

PEACEWORK

A New England Peace & Social Justice Newsletter

September 1991

Issue No. 211

\$1

1992 and The Quincentenary: How Activists Can Best Express Solidarity

For a short period, over the next several months, the selling of Christopher Columbus will be bigger than the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The "Discovery of the New World" will be the latest set of yellow ribbons marketed on behalf of the New World Order. It's up to activists to stand with Native peoples in opposing the demagoguery. The myth stops here.

"The 500th" is very much upon us. The Quincentenary of the arrival of Columbus will be observed during the coming academic year and throughout 1992. It offers an unprecedented opportunity for education on the myths and realities of colonization, racism and cultural imperialism. This issue of *Peacework* has several articles on the emerging Counter-Quincentenary movements, some national in scope but all rooted in the consciousness of local people who were exposed to the Columbian mythology. (As a high priority, the newsletter will carry additional news throughout the Quincentenary period; readers are invited to send notices and comments.)

A Native American active in national Counter-Quincentenary organizing told me that perhaps the most effective thing social justice and peace activists and other citizens can undertake is to approach teachers (and school boards) at the elementary and

**BOYCOTT
COLUMBUS
CELEBRATIONS**
Recovery not "discovery"



secondary school levels at the beginning of this semester, informing them of their concern that academic attention to Columbus includes materials on the "other side" of discovery, going beyond "encounter" to discussion of the profound, ongoing negative effects of the arrival of Europeans.

The issues that will be raised during the Quincentenary have been around for centuries, of course, and will be with us long after October 12, 1992; this is merely a classic opportunity to demand "equal time" and raise some consciousness by taking on the lies.

The taking of lives, the aggression against humanity and the earth so commonly countenanced in these United States, goes back to the shores where

Columbus and his crew landed. Those who would honor life and stop the slaughter must trace the trail of injustices. Peace—so distant from our cities and from our foreign policy and from our national values—was compromised by the way this enterprise began. Coming to understand that, and to express solidarity with those still confronting most directly its murderous consequences, can make the Quincentenary truly meaningful.

—Pat Farren

Moving Beyond 'Conquest' in Our Activism

Louise Dunlap works against white supremacy in her workplace (MIT) and is active with the Mass. Solidarity Committee for Native Action.

For me, "1992" summons activists to three main kinds of work—the first two reflective, the third a difficult but urgent form of action based in reflection. The first two I'll call "deeper analysis" and "re-evaluation." The difficult

kind of action is figuring out how to work multiculturally during and beyond the 500th anniversary of conquest—and beginning to do it.

"Deeper analysis" has two elements, bringing new energy into whatever wing of the movement we're involved with:

- Learn more about the meaning of the Quincentenary. A wealth of excellent authors can help: Kirkpa-

trick Sale, Howard Zinn and Eduardo Galeano are some of my recent discoveries. We must also learn from Native people, through their own media and through personal contacts with those who have experienced the legacy of oppression. We must find out how to counter official propaganda with something more than "counter-cant."

• **Reframe our thinking about the issues we work with.** We can let deeper understanding of the legacy strengthen our approach to issues we are already working on. Sale shows clearly how Columbus's human rights violations were linked with violations of the integrity of the land. Galeano and Hans Konig clarify the link between conquest and the growth of capitalism. 1992 will be a "teachable moment" for helping those we work with see the roots of oppression and how different issues are connected.

"Re-evaluation" also has two parts:

• **Empathy.** We deepen our understanding by recognizing that indigenous people feel active pain at glib "celebrations" of Columbus. An Afro-Caribbean friend has been telling me of her outrage and sadness at the insensitive treatment of "discovery" at her daughter's school. I want fellow activists to listen to stories like hers so they will realize just how serious this problem is. Take time to empathize even if you already understand.

• **Denial.** If you're white, like me, you may need to take some time over the coming months to get in touch with your own pain. This may be harder for us to do than for people who were/are actively oppressed. Our ancestors, or people similar to them, carried on the legacy, and we still benefit from it, so it's easy for us to ignore or deny. Maybe some of the images in films or other works of art—or heartfelt discussions with friends—can help us discover and express some of the strong feelings we have as beneficiaries of injustice. Maybe we need to create new ceremonies. In my experiences, heart-based expression of these feelings can liberate us from blocked energy and the paralysis of shame.

Third and hardest is the challenge to make an honest effort to work multiculturally during "1992" and beyond—to value the kinds of differences that Columbus ignored in his early contacts with people of this continent. What if the Europeans had teamed up equitably with the Caribbean residents to create solutions to common problems? We really need to unite around this point in history—not only to undo the oppressive patterns set by the conquest and internalized by most of us to this day, but also because the Columbian legacy means dividing the opposition, and with this "New World Order" to deal with, we can't afford to be divided. I am trying to work multiculturally from the following four guidelines:

• **Clarify values.** In working with individuals or groups from a different culture, notice whether any of the frictions come from cultural differences. Can you work well with people who may have different attitudes and different ways of measuring productivity and success? Are any of your own expectations part of Columbus's legacy?

• **Clarify language.** 1991 will be a good year for organizations to work out culturally sensitive language guidelines. My Indian comrades really don't like to hear

me complain about "red tape." When should we say "Indian," "Black," "African American," "people of color"? How can we develop a flexible set of "rules" to take into account the wishes of the people we are speaking of or to? Let's get comfortable with the language of diversity after 500 years of awkward and invidious locutions.

• **Walk the line between appreciating the culture of others and appropriating it.** This one is going to be very hard to figure out. The Indian media is full of stories about whites trying to take over native spirituality. And stories and ads in New Age publications suggest the Indians may be right: 500 years of the Columbian legacy have left many Americans starving for genuine spiritual experience. But this kind of culture-sharing requires great humility and sensitivity. Remember, "we" have already taken almost everything else that was theirs. We must not take what is not lovingly given—and maybe we should sometimes not take even that.

• **Encourage persons of color to put their words and ideas forward—then listen.** If you're a white activist, don't rush to grab the podium no matter how good you think your analysis of 1992 may be. Even with the uncooperative mass media, we have generally had more access than people of color, so let's be sure to use this occasion to help change the media's legacy of conquest.

In genuinely diverse ways, let's make 1992 a time of respect, education and solidarity.

Quincy and the Yakoo

A classic controversy to change invidious racial stereotyping is underway in Quincy, MA where the mayor, the school committee and the North Quincy High School principal think that a school logo demeaning to Native Americans is acceptable.

The "Red Raiders" mascot is called the "Yakoo"—from a drawing made in the 1950s by a student named Alan Yakubian of a figure with hooked nose, feathers and war-paint, brandishing a weapon. The insignia appears on mugs, T-shirts and on the gym floor; a former superintendent of schools did succeed in having it removed from printed documents. Once a year students dress up in huge painted sheets as grotesque Yakoo figures.

Although Native Americans have spoken out repeatedly about the pain caused by the logo, some townspeople and students have rushed stridently to its defense. Educational efforts by Project Together, a teacher/student/administrator group, have not yet been enough to counter the dominant idea that the logo is harmless because "we don't mean any harm."

Activist Ed Grogan, a sociology teacher who has been at the center of the struggle for three years, would like to hear from supporters who can assist with community education and with the current strategy of working through the State Board of Education and the teachers' union, the NEA. Contact him at 617/472-3716.

—Louise Dunlap