

Report from the Coordinator on the 22nd National Space Symposium

After admiring their work for years, this past spring Nebraskans for Peace officially joined the "Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space." Based in Brunswick, Maine, the network literally includes organizations from around the globe opposed to the U.S.'s ongoing effort to militarize and dominate space. Over the past two decades, Colorado Springs, Colorado has served as the center for this space warfare research and development and today is the official home of the U.S. Space Command. SpaceCom's eerie activities should be a concern to anyone on the planet interested in Peace & Justice. But the command has special significance for Nebraskans. In 2002, in the wake of 9/11, SpaceCom was placed under the authority of StratCom. All of the 'eye in the sky' intelligence gathering and war-making-from-space originating from SpaceCom takes its direction from Offutt Air Force Base just outside Omaha.

Planning for the strategic domination of space is, as you might well imagine, an enormous undertaking, requiring all the combined might of the Military-Industrial Complex. For the past 22 years, accordingly, the Pentagon and the defense industry have colluded to host a "Space Symposium" in Colorado Springs to showcase the latest state-of-the-art gadgetry available for sale. The "Symposium," as the following report by Bruce Gagnon, Coordinator of the Global Network, details, has become little more than a crude 'trade fair' for the defense industry and a corresponding 'shopping spree' for the Pentagon (paid for, of course, at taxpayer expense).

StratCom, sad to say, has begun replicating this unsavory spectacle with an arms bazaar and confab of its own. This coming October 10-12, the third annual "Strategic Space Conference" will be held in Omaha. The best thing that can be said for this nefarious gathering is that it gives us an opportunity to focus international attention on the growing menace that StratCom has become for the world community since Bush and Cheney launched the "War on Terrorism."

The trip began on April 2 with a very early morning drive to Portland, Maine so I could catch the bus from there to the Boston airport. After a three-hour wait in Boston, I flew to Chicago where I ended up with a seven-hour delay due to major thunder-

storms throughout the Midwest. I finally arrived in Colorado Springs at 12:30 a.m. and gratefully Bill Sulzman still came to the airport to pick me up.

Bill Sulzman [brother of NFP Vice President Jeanette Sulzman] was one of the founding members of the Global Network when it was created in 1992. At that time I was the state coordinator of the Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice. Bill's group, the Colorado Springs-based Citizens for Peace in Space, had been working with us in Florida since the '80s. For some time the two groups were really the only local organizations in the

try Club has a \$100,000 entry fee and there is a waiting list to join. The setting for the protest could not be more ideal. We were able to stand with banners on the sidewalk directly in front of the main symposium auditorium, thus every person entering the event passed directly by us.

The theme of the protest this year was "Only You Can Prevent Truth Decay," and T-shirts were made with that message on the front and the schedule of protest events for the week was listed on the back—similar to a rock-and-roll concert tour. The sub-theme was "Blow the Whistle on Crime and

suggesting our baloney was better than the baloney being passed out inside the space symposium.

On April 4 we got to the symposium at 7:30 a.m. just as the crowd arrived. I held a banner that read "Beware of the Military-Industrial Complex—Dwight D. Eisenhower" and would routinely ask military officers passing by if they would like to take a turn holding it for awhile. I got no takers.

From the space symposium that morning we drove north to Aurora, Colorado where Buckley Air Force Spy & Space War Base is located. We held a vigil outside the



Photo by Sung-Hee Choi

"Global Network" protestors outside the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado where the 22nd National Space Symposium was held. The banner at the far right says, "Beware of the Military-Industrial Complex—Dwight D. Eisenhower."

country doing on-going space organizing. It became clear to us by 1992 that we needed to grow this movement, and with the help of journalist Karl Grossman, we created the Global Network to do just that.

This year marked the 22nd annual meeting of the Space Symposium, an event put on by the aerospace industry. It was reported that this year almost 8,000 military personnel, aerospace industry executives and technologists were in attendance. In addition, the Space Symposium brought in hundreds of students from elementary, middle schools and high schools as a way to recruit them to work in the industry.

This event draws a protest each year by Citizens for Peace in Space. The symposium is located at the very posh Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. I was told that a membership to the Broadmoor Golf & Coun-

Corruption!"

The theme could not have been more timely, as the *New York Times* reported in its April 2 edition that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in Washington has been covering up a scientific fraud among builders of the expensive "missile defense" system. The *Times* reported that the GAO ignored evidence that the two main contractors for the program (Boeing and TRW) had doctored data, skewed test results and made false statements in a 2002 report.

Our first protest at the symposium began at 5:00 p.m. on April 3, just as the confab was to begin with a banquet. Our group of about 25 folks blew whistles and handed out leaflets urging the vast assemblage entering the building to "blow the whistle on the deception that is rampant in the military space program." We even handed out baloney sandwiches to those willing to take one,

main gate with the giant white golf ball-shaped "radomes" in view. Loring Wirbel explained how these systems 'suck in' all phone, fax and e-mail communications from throughout the entire world as part of the U.S. program called Echelon. I told the story about how Global Network-affiliated groups in Australia, Germany, England and the like continually protest at U.S. "downlink facilities" that collect this information regionally, and then send it via satellite in 'real time' to Buckley AFB for final processing.

We were met at the Buckley vigil by the three Dominican Nuns, Ardeh Platte, Carol Gilbert and Jackie Hudson, who were found guilty in 2003 for having symbolically "disarmed" a Minuteman nuclear missile silo in northeastern Colorado. Their action, "Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares," put them in jail for a considerable amount of time and Ardeh was the last to get out just a couple



The 'golf ball-shaped' radomes at Buckley Air Force Base near Aurora, Colorado. Under the "Echelon" program, all phone, fax and email communications throughout the world are 'sucked in' via satellite and 'downlinked' to Buckley for processing.

of months ago. This was the first time they had been back in Colorado since their trial. Following the vigil at Buckley, we made the two-hour drive further north to Weld County where the sisters had done their act of disarmament at the N-8 missile silo.

When we arrived, we decorated the missile silo gate with yellow crime scene tape and hung an eviction notice, signed by all who were there, on the gate. A team of reporters from several newspaper and radio outlets listened to the sisters make a statement about what motivated them to do the action in 2002. They spoke about their Dominican Order being one of preachers who were obligated to tell the truth. The nonviolent Jesus called on them to publicly witness against weapons of mass destruction. Their mission at the N-8 silo in 2002 was to open the gates so the world could see that the U.S. had WMDs, as Bush lectured the rest of the world about the evils of nuclear weapons. Having worked with the poor all their lives, the sisters insisted that the funding of WMDs was a theft from the poor.

Next we drove back to the nearby town of Greeley where the sisters had been taken to jail following their 2002 action. On this April 4 evening, we were to show the new documentary video called "Conviction" that told the story about the nuns and their peace witness at N-8. The only place that would host the event in Greeley was a Mexican restaurant—and fortunately they had a wonderful buffet. Following dinner, the filmmaker introduced the film and a good crowd of local people, in addition to those on the protest caravan, watched the documentary. The film not only featured the sisters, but also included extensive interviews with the Rev. Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, who is based in Colorado Springs. During the film, Haggard

explains how U.S. military technology keeps the world free and called the disarmament action by the nuns misguided, criticizing their theological interpretations.

On April 5 we were back out to the Broadmoor Hotel for a lunch time vigil. Bill Sulzman remarked that he had never seen so many military personnel as this year. Many generals (one star, two stars, three stars, four stars) walked past us. Former Republican Congressman Robert Walker, a 20-year veteran of the House of Representatives, where he served as Chair of the House Science Committee, passed by us on three different occasions. While in Congress he was a big critic of "liberal big spending," so each time he walked by I would ask him why we were not reading any quotes from him in the newspaper about the "big spending" Bush Administration. He groaned and gruffed as he slinked by. At one point I also noticed former Sen. Chuck Robb (D-VA) enter the symposium. Robb, a former Marine, became the first senator ever to simultaneously serve on the Senate Armed Services, Foreign Relations, and Intelligence Committees. All these politicians are now working as consultants and lobbyists for the military industrial complex. I also noted their business suits were cut from very expensive cloth these days.

Following this mid-day vigil I was invited to speak to a Philosophy class at Pikes Peak Community College. The class, I was warned, had a couple of recent Iraq war veterans in it and some wives of soldiers at nearby Fort Carson, an Army base that regularly sends troops to the war in Iraq. About 20 students were in the class and I was asked to speak about Ethics and the Military Industrial Complex. My talk went quite well with no real opposition expressed during our lively question and answer period. It was clear to me that this working class group of



Photo by Sung-Hee Choi

Dominican Sisters Jackie Hudson, Carol Gilbert and Ardeth Platte offering a prayer at the site of the N-8 Minuteman Missile Silo where they were arrested in 2002.

students clearly understood that the rich were getting richer in today's America and that the war in Iraq was a war for control of oil that would only benefit the big corporations. It gave me confidence that the public increasingly has figured out the big picture.

The primary question posed by one student was, "What do we do now?" I answered by saying that as I walked from the parking lot to the main building on campus, I was nearly blown over by the powerful wind. Why, I asked, can't you have some windmills here providing power for this college? Think of the money and energy saved, the oil not needed, and the jobs that could be created in America building windmills. Why not solar too with so much abundant sun in Colorado? Why not a public transit system, here in Colorado and across the U.S., giving you an option other than your ex-

pensive car? Why can't we build these sustainable technologies instead of weapons and endless war? And why can't the peace movement, the environmental movement, and the labor movement create a unified campaign and political demand around this issue? The students got it.

My trip to Colorado ended with another early morning vigil at the Broadmoor Hotel on April 6 as the symposium was wrapping up 'business.' On my first day in Colorado Springs, the local newspaper had carried an article about the event and one space symposium organizer was quoted as saying the whole event was about 'business.' He said the aerospace industry sponsors would be cutting business deals during the week. There is huge money to be made moving the arms race into space and the rats are gathering around the cheese. In order to pay for, what the weapons industry calls the "largest industrial project in the history of the planet Earth," the aerospace industry has targeted the "entitlement programs" for defunding. The space business community wants Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and what is left of the Welfare Program, to be de-funded, with the money moved into the new space arms race.

The open question is how will the American people respond? If my talk to the Philosophy class was any indication, they are not eager to see the dismantling of social progress. But first they must learn about the issue. The week-long protest at the 22nd Annual Space Symposium in Colorado Springs was an important contribution to this much needed public debate. I'll be back next year for more. I hope more of you will join us.

More information about the Global Network can be found at www.space4peace.org.



Photo by Sung-Hee Choi

Bruce Gagnon, Coordinator for the Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space, speaking to a Philosophy class at Pikes Peak Community College.