

Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter
(November 1998)

November Meeting

The November meeting will feature Cleo and Hank Kocol discussing freethought pilgrimages they made in July. Cleo will discuss the visit to the Seneca Falls, NY, area for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention where in 1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton suggested that women should have the vote. Cleo will place that Convention in historical context and report on the conferences, meetings, panel discussions, famous people, and exhibits she and Hank saw and heard while visiting the National Park and other important historical places in the area. Her talk will end with a monologue featuring the only woman who was present at that first historic meeting and who was still alive and able to vote in 1920 when women got the franchise.

Hank will discuss the visit to the Center for Inquiry, Amherst, NY, where he and Cleo met with several members of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH) and toured the facility. AOF is affiliated with CSH. Both Cleo and Hank also visited the homes of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Robert Ingersoll, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, and Eleanor Roosevelt and will show photographs of these famous places as well as others.

Internet site of the month

The website of the month is: www.ifas.org

This is the web site of the Institute for First Amendment Studies, one of the watchdogs of religious right activity. It publishes Freedom Writer, a monthly chronicle, maintains the latest press releases, and hosts a library. Another watchdog of the religious right, Project Tocsin, is located along with the AOF site at www.rthoughtsrfree.org

October Speaker

The speaker at the General Meeting was Jo Ann Fuller, who spoke on "Compromising Our Children's Future -- A Critical Look at the U.S. Military Budget Past and Present". Jo Ann is a member of the board of National Peace Action.

U.S. defense spending is the largest category of expenses paid by income taxes, at \$270.5 billion for 2000. This does not include related expenses in the Department of Energy, NASA, or the Veterans Administration. As a way to understand the magnitude of one billion dollars, it is the equivalent of \$1000 per day for 2,740 years!

(Peace Action, page 2)

Copyright © 1998 by Atheists & Other Freethinkers, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Subscription: \$8 per year (free to members). Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists & Other Freethinkers. Submissions may be sent to AOF (attn.: newsletter committee). AOF cannot be responsible for unsolicited submissions. Past AOF newsletters can be viewed at www.rthoughtsfree.org.

AOF's Statement of Purpose: The purpose of the association, Atheists & Other Freethinkers (AOF) is to promote the understanding and acceptance of Atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend Atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll send one free newsletter to any individual upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$8 per year. Or become a member and get this fabulous newsletter free as part of your membership!

AOF Board Members

President: Dave Flanders
Vice President: Don Knutson
Secretary: Steve Knapp
Treasurer: Kay Dickey
Directors at large:
Hank Kocol
Peggy Lucas
Marilyn Vogel
Paul Storey
AOF Committees
Atheist Alliance liaisons: Kay Dickey, Cleo Kocol
Dinners-for-the-needy: Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell
Highway cleanup project: Don Knutson
Internet website: Pat Kelley
Meeting facility: Betty Simonsma
Newsletter editor: (opening available)
Voicemail system: Karen Abbe
Membership database: Betty Simonsma

(Peace Action, continued)

National Peace Action asks politicians in current election campaigns some difficult questions:

Question 1: Would you support weapons development that the Pentagon doesn't want?

Jo Ann provided some examples. Congress authorized seven C17 transport planes, when only one was requested by the military. Note that the manufacturing is mostly in Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas. It is not a coincidence that the current Congressional leadership comes from those states [when they are in the majority, the Democrats are equally guilty]. The B-2 bomber is another example: intended to sneak under USSR radar after a first nuclear strike, it costs over \$2 billion per plane. The Pentagon says the present complement of 21 is enough (and doesn't have enough facilities to provide the delicate handling for their radar-absorbing surface) but Congress has budgeted nine more.

Question 2: Would you sell weapons to dictators?

When domestic weapons production runs are through, manufacturers have their assembly lines and procedures in place and want to keep their production lines open. They get political support in providing foreign sales. Our government provides money subsidies or loans for purchases of our advanced weapons, even guaranteeing against defaults. Thus the conflicts in Bosnia and elsewhere have American forces facing the advanced weapons we have paid for. Consequently we have to develop more advanced weapons systems to counter the current weapons we have sold to foreign dictators.

Question 3: Would you vote for new nuclear weapons?

We currently have 8000 nuclear weapons on the ready at this time. The Pentagon has said it could live with 1500. We have submarines that can target any large city in the world. The U.S. is slowly reducing the number of nuclear weapons it has, but failure to substantially reduce the number of nuclear weapons in our arsenal promotes escalation by other countries, like India and Pakistan. Congress has voted \$60 billion over the next 13 years for research in new nuclear weapons.

This leads to the question: Where could the money be better spent?

Jo Ann went through a long list of programs in social areas, like prenatal care, the WIC program, head start, repairing all schools which don't meet standards, and student loan programs, instead of new bombers.

Jo Ann presented a comparative chart of recent expenditures of the US and its potential enemies. The US expenses are over 5 times those of Russia, about 9 times those of China, over 50 times those of Korea, and 90 times those of Iran and Iraq.

There was an extensive Q&A period after the presentation.

In one answer, Jo Ann pointed out that new money is not going to improve the depressed salaries of the troops, but to military-industrial corporations.

One defense of military spending is that it creates jobs. Jo Ann showed a chart with a comparison of the number of jobs created with \$1 billion of spending in different areas:

Military: 24,000 jobs

Mass Transit: 30,000 jobs

Housing: 34,000

Education: 41,000

Health Care: 47,000 jobs

How many wars should the US be prepared to fight? This may not be a realistic question, because (a) we are not alone; (b) we would have to be fighting, say, China and another giant at the scale of W.W.II, alone. As recent U.S. wars have been related to oil, why not develop alternatives to oil so we don't have to be placed in that situation. We do not have to accept the Pentagon's framing of this question.

Jo Ann said that some religious fundamentalists want to promote nuclear wars in their belief that apocalyptic events will precede the "end times".

National Peace Action has four focus areas, variously supported in the local chapters: Nuclear abolition; a peace economy; weapons trafficking; and conflict resolution.

The web address for California Peace Action is: <http://www.capa.org>

Numbers of the Beast

(From the Art Bell humor web page)

666 Number of the beast

668 Neighbor of the beast

660 Approximate number of the Beast

DCLXVI Roman numeral of the Beast

666.0000 Number of the High Precision Beast

0.666 Number of the Millibeast

1/666 Common Denominator of the Beast

666[-/(-1)] Imaginary number of the Beast

1010011010 Binary of the Beast

29A Hexadecimal of the Beast

-666 Negative number of the Beast

00666 Zip code of the Beast

\$666 Retail price of the Beast

\$712.62 Price of the Beast plus 7% state sales tax

\$769.95 Price of the Beast with accessories and replacement soul

\$656.66 Wal-Mart price of the Beast

Phillips 666 Gasoline of the Beast

Route 666 Highway of the Beast
665 Older brother of the Beast
667 Younger brother of the Beast
6-6-6 Fertilizer of the Beast
666lb cap Weight limit of the Beast
666 F Oven temperature for cooking roast
Beast
666k Retirement plan of the Beast
666 mg Recommended Minimum Daily
Requirement of Beast
6.66% 5 year CD rate at First Beast of Hell,
\$666 minimum deposit.
1-800-666-6666 Toll free number of the Beast
Lotus 6-6-6 Spreadsheet of the Beast
Word 6.66 Word Processor of the Beast
i66686 CPU of the Beast
666i BMW of the Beast
666-66-6666 Social security number of the
Beast
www.666.com URL of the Beast
IAM 666 License plate number of the Beast
Formula 666 All Purpose Cleaner of the Beast
WD-666 Spray Lubricant of the Beast
66.6 MHz FM radio station of the Beast
666 KHz AM Radio station of the Beast

Quote of the Month

Are There Any Christians?

According to Billy Graham, a Christian is a person who "has a real, genuine, personal relationship with Jesus Christ." Now, unless one believes that Jesus is resurrected from the dead, there is no Jesus to have a relationship with. (At least not in the normal sense of the word "relationship".) Therefore, on Billy Graham's definition of the word "Christian", anyone who is not a Christian must believe that there are no Christians. Talk about paradox!

Jeffery Jay Lowder

Highway cleanup

The next highway cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, November 14, at 9 a.m. The meeting place is the park-and-ride lot off Highway 99 at Elkhorn Boulevard.

Boy Scouts of America Reorganize to Protect God

It is important that the atheist community be aware that the Boy Scouts of America National Executive Board officially adopted changes to their program on Feb. 12 which they presented at their May annual meeting of the National Councils. These changes, which took effect Aug. 1, were defended by Jere Radcliff, the Chief Scout Executive, in a letter to the Council Scout Executives as helping to "protect our core traditional program from legal challenges". This is presumably a reference to the success of some lawsuits in challenging BSA's implementation of its restrictive membership policies, particularly when the chartering organization is a government agency.

BSA is organized into two divisions: The Boy Scout division and the newer Learning for Life (LFL) division. Although participation in the Learning for Life program has always been unrestricted, the adult leadership requirements were identical to the Boy Scout division. Thus, all adult leaders had to sign a Declaration of Religious Principles which claimed that belief in God was requisite to the best kind of citizenship. Exploring was a program introduced into the Boy Scout division in 1950 which was divided into different specialties including Career Exploring. Exploring was for older youth ages 14-20 who completed the 8th grade.

Under the reorganization this has changed. Career Exploring has been moved to the Learning for Life subsidiary and all other Exploring Posts have been renamed Venturing Crews. The leadership criteria for Learning for Life units are now decided by the chartering organization. This means that it will be the responsibility of citizens to ensure that their local public schools are not discriminating in accordance with local, state and federal laws. Please speak with your local school officials and make sure that they are aware that subscribing to the DRP is no longer required and should not be enforced.

Also, the new Venturers oath drops the aggressively sectarian "I believe that American's strength lies in her trust in God ..." from the Explorers oath. The Venturers oath is now as follows: "As a Venturer, I promise to help strengthen America, to be faithful to my religious duties, to help others, and to seek truth, fitness, and adventure in our world". Unfortunately, no substitution for religious duties will be allowed. Finally, Scouting advancement will no longer be allowed in LFL Career Explorer posts. This eliminates the anomaly of male Explorers earning the Eagle award while their female Explorer counterparts could not because they did not have an opportunity to earn the prerequisites in all male Scouting troops.

Overall these are positive changes that should be acknowledged and applauded by the anti-discrimination community. The reorganization goes a significant way towards eliminating the more egregious discrimination problems resulting from the religious mandates component of Scouting mixing with career training and government. Several problems remain, however. Units in the Scouting division continue to be chartered to government agencies. These units continue to mandate expression which is inconsistent with non-theistic worldviews. Also, units chartered to Parent Teachers Associations continue to recruit inside schools with the assistance of public school personnel. Furthermore, the Boy Scout division remains closed to atheistic expression

and therefore, by implication, it remains antagonistic to atheistic worldviews which are not comfortable or not compatible with public theistic self-identification.

[Matthew Goldstein of the Nonbeliever Antidiscrimination Project at nap@infidels.org prepared this report.]

Picketing Promise Keepers

On Saturday, October 10, nineteen atheists and/or other freethinkers picketed the Promise Keepers at Arco Arena. This event was planned and coordinated by Dave Kong of American Atheists. Five people from AOF were present, Dave Flanders, Karen Abbe, John Webb, Marv Blackman, and Kay Dickey, along with five from the Redding area. One person drove from Los Angeles (Ken Bonnell from Atheists United). The remainder came from the Bay Area. The picketers received waves and other gestures from Promise Keepers as they entered the lot. Picketers engaged in conversations with several Promise Keepers. There did not appear to be anyone from the media present. Perhaps the Promise Keepers are no longer newsworthy. Karen and Kay shared their experiences at the October AOF meeting. The event will be the subject of an Access Reality show on the Access Sacramento cable network.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182

Name(s) _____ Phone (_____)

Street _____
Apt _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Annual Subscription/Memberships

_____ Newsletter Subscriber only..... \$8.00 _____ Family membership..... \$30.00
_____ Low-income Member..... \$10.00 _____ Patron..... \$50.00
_____ Single Membership..... \$20.00 _____ Donation..... \$ _____

_____ Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Calendar of Events

Sunday, November 8, noon to 2:00 p.m., Hank and Cleo Kocol

Saturday November 14, 9:00 a.m., Highway cleanup

Wednesday, November 18, 6:30 p.m., Board Meeting

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

AOF meetings are open to the public and are held on the second Sunday of every month from noon to 2:00 p.m. at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. After the meeting, join AOFers for lunch and conversation at a nearby restaurant.

Internet Website Address:

<http://www.rthoughtsfree.org>