

People say, what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much to do.

-Dorothy Day

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Dear Friends,

In a few months, Bridge the Gap will turn fifty. Half a century of hard work for peace, justice, and the environment. And yet the world is filled with killing and overflowing with injustice, with the environment threatened as never before in human history. Any sensate human being would ask: has it been worth it?

Our friends at the Los Angeles Catholic Worker have worked over the same fifty years on behalf of the homeless and hungry on Skid Row, yet there are far more homeless and hungry there now than when they began. One can readily imagine them asking themselves the same question asked of us: were the sacrifices worth it? And one can guess the answer: they fed tens of thousands who would not otherwise have had anything to eat.

One gives all one can to heal the world, to hear and respond actively to the call for peace, justice, and protection of this precious environment we have been given; and if more people heard and acted on that call, there would be less killing, injustice, and environmental destruction. It really is that simple.

As Bridge the Gap approaches its 50th birthday, I have often found my mind returning to lines from T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland,"

Then spoke the thunder

DA

Datta: what have we given?

It is a question we should all ask at some point, what the thunder spake: What have we given?

This, in brief, is how I would answer:

We worked hard for years, with millions of others, to bring an end to the Vietnam War. In the process we wrote and helped enact legislation cutting off funding to the police and prison system there because of the torture of political prisoners held in "tiger cages," legislation that became the model for human rights legislation applying to numerous other countries.

After the war ended, we turned our energies towards nuclear threats. We helped pass the California Nuclear Freeze Initiative. We helped stop plans for orbiting nuclear bombs and reactors to power the proposed "Star Wars." We shut down the UCLA reactor, which had five atomic bombs' worth of weapons-grade uranium stored in a filing cabinet with security little better than the college bookstore. We got the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to adopt regulations requiring the conversion of reactors nationwide and many abroad from using bomb-grade uranium, material that if stolen or diverted could be used for nuclear weapons.

continued on reverse

When the Chernobyl accident occurred, we exposed safety problems at the similar Hanford “N” plutonium production reactor, leading to its closure and that of others, ending U.S. plutonium production for weapons.

We exposed a long-secret partial nuclear meltdown in the Los Angeles area at the Santa Susana Field Lab and helped get that site closed. We helped bring about an international ban on dumping radioactive waste in the ocean. We helped stop plans to bury long-lived radioactive waste in unlined trenches at Ward Valley, waste which could have migrated to the nearby Colorado River, the main water source for much of the Southwest. We helped close the San Onofre nuclear plant and bring about the phase-out of the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant, which will make California nuclear-free. We helped raise the consciousness of the public and train new generations of people of conscience.

One is tempted after each of these to say, as in the Passover celebration of each step toward freedom from slavery in the land of Egypt, “Dayenu”—which means, if that had been all that was given, it would have been enough. But we are not deities and even together these products of hard work are clearly nowhere near enough. The world is in terrible shape. There is a great deal more work for us all to do to try to mend and preserve it.

Dan Berrigan wrote, “We cry peace, and we cry peace, and there is no peace. There is no peace because ... the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war.” There is a price to be paid if one tries to be faithful, not merely mouthing the words but living them. And sometimes, to be frank, that price seems to catch up with one. But there is joy and meaning in having been willing to pay a price for trying to be a maker of peace, of being permitted to work to reduce the unnecessary suffering in the world.

Banged up a bit from fifty years of tough work, but with a new generation joining in, we continue the battles. Help us if you can.

Peace, and other responsibilities,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dan", with a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line extending to the right.

Daniel Hirsch