians overseas. They continue to create weapons of mass destruction in order to receive government contracts."

"The time comes when silence is betrayal," and Dr. King confessed that he was "moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart." Condemning the destruction of Vietnam and the wasting of fortunes and lives for an arms race in the face of poverty at home and abroad was not a strategic choice he could make or not, nor is it

for us. Dr. King recognized that he and others would find that "the calling to speak is often a calling of agony."

Despite this, he insisted, "we must speak." No one, Dr. King said, was exempt from the responsibility to protest the war in Vietnam. No one today is exempt from the responsibility to protest the war in Afghanistan- our credibility in all matters and our humanity depend upon this. Silence is betrayal. I hope and pray that 99% Spring is more than successful in its goals, which are certainly worthy ones, even if limited. I fear, though, that its silence on the root of the problem, the military industrial congressional complex, will prove fatal to its ends. A movement that engages in "non-violent action in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi to forge a new destiny" is desperately needed in America in 2012. That movement will necessarily be one that demands economic justice at home and that clearly and unequivocally condemns the war in Afghanistan, nuclear weapons, militarism and imperialism in general. 99% Spring, unfortunately, is not that movement.



# Above the Drone Wars, A Voice for Peace

#### by David Smith-Ferri

In 1876, at the so-called Battle of the Little Bighorn when U.S. Cavalry regiments attacked an Indian village along the Little Bighorn River in Wyoming, the first casualty was a ten-year old Lakota Sioux boy named Deeds. Unaware that U.S. troops were nearby planning an attack, he and his father were combing a hillside looking for a lost pony when U.S. troops encountered and killed him. The next casualties were six Lakota women and four children, who were murdered while in a field gathering wild radish bulbs, one of the many indigenous plants that Native people depended on for their livelihood, and hardly a threatening activity.

I think of these events today because of the recent killings of Afghan civilians, not only the 17 women and children killed in villages outside Kandahar, but also two recent and less publicized atrocities resulting from NATO airstrikes that killed civilians in Kapisa Province, including eight Afghan boys who were tending their sheep. Sheepherding, of course, is an activity as integral to their livelihood as gathering indigenous plants was to Lakota people. Studying the past can reveal patterns that may replicate themselves in the present or future. The U.S. Calvary was tracking Sitting Bull and the Lakota Sioux people because they had refused to sell the Black Hills, land in presentday South Dakota that was both an important resource gathering site and a sacred spiritual site. Not many years before, it had been legally set aside as "Indian Territory." But in 1874, an official US military expedition led by none other than George Armstrong Custer

discovered gold in the Black Hills. More gold would be extracted from one of the Black Hills mines than from any other mine on the continent. So, for the love of gold, women and children were killed and an entire culture was under increased threat.

As my friend Randall Amster noted during a presentation last week at Prescott College, "We forget that the U.S. is waging a resource war in Afghanistan." Randall was referring in part to the known reserves of natural gas resources in Turkmenistan, and the pipeline that the U.S. wants to see built to carry it to burgeoning energy markets in Pakistan and India. The pipeline, on the drawing board since 1995 when Hamid Karzai was a Director of UNOCAL, is planned to traverse south-central Afghanistan. Randall also referenced another form of extractable wealth, not gold but the potentially huge mineral deposits in Afghanistan, especially rare earth minerals necessary for the computer and telecommunications industries. We should be as appalled by blood for natural gas and rare earth minerals as we are by blood for gold.

Our understanding of historical events does more than illuminate patterns of human behavior. It also limits our imagination, influencing our sense of what is possible. Sadly, the popular history of US-Indian relations during the 19th Century focuses on military adventures fought on the Great Plains and largely unencumbered by questions of morality. Omitted are the many stories of White settlers who befriended and aided Native people. Also omitted is the nonviolence advocated by groups like

the Quakers who opposed U.S. expansion and militarism. And what about the Native people who would have been willing to share their resources and co-exist with settlers if they could have maintained their sovereignty and their way of life? Their names and their voices are largely lost to us, drowned by the war cries of stereotyped Plains Indian warriors. In California, the earliest European settlers found that Native people were good trading partners and good neighbors who exchanged gifts with explorers. In 1595, when the Spanish explorer Sebastian Cermano ran aground on the Marin County coast, Native people came to the aid of the crew, providing them with food and other aid without which they would not have survived. In the late 18th Century, looking to establish a fur trading outpost, Russia dropped 12 men off on one of the Aleutian Islands, where a highly developed Native culture flourished. For seven years these men had no contact with people off the island. Again, they survived – indeed thrived, intermarrying with Native people only because of Native generosity, hospitality, and openness.

Given the "news" from Afghanistan which focuses on military actions, and the popular image of Afghan people as "tribal" with all its attendant associations of "backward, repressive, and violent," can we even envision a homegrown nonviolence movement in Afghanistan? And yet, as hard as it may be to imagine, this is exactly what a group of young Afghans is trying to spark. And they are doing it with courage and determination. Calling themselves the

Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers (AYPV), they have moved their base from Bamiyan Province – remotely located and largely populated by Hazara and Tajik people – to Kabul, where Pashtun youth have joined them.

These are young people who have direct experience of war and poverty. Every one of them has stories to tell about close family members who have been killed, injured, or disappeared. They know what war does to people. They know the history of foreign military intervention in their country over the last four decades, and they reject it. They know the history and teachings of Mohandas Gandhi, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and they embrace it. And they know the stakes: their lives and their futures. They want a legitimate government in power in their country, not the corrupt puppet of an occupying power. They want to share in the political process and in the benefits of local and regional economic activity, including extracting their country's resources. As one of their members, Faiz, said on a recent phone conversation, "It is important for young Afghans to connect with each other. We are the future. We are the ones who will bring about change."

They are raising a voice for nonviolence

in Afghanistan and speaking out clearly and thoughtfully on important current issues, such as the Strategic Partnership Agreement. And they are doing the hard and risky work of building friendships and alliances. Following Mohandas Gandhi, and knowing that reaching out across ethnic divides is essential for any peace process in their country, they are now engaged in a Caravan of Nonviolence in Afghanistan. They've just returned from visits to Parwan Province, to Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar Province, and to Kapisa Province, where the sheepherders were killed earlier this winter

In addition to these meetings with youth in other provinces, they are preparing actions which symbolize the need for ethnic reconciliation and for nonviolent alternatives to war. Later this year, they plan a multi-ethnic, gender-diverse peace walk from Kabul to Parwan Province. And on December 10, 2012, International Day of Human Rights, they are planning an international peace vigil called "2 Million Friends to End the Afghan War." Vigils, to be held in Kabul and in other Afghan provinces, will include lighting candles, releasing doves, bearing banners, and other symbols and statements advocating nonviolence. Peace and justice groups worldwide are invited to join them through the simple action of lighting candles. Youth they met and spoke with during their Caravan of Nonviolence will participate in both of these actions.

It is hard to imagine the U.S. government acting nonviolently in Afghanistan, seeking out and supporting people and processes that engender peace and reconciliation. But can we at least imagine ourselves doing this? The Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers ask for something more. They ask for our participation. In concert with Voices for Creative Nonviolence, they are calling on people around the world to take part in the December 10th action by organizing a vigil in our local communities. For information on how to participate visit www.ourjourneytosmile.com.

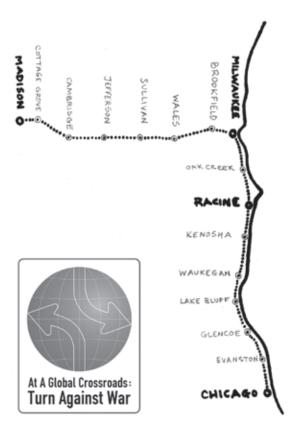


### **Upcoming Projects**

### At A Global Crossroads: Turn Against War

is a 180-mile march to Chicago to confront NATO's war agenda for Afghanistan. We will march to push a different set of proposals at the upcoming summit: end the drone strikes immediately, dismantle the NATO-ISAF armed mission in Afghanistan, end diplomatic and financial support for Hamid Karzai and the warlords in the National Assembly. We demand that NATO give reparations to the Afghans whose livelihoods it has ruined. Please join us, as you are able, sometime between May 1-18 on this march from Madison to Chicago.

Visit our website for flyers or contact Buddy Bell at <u>buddy@vcnv.org</u> or 773-878-3815.





## 2 Million Friends to End the Afghan War

Ordinary people in the 50 countries comprising the US/NATO coalition are finding a way to remember 2 million ordinary Afghans who lost their lives to the past 4 decades of war.

Grass roots organizations are identifying representatives from each country to assist in focusing people on a campaign to commemorate the lives lost during forty years of war in Afghanistan. The campaign will call upon internationals to show solidarity with people in Afghanistan by lighting candles on December 10th, 2012, the International Day of Human Rights. Within Afghanistan, communities will engage in a variety of commemorative actions, which could include releasing doves and flying kites, as well as lighting candles.

# Why Do We Protest the NATO Summit?

### by Buddy Bell

After the end of World War II, a group of nations in the north Atlantic established NATO to impede Russian influence over the reconstruction of Europe and to facilitate their own. The economic blueprint begun under the Marshall Plan and continued with NATO saw European member countries shift their energy dependency from coal to oil at a time when the U.S. was the world's leading oil producer, supplying more than a third of worldwide production from within its own (today, greatly oildepleted) borders. A couple of decades earlier, the U.S. had already wrested from Britain effective control over vast petroleum reserves in Venezuela. This arrangement ensured that U.S. oil companies stood to make a fortune, setting a high price to fulfill Western Europe's manufactured demand.

After the Cold War ended, the U.S. rebranded NATO and extended its mandate as a defender of liberty in regions beyond the north Atlantic. Seeing military action as a suitable solution to various global conflicts, it has had the effect of sowing discord and violence instead of alleviating these problems. In Kosovo, NATO claimed that bombing the countryside would stop Yugoslav forces from invading homes and practicing summary executions of the Kosovars. Instead, Belgrade's atrocities at ground level "kicked into high gear," as was widely predicted by international aid workers, described in the Washington Post as "the only remaining brake on Yugoslav troops" and who were forced to leave their host villages when NATO commenced aerial bombing. Two years later, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia would issue an indictment against Slobodan Milosevic on 17 Kosovo-related war crimes, 16 of which happened after NATO's entry

into the conflict.

In Libya, the scene following the NA-TO-enabled civil war has been a chaotic mix of factional battles with various anti-Gaddafi militias who refuse to disband. On Jan 21, 2012, Libyan veterans were attacked with tear gas while protesting outside the Benghazi headquarters of the ruling NTC party, the site of a near-attack on the country's Vice President days earlier. They charged into the building and seized it while party officials fled. Widespread torture of alleged Gaddafi loyalists has caused a vicious humanitarian catastrophe, prompting the medical aid group Doctors Without Borders to pull out of Misrata because "detainees were brought for care only to make them fit for further interrogation." NATO continues to insist that its actions have prevented political repression and have promoted freedom and democratic change, despite ample evidence to the contrary.

In Afghanistan, NATO has been the overseer, since 2003, of the criminal bombardment and invasion of a small nation, one which has not initiated hostilities, by a vast superpower employing devastating and overwhelming weaponry. This war began to exceed the death toll of 9-11, civilian life for civilian life, in only the first few months, and over the last decade, the death toll has continued to mount. A report released in February by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) noted a sharp rise in the proportion of civilians killed that were women and children. The negligence of NATO was especially glaring from July-December of 2011, during which time aerial strikes killed triple the number of women and children who were killed over the corresponding period of the previous year.

Chillingly, NATO has looked at the Colombian government's devastating and prolonged war against the FARC as a model for staying the course in Afghanistan. The scandals and crimes carried out by NATO troops and the detestable official apologies devoid of real solutions illustrate that each day the war continues will mean a continuing humanitarian disaster for Afghan people. Those who participate in the May actions to shed light on this deranged historical trend will not just be protesting NATO, but will also be proposing a different agenda for the nations who convene under NATO's banner. Instead of pursuing a partnership agreement with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, which would authorize the war up until the year 2024 or beyond, the powerful nations of the world should be meeting to discuss ending drone strikes immediately, pulling combat forces out of Afghanistan, and ending their manipulation of Afghan democracy, which they do, in part, by propping up Hamid Karzai and the warlords in the National Assembly. Secondly, they must take responsibility for their past criminality by providing reparations, to be dispersed by an independent body such as the UN general assembly. Reparations would fund projects decided on by local communities and might take the form of food aid, water filtration, housing construction, soil renewal, sanitation, mine disarmament medical brigades, etc. It is crucial that we walk, march, picket, and speak out to demand these real solutions.

For more information go to <a href="http://vcnv.org/7-widespread-myths-about-nato">http://vcnv.org/7-widespread-myths-about-nato</a> to download the resource "7 Widespread Myths About Nato." Please distribute widely.



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### **Update Bahrain**





The resistance in Bahrain continues and grows as does repression by the regime. The blackout on human rights observers has not lifted: Juan Mendez, the UN special rapporteur on torture, cancelled his scheduled March 8th visit after being officially asked to delay it until July. It's chilling to speculate what Bahrain's government may plan for vulnerable dissenters in the interim. More than 120 protesters were wounded in the protests in February and an unknown number killed, nearly all through asphyxiation by punitively massive doses of tear gas. Military aid from the US, which often increases for governments suppressing dissent, continues unabated in Bahrain.

Contact Brian Terrell at, (brian@vcnv.org), if you would like to invite him to speak about the peaceful revolution in Bahrain with your group or community.

#### Following his own deportation, Brian wrote:

"we were in Bahrain as tourists, not of the malls and golf courses and museums but of the streets and villages where real people live and struggle. Anyone who visits Bahrain and never gets a whiff of tear gas is a poor tourist, indeed. To the police who arrested us, a tourist with a gas mask is a hopeless contradiction and proof of culpability. For the tourist who wants to learn the present reality of Bahrain, a gas mask is more indispensable than sunscreen."