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Protesters question U.S. weapons development

by Casey McCorry



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Kansas City, MO.

The rhythmic clash of a gong set the pace. Scatterings of wooden crosses were planted in the ground, marking a trail. Fingers thrust into the air in desperate peace signs and the words "We Shall Overcome" were sung by peace-seekers of all ages. The somber march was held June 18 at the Kansas City, Mo. Bannister Complex to protest its' manufacturing of non-nuclear parts for nuclear weapons, and the building of a new complex that will take place next year.

The Kansas City Bannister Complex, home to nine federal agencies, manufactures 85 percent of the non-nuclear components of the U.S. Nuclear bomb arsenal, over 100,000 parts annually, and is the National Nuclear Security Administration's highest-rated production facility.

Through the collaboration of three sponsors: Peace Works, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and East meets West of Troost, Juneteenth in Kansas City was celebrated in a unique way. Normally commemorating slave emancipation in the U.S., this holiday was thought by sponsors to parallel the bondage endured under a government, they say, condones the production of nuclear weapons.

?On June 19, 1865, Texas slaves learned of emancipation two and a half years late, and they became free only because various groups helped enforce the proclamation? said Sasteh Mosley, leader of East Meets West of Troost. ?People wanted to hold onto slavery even after it began crippling the economy until good people pressed the law demanding change.?

Non-violence training, workshops, a concert, and potluck dinners were some of the Juneteenth activities, leading up to acts of civil disobedience in which four persons were arrested for refusal to leave a walkway in front of the plant.

While the activities aimed to raise awareness about the building of the new plant in Kansas City, the local protest was just one event in the sponsors' focus to eliminate the manufacturing of nuclear weapons globally. They call themselves ?witnesses for peace.?

Speaker, Steven Starr, International Consultant/Educator for Nuclear Disarmament, Associate member, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, and Senior Scientist, PSR, spoke on the final night of the Juneteenth activities. As Starr showed slides of the widespread damage in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sustained by atomic-bomb blasts, a uniform sigh filled the room, hands covered mouths, and heads shook.

Once thriving cities were transformed to tombs for roughly 200,000 victims, Starr said.

?Consider that modern nuclear weapons are generally eight to 50 times more powerful than the first atomic bombs that destroyed the Japanese cities.? He added that there are now some 22,300 strategic nuclear weapons in the world.

Starr discussed the less obvious environmental damage that nuclear weapons would cause, including



deadly climate change.

?If one percent of the nuclear weapons now ready for war were detonated in large cities, they would utterly devastate the environment, climate, ecosystems and inhabitants of the earth, Starr said. ?In a nuclear war, immense nuclear firestorms in burning cities would create millions of tons of thick, black, radioactive smoke. This smoke would rise above cloud level and quickly surround and engulf the entire Earth. The smoke would form a stratospheric smoke layer that would block sunlight from reaching the surface of Earth for a period of about ten years. In a matter of days, Ice Age weather conditions would descend upon all peoples and nations. Prolonged cold, decreased sunlight and rainfall, and massive increases in harmful UV light would shorten or eliminate growing seasons for a decade or longer. Nuclear famine would result for the 800 million people who are already suffering from hunger and malnutrition."

Showing pictures of uniformed, briefcase-carrying men trailing American presidents, he explained that in the men's briefcases were computer controls to high-alert weapons. Russia and the United States, he said, have more than 2000 such weapons on high-alert. The high-alert weapons are mounted on hundreds of missiles that can be launched with 30 seconds to three minutes warning. These weapons cannot be recalled, he reminded his audience.

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Shrugging shoulders and laughing Starr said, "I'm sorry, this is probably the worst news to have to hear. We're all asleep. We're going to work, taking our kids temperatures, etc, this is like a dragon in the basement. And we're making it. We can keep our heads in the sand, but our panties are going to get burned. No political or national goals are worth risking the destruction of the human race.?"

Meanwhile, the General Services Administration has plans to spend \$673 million to relocate the Kansas City plant to land to the south, adjacent to former Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base, in 2011, putting the current polluted 300-acre site on the market.

The Bannister Complex nuclear facility protesters make the point that the plant has been home to millions of tons of toxins, including PCB's, and the carcinogenic plutonium-beryllium.

After \$65 million already spent to clean the site, there still remains subsurface pollution in soil and groundwater, as deep as 50 ft. in some areas, studies have shown.

In response to further spending on nuclear weapons parts, speakers at the Juneteenth event discussed proactive solutions to free the U.S. from nuclear weapons.

Ann Suellentrop, Peace Works board member and director of KC Plant Project, speaking one evening, said, "I like to think this is a gathering of beautiful minds for our survival.?"

Dr. Helen Caldicott, co-founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), came to Kansas City to participate in the activities. The Australian pediatrician revitalized the U.S. Physicians for Social Responsibility. Using provocative words, Caldicott said of those in the nuclear weapons industry: "Let's give them Viagra so they feel a bit better and don't need their guns!?"

Discussing her experiences delivering babies Caldicott said, "I don't think we understand how privileged it is that we have a life, that we've been born.?" She said she is stupefied as to how anyone could possibly be apathetic about the issue of nuclear warfare, adding that it affects "every single one of us.?"

"And here we are in this church, why isn't this place absolutely jam-packed with people who call themselves Christians? What does Jesus say? Love your neighbor as yourself that's all you need to know. Did he ever get angry? You bet he got angry and righteously so."

Straightforward tasks were thrust onto listeners, the most important task: become educated. "I had to learn Gray's anatomy to become a physician. You can't practice medicine without being right up to it with all the latest data and information. You can't practice global preventative medicine without knowing all of this stuff. Do what you can to attract television. Use your imagination. Don't be conformists, we're only dealing with the end of creation here.?" Caldicott stressed the urgency of the situation encouraging everything from speaking on radio shows to stripping in front of the capitol. She even described a time she herself donned solely a scarf and set of pearls and, joining fellow scantily clad friends, stood in front of the capitol yelling "Nudes not nukes."

Amidst the disheartening truths the events of the week focused on rang Helen's heartwarming final words.

"And I do believe we can fix it b/c I know in the heart and soul of every person, even those who have lived most wicked lives, is some beauty and goodness. And what we need to do is tap into that and

remove the psychic numbing and get people to cry for their love of the earth and the love of their children and give up everything they normally do and devote every spare waking minute and dreaming to how to save the planet. And we can.?

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