

International Catholic Worker Gathering Ends with Peace Actions: 31 Arrested at Nuclear Test Site, 13 at Drone War Base

By Felice Cohen-Joppa, excerpted from *The Nuclear Resister*

On Sunday, October 9, 120 people from 17 US states, plus Mexico, Australia, Germany, and The Netherlands concluded a Catholic Worker* gathering in Las Vegas with protests at the nearby Nevada National Security Site (NNSS, formerly known as the Nevada Test Site) and Creech Air Force Base.

A morning liturgy was held in the desert just outside of the main entrance to the nuclear test site. An activist marching band then led the group as they carried signs, banners and colorful butterflies down the road to the gate. Thirty-one of the activists crossed onto NNSS property and were arrested for trespass. They were soon cited and released.

The 1,360 square-mile site is where the US tested over 1,000 nuclear weapons (above- and below-ground) from 1951 to 1992. It is now used for experiments and training related to the nation's nuclear arsenal.

The NNSS is on Western Shoshone Nation land, recognized by the US government in the Treaty of Ruby Valley of 1863. The Western Shoshone National Council has declared their country a Nuclear Free Zone. It has resisted attempts by the US government to nullify the treaty, and have fought for their land to be returned to them.

The protest group later caravanned a short distance to Cactus Springs, where they visited the Goddess Temple before continuing on to Creech Air Force Base, a center for US drone warfare operations. They were greeted there by at least 30 Nevada state and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police vehicles, and many more officers and deputies. While the marching band played and supporters held signs nearby, 13 Catholic Workers from across the US blockaded the main entrance of the base. They held signs reading "Killer Drones: Illegal and Immoral" and others with the names of civilians who have been killed by US drone attacks. The 13 were charged with unlawful assembly and taken to the Clark County Detention Center in Las Vegas.

Arrestee Brian Terrell said, "Contrary to the allegations of Las Vegas Metro Police, we did not assemble at Creech Air Force Base to disturb the peace or to commit any unlawful act. The purpose of our assembly was to disturb the war and to demand an end to the unlawful act of assassination by drones committed from there by remote control." (Ammon Hennacy, a Catholic Worker, pacifist, anarchist and Wobbly who came to Las Vegas in 1957 to protest nuclear weapons testing, and died in 1970, once said regarding a similar charge, "I wasn't disturbing the peace, I was disturbing the war".)



Kelsey Chalmers joined the October 9 march and protest against the Creech Air Force Base in Nevada and the role it plays in US Drone wars. Photo by Felice Cohen Joppa.

Terrell, Alexandria Adesso, Kathy Boylan, Kelsey Chalmers, Austin Cook, John Heid, Steve Jacobs, Allison McGillivray, Phil Runkel, Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, Claire Schaeffer-Duffy and Sam Yergler were released from jail 5-7 hours later. Marcus Collonge refused to sign the citation and was released the following afternoon.

Allison McGillivray reflected after her time in jail, "My act of resistance, as insignificant as it might be, was an attempt to put my body in the way of unchecked complicity with drone warfare. This imperial force is not only illegal and unjustified, it is a stain on the precious American ideals of freedom and liberty. I was lucky enough to stand in the name of peace with new and experienced resisters, and to have the opportunity to explain my action to police and prison guards and prisoners alike. Jail is a miserable and ugly and cold place. It is an institution that forces guards and prisoners to be adversaries, a division that seeps into our binary perceptions of good and bad in the world outside. Still, there was tenderness and care between the women in the holding cell, signs that humanity takes more than shackles to be quelled. In the end, this insignificant act brought to me a significant experience. I think Ammon Hennacy said it best, 'I'm not trying to change the world. I'm trying to stop the world from changing me.'"

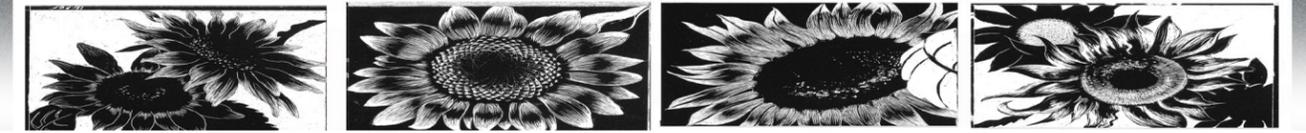
Scott Schaeffer-Duffy said, "The gratuitous cruelty of the guards inside the Las

Vegas lock up was as excessive as the glitz on the Strip and the lie that drones are precision weapons. It was wonderful to experience the joy of the Catholic Worker gathering, to witness at the Test Site and Creech Air Force Base, to spend time in solidarity with the poor in lock up, and then, for Claire and me, to enjoy the beauty of Zion National Park. There is more than enough goodness in humanity and beauty in the world to inspire resistance to war and all injustice."

Hosted by the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, the three-day gathering of about 100 began with thoughtful sharing at many workshops, an inspiring talk by long-time Catholic Workers Willa Bickham and Brendan Walsh of Baltimore's Viva House, an open mike with performances by musicians, singers, storytellers and poets, and shared meals and prayer.

*The Catholic Worker movement, founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in New York City in 1933, works to create a "new society within the shell of the old, a society in which it will be easier to be good." From the Catholic Worker website: "Today 236 Catholic Worker communities remain committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry and forsaken. Catholic Workers continue to protest injustice, war, racism and violence of all forms."

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Another \$125 Billion in Military Waste Alleged; Report Adds to Trillions Still Unaccounted For

Editorial

The *Washington Post* reported December 5 that, "The Pentagon buried an internal study that exposed \$125 billion in administrative waste in its business operations amid fears Congress would use the findings as an excuse to slash the defense budget."

News of the \$125 billion in Pentagon waste and allegations of its attempted cover-up should be welcomed by President elect Trump, who said he would pay for a \$500 billion increase in military spending using a "full audit" at the Pentagon, cutting redundant bureaucracy and unwanted programs. Although Mr. Trump is now waffling on campaign promises to "lock her up," "build a wall," "get rid of 'Obama care,'" and "bring back waterboarding and a hell of a lot worse," he also promised to "eliminate waste and budget gimmicks" in the federal budget.

The *Post's* report of waste and accounting fraud comes on the heels of a June 2016 military Inspector General's report which said the Army made \$2.8 billion in wrongful adjustments to accounting entries in one quarter alone in 2015, and \$6.5 billion for the year. "Yet the Army lacked receipts and invoices to support those numbers or simply made them up," Reuters reported. The Pentagon's 2016 fiscal year budget was \$573 billion—more than half of the total federal budget appropriated by Congress.

The *Post* notes that the newest investigation "identified 'a clear path' for the Department of Defense to save \$125 billion over five years," but was met with disdain by high-ranking officers. The *Post* reported, "Some Pentagon leaders said they fretted that by spotlighting so much waste, the study would undermine their repeated public assertions that years of budget austerity had left the armed forces starved of funds."

Saving the \$125 billion could be done, the Pentagon report's authors said, without job losses, through attrition, early retire-



ment, and by reigning in the most high-priced military contractors, like Lockheed Martin (with \$29 billion in weapons deals), United Technologies (\$6.6 billion), Boeing (\$15 billion), Northrup Grumman (\$9.5 billion), Raytheon (\$12 billion), and General Dynamics (\$12 billion).

Trump's speeches about "US military decline" will help Congress keep these giant weapons dealers well funded, but should not fool the public. The 2017 military budget of \$768 billion is four times China's \$190 billion, and 14 times Russia's \$53.02 billion; it is

bigger than the nine next biggest military budgets combined.

In November 2013, a Reuters investigation found that since 1996, a staggering \$8.5 trillion (with a 't') in Pentagon spending had never been accounted for. The report explained that the military regularly uses a budget gimmick of entering false and sometimes completely made-up numbers called "plugs" into ledgers in order to hide lost or missing data. In fiscal year 2012 alone, the military reported \$9.22 billion in such faked "plugs." This was up from \$7.41 billion in 2011 fakery the president-elect promises to root out.

This Reuters' report on waste, fraud and abuse in the Pentagon came after the little-remembered admission made by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on September 10, 2001. In a shocking speech that was buried in the aftermath of 9/11, Rumsfeld said, "According to some estimates, we cannot track 2.3 trillion dollars in transactions." He decried the accounting mess as "monumental" and "terrifying."

Sadly, the billionaires and generals appointed by Trump to oversee the treasury and the military budget cannot be expected to tear into the Pentagon's monumental, terrifying, and unaccountable transfer of federal taxes to the shareholders of the weapons contractors. After all, they themselves are major shareholders.