

January



# PASI NEWS

Newsletter of Peace Action of Staten Island, [www.peacesi.org](http://www.peacesi.org) 718-989-2881

### Calendar:

- JAN. 6-10, 6 AM – 9 AM. Flier at the Staten Island Ferry with Peace Action.
- SAT., JAN. 11, 5:45 PM “Money Out of Politics Forum” Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.
- SAT., JAN 25-26, “Peace Action – National Organizers Meeting.” Washington DC. Contact Alicia at PANYS at 646-723-1749.
- SAT., MARCH 8, 5:45 PM, “Peace Action – A National Movement.” Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.
- SAT., MAY 10, 5:45 PM, “Dirty Wars.” Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.
- SAT., JUNE 14 5:45 PM. “Candidate Forum.” Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.

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## Money Out of Politics Forum

Saturday, January 11, 5:45 to 8 pm

**Speaker: Reed Perkins**

Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place



Reed Perkins of Move to Amend

**On Saturday, January 11th, Peace Action of Staten Island will hold a forum regarding the campaign now underway to amend the constitution to end corporate personhood as it now exists under US law.**

As Affiliate Coordinator for the NYC chapter of Move to Amend [movetoamend.org](http://movetoamend.org), **Reed Perkins** has been working with area members to broaden awareness of the issue and reaching out to other organizations with an interest in cleaning up the corruption of big money in our political process. Currently MTA NYC is supporting the New York for Democracy Coalition in getting NY State Senators on the record with their positions on an amendment resolution.

The Move to Amend campaign began because of the 2010 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission prohibiting the government from limiting political expenditure by corporations, associations or labor unions because it would violate the right of free speech, thus equating corporations to persons. This decision has led to an unprecedented amount of money flowing into elections at all levels of government.

Move to Amend asks its supporters to take the following pledge: “We, the People of the United States of America, reject the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in Citizens United and other related cases, and move to amend our Constitution to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights.”

On the agenda for the evening is also the selection of the nomination committee for the PASI board. Elections are scheduled at the annual meeting on May 10, 2014.

***This event is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.***



### Flier at the Ferry January 6 – 10<sup>th</sup>

Peace Action of Staten Island will flier at the Staten Island Ferry Terminal the week of January 6<sup>th</sup> from 6 am to 9 am to encourage our fellow Staten Islanders to come to the forum, listen to Reed Perkins and the Move to Amend campaign, and discover ways they can support reforming our democracy. A stronger democracy is part of building a more peaceful and just world. Would you like to help? If you have never handed out a flyer before, let this be your first courageous act of 2014! Contact Rich Greve at 347-277-2697 to volunteer.



## Drones Around the Globe: Proliferation and Resistance

by Eileen Bardel

From November 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, I attended a conference on Drones organized by CodePink in Washington, DC, and co-sponsored by the Center for Constitutional Rights, Institute for Policy Studies, The Nation Magazine, and the National Lawyers Guild. We were welcomed by CodePink co-founder, **Medea Benjamin**, and CodePink anti-drone coordinator **Noor Mir**.

**Dr. Cornel West** gave the keynote address. His message was "Tell the truth and bear witness to justice." Dr. West established the purpose for the convergence of activists from all over the world at this conference. Resist the proliferation of drones around the globe. I feel very fortunate to have experienced this summit and would like to share some of the highlights with you.

In a workshop called Legal Challenges to Drone Strikes, **Mary Ellen O'Connell**, VP of the American Society of International Law, explained that international law does not condone or validate the war on terror. Even President Obama admitted that there is no such thing as a global war on terror. Often laws are used to whitewash the illegality of war. In response to the 9/11 attacks, Congress gave President Bush sweeping powers under the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) to use force against "those nations, organizations, or persons [the President] determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons." Twelve years later, the Obama administration continues to use and broaden the provisions of the AUMF to justify using drones targeting people in Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan and other countries.

**Pardiss Kebriael**, Sr. Staff Attorney of the Center for Constitutional Rights, explained that often American xenophobia blinds people from seeing that citizens of other countries are just as important and valuable as Americans. Often Americans try to separate US law from international law, but, if the US ratifies international law, it becomes part of US law.

**Chris Cole**, UK-NATO Expert, Secretary of the UK Drones Network Campaign, spoke about drone proliferation across the globe. The UK hides the fact that they are responsible for up to 40% of the drone attacks in Afghanistan and use as many drones as the US in Pakistan. He also talked about the belief by some people that drones are an ethical option, pointing out that anything can be ethical if you can see a worse option.

In another presentation View from Yemen, we heard from **Faisal bin Ali Jaber**, a relative of drone victims in Yemen. His son was killed at his cousin's wedding as a result of a drone attack. The world over, a wedding is a happy occasion, and guests are not expecting anything bad to happen. The day of Faisal's cousin's wedding, four drones came down and brutally killed his son along with others. There was no response from President Obama.

**Ahmed Arman** is a lawyer with the Yemeni organization HOOD that does work pertaining to drone strikes, Guantanamo, and issues of human rights. He pointed out that Americans should not be complacent about our technology because the American government is using the people of Yemen as guinea pigs. They can't speak out and it is easy to conceal what is really happening. "Some day it will come back to haunt you", he said.

**Amie Stepanovich**, Director of EPIC's Domestic Surveillance Project, pointed out these drones are being operated without any accountability to the American public. There are no federal standards for operating drones, no regulations that prevents drones from carrying weapons, no public information on who is allowed to operate drones and no requirement for a policy to meet certain standards.

*Where do we go from here?* Participants at the summit were urged to organize opposition on a local level by getting city, town and state leaders to speak out against the proliferation of drones for surveillance and warfare. We can get to know our city council members by attending meetings and voicing our concerns. We can connect with other groups who are working to ban weaponized drones. We can start a letter-writing campaign. Some of us can create a ten minute presentation to be given at schools, churches, synagogues and mosques. We can also contact veterans who have worked with drones and ask them if they would get involved in supporting our work. Art, theatre, music and stories are an excellent way to create an understanding about the effect of drones. Finally, it is so important to remember that we as individuals have a lot of power collectively.



## The Wheel and the Vicious Cycle *Commentary by Richard Florentino*

Imagine a survey taken, say, 5 years ago, asking every Staten Islander what is the most serious problem facing our borough. Traffic, roads, tolls, public transit, prescription drug abuse and, of course jobs would likely all be high on the list. However, quite definitely, not one response out of many, many thousands would have cited the lack of a 625 foot Ferris wheel. Maybe a few (with a few extra shekels to burn) might have mentioned a high-end shopping mall. But only two years ago, a wheel and a mall on the Staten Island waterfront magically shot to the very top of the list – and not only that – they dominated discussion for many months. The other needs on the list moved to the back burner.

So how do such things occur? Simple. A few people with about a billion votes (sorry, I mean dollars) decide it is a good idea. And why do they think it's such a good idea? Because when all is said and done they will wind up with more dollars. That's the way our economy works. In fact, sad to say, it is how almost every last one of us believe it is the way it is supposed to work. It's a 'private' venture and as 'private' citizens the investors are entitled to use their 'private' funds as they see fit (within some guidelines, more meager all the time) to amass more 'private' wealth. That's capitalism, the best, most productive economic system of all time (you know, the one that lifts all boats, forgetting the fact that most people don't have even 'metaphorical' boats and are treading water to keep from going under). Furthermore, the whole system is all wrapped up in personal freedom and rugged individualism and the pursuit of dollars (sorry, I meant happiness) – the bedrock principles of the America we all know and love.

Now some of our elected officials, Councilwoman Debi Rose, in particular, deserves mention. She did a yeoman's (yeowoman's?) job in getting the best deal possible from the developers. But we, citizens and our representatives are not exactly negotiating from a position of equal strength. The developer would certainly like to do his project and make more money – but he certainly doesn't need the money to the same degree that we of the worrying-about-bills class do or the revenue-starved government.

In any case, though, some "trickle down" benefits were wrangled from the situation. Union construction jobs (though short term and at reduced scale) were worked out. 'Permanent' (ha!) retail and service jobs (of unknown wages and benefits) will be given to local people. To enable even this we, taxpayers will have to foot the bill for traffic improvements and possible additional ferry service. Also to be noted, the always anticipated business spurt in the area almost never materializes (think of the ballpark, right next door – or on a larger scale the casinos in Atlantic City – neighborhoods only a few blocks away are unchanged).

On balance some local folks will be better off – and this is excellent – but one must consider the overall effect of one more 'outside' project– more money going up to developers and investors and relatively minor local benefits. In essence, it just represents one more turn of the vicious cycle of the economy that continues to pump money up - increasing the concentration of wealth at the top – so that those with the dollars can bully their way in to the next community with their out of character projects – to make them richer while they tell the 'locals' it's for their benefit.

Those with vast accumulations of wealth govern what happens in our economy. And they can do this even if money is taken out of elections. Imagine a phone call to any elected official saying we can bring jobs and revenue to your community or not – it's up to you. That's power whether they fund election campaigns or not. So there is good reason to get money out of politics (which in fact just means out of elections) but it will not solve the problem.

So what then must we do? First realize the scope of the structural problem with our economic system. In the 70's the portion of the entire economy that went to wages was 55% - now it is 45%; that, you might say, is only a 10% difference - but out of our current \$16 trillion dollar economy it amounts to *\$1.6 trillion dollars a year!* - every single year that used to be wages and now goes up! And what happens to it – much of it goes overseas, or to \$100 million pieces of art, or worst of all is used to bribe us to accept meager crumbs for developments which only worsen the structural problems in our society while pressing needs of the vast majority of us are further neglected.

Then we must come to grips with the nature of the problem. Money is power. As a very wise Supreme Court Justice (Louis Brandeis) said around the beginning of the roaring 20's, "You can have democracy, or you can have great concentrations of wealth, you CANNOT have both." We must make progress against economic aristocracy. And the antidote to aristocracy is democracy – people power. Small businesses, local businesses and perhaps most effective, democratically run businesses – with substantial employee control (i.e., worker coops) or even more democratic control (employee representation on boards) of large corporations.

It won't be easy or quick, and will require quite a large tent encompassing many different viewpoints and backgrounds. Do you believe in self-government or not? Do you think we have it? Do you want it? Do you really want it? Or are you willing to let unaccountable others govern our lives? Are you willing to work for it? Good, if so, let's go!

**Any thoughts, comments on this essay please contact the author via e-mail: [gcitizensi@gmail.com](mailto:gcitizensi@gmail.com)**

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**PASI 2014 Meeting  
Schedule**

January 11, 2014  
March 8, 2014  
May 10, 2014  
June 14, 2014

**Money Out of Politics  
Speaker: Reed Perkins  
of Move to Amend**

**Saturday  
January 11, 5:45 PM  
PASI Meeting  
Staten Island Museum,  
75 Stuyvesant Pl, SI, NY**

**Give Diplomacy a Chance in 2014!**

**Tell your Senators: give diplomacy with Iran a fighting chance  
to succeed where sanctions and saber rattling have failed.**



Go to Americans for Peace Now [www.peacenow.org](http://www.peacenow.org)  
and use their website to send a message to New York  
Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand to  
support diplomacy, not some Senators' (including  
Schumer's) efforts to impose more sanctions on Iran.

*Peace Action of Staten Island, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-partisan, non-profit organizations. Peace Action is  
dedicated to promoting the non-violent resolution of conflict, the abolition of nuclear weapons, halting the global  
spread of conventional arms, building a human rights culture and supporting human needs instead of militarism.*