

Peace Issues

Dream the possible dream

Peace seems a simple concept. To live without threat to your physical existence. To live with a sense of security and well being. Why does it therefore seem like an unachievable state? Why is it so difficult to maintain this sense of security? How are we to achieve our goal of permanent and definitive peace?

I think the primary concern is with those who hold power in the Western world. They tell us that peace is an unreasonable and unrealistic alternative. That those who call for peace are in fact idealists; alienated and removed from life. This is the first misconception which must be surmounted. This represents the most fundamental myth that we must overcome.

If we are led to believe that "not peace" is simply a pattern of our lives and existence, then we will also accept a state of antagonism and contention. We will simply view this state of reality as a natural, expected and anticipated reality. Conflict and war will not be called into question but accepted as a necessary part of our lives.

Are we to accede to this sort of condescending attitude? Are we willing to have others decide and predetermine our fate a pattern of life? Does war not also represent an ideal state of being? Are we to pit peace and war against each other as absolute and definitive opposites? Wouldn't doing so assent to the whole notion of conflict and war that those in power wish to have us ascribe to and accept? It seems that we need to deal with fundamental questions and notions before we can effectively deal with practical applications. We must also be equally careful not to become preoccupied with theorizing and philosophizing about such issues without looking to application.

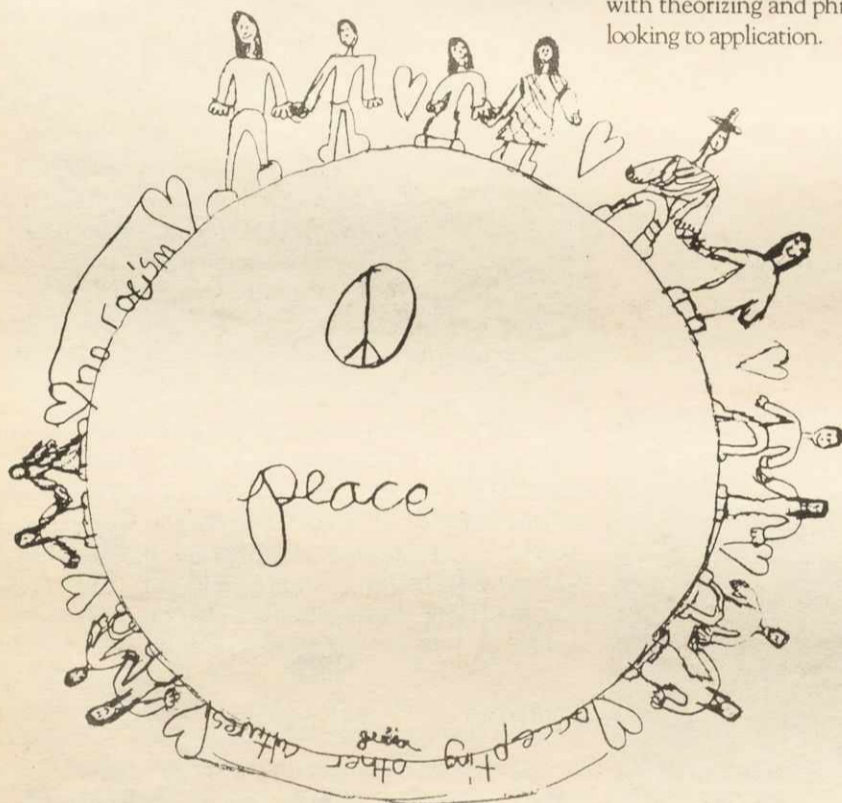
We must accept peace as a reality and legitimate option for life - the only option for life. Peace is as realistic an option as a state of war. It also represents a much more humane and compassionate state. But it is more than that. It is a life and reality that respects and recognizes the needs, desires, wants and existence of others. The very core of that it means to be human.

We must affirm our beliefs through positive and active involvement in the conflicts which threaten the reality for which we strive. For not to do so represents and indicates to those in power that we are willing to accept their definition and account of reality. One which has conflict and war as a fundamental component.

It is difficult to send a clear message that we are not willing to accept this distorted concept of life and reality? I don't believe so. The first step is to live your life in a way which truly reflects your commitment to respect, appreciate and understand the perspective of other people. That, I think, necessarily incorporates a commitment to the goals of a peaceful global community. Yes, the expression "Think globally, act locally!" applies quite well in this case. If we can manage to uphold this commitment we can overcome the larger global problem through simply applying our local action on a larger scale.

Although my solutions may appear simplistic, I believe that is where - in the strength of the arguments lie. Peace is not a difficult state to achieve, it only requires that you do not accept the notion that war and conflict are the natural state. Upon this realization we can foster and nurture an environment which is conducive to the kind of life which maintains a sense of mutual respect, awareness, acceptance and interaction.

~Anthony Roberts, BGLAD



Children's drawings
courtesy of the
Dalhousie Elementary
School, ages 5-9

Waiting
To hear the rage within me
Overpower my sense of compassion

Wanting
To feel some energy erupt
And warm my caustic sentiments
Against all injustices of the world

Willing
To change things as they are
But being bound by many prejudices
Am unable to change anything but me
Today.

~J.Church-Phillips

Building a future together

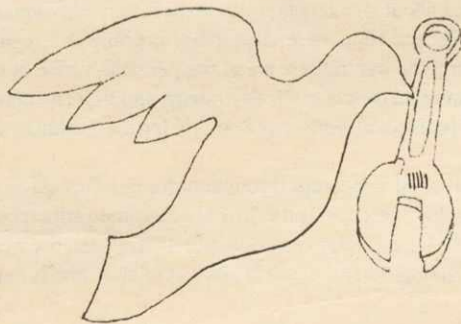
Tools for Peace began in 1981 when a group of B.C. fishermen, after returning from a trip to Nicaragua, collected \$30,000 worth of fishing equipment and shipped it to the Nicaraguan fishermen. By 1989, 127 of these groups supporting and aiding the people of Nicaragua existed across Canada.

The war against the Contras and the US trade embargo created conditions of extreme misery in Nicaragua. Besides casualties of war, crops, homes and livestock were destroyed. Canadians from all walks of life have been collecting medical supplies, wheelchairs, educational material, simple farm tools and safety equipment which were all shipped by boat from Vancouver to Nicaragua. The Tools for Peace rep. in Nicaragua oversaw its distribution by our partners FACS (Augusto Cesar Sandino Foundation) a non-government humanitarian organization.

After the defeat of the Sandinista government in February 1990 and the return of a pro-American administration under the presidency of Violetta Chamorro, the US government lifted the trade embargo and the Contras reluctantly agreed to disarm.

In order to qualify for US government aid and loans from the international banks, the Nicaraguan government had to lay off thousands of workers. The health care system, set up by the previous government, was dismantled - no free clinics - patients who had the misfortune to require surgery found they had to buy their own medication and drugs, dressings and even sutures, and bring their own bed linen.

Their relatives were expected to feed them. Diseases which had been brought under control have again become widespread. Education has also suffered drastic cuts. Schools closed and teachers have been laid off. Those children whose parents could afford to send them to school had to buy their uniforms and school books.



Unemployment is now 60%, and 70% of all Nicaraguans suffer from malnutrition. Illiteracy has increased from 13% to 25% in the last 2 years. There is widespread discontent and violence. The use of drugs has increased dramatically; however, there still exists some hope for the future. The popular organizations and unions are taking the initiative to set up projects for the people.

The Halifax Group was formed in 1985 specifically to collect material and raise money to help pay for the transportation of the material to Nicaragua. With permission from the local principals, we collected notebooks, paper and pencils and pens from students in Halifax schools. Some Sunday schools also collected notebooks for our campaign. Local businesses, including the Dalhousie and St. Mary's bookstores made generous donations.

The Ministry of Supply and Services for the Provincial Government permitted us to go through their warehouse to look for small medical equipment and wheelchairs, and some hospitals also donated medical supplies. The former Mayor of Dartmouth permitted us the use of a city warehouse to store the material.

In 1988 when a hurricane devastated the South Atlantic coast of Nicaragua our group was able to respond by sending 54,000 dollars worth of material aid: Antibiotics, medical supplies, carpentering tools, nails shovels and plastic sheeting. This year the group sent 500 dollars in cash to help the victims of a giant tidal wave, caused by an undersea volcanic eruption.

With the change of government our emphasis has changed in favour of raising funds to support the projects initiated by the A.T.C. and the F.A.C.S. To that end we are organizing a benefit at the Pub Flamingo on Wednesday 17th February, Salsa Picante will be playing and the tickets are 5.00 each.

~Peggy Matthews