

## Executive Director's Letter

Dear Friends,

Preparations for this year's Soup Luncheon went more smoothly than last year when two churches "dis-invited" us because they deemed one of our featured speakers, Ron Kuby, too controversial. In the eight days leading up to last year's event, we had to notify hundreds of people TWICE of a change of venue. Not surprisingly, one theme of my presentation at last year's event was "We're still here and we're not going away!"

Looking back on that time and fast forwarding to Nov. 2, 2004, what happened to us last year seems a small snapshot of what is happening in this country today. Ron Kuby, noted constitutional lawyer and radio host, expressed his concern over how people in this country were polarized. Instead of talking through differences of opinion, he said, people were trying to out-shout the other side. He bemoaned the loss of the art of debate and dialogue and an apparent unwillingness to address ideas different from one's own. Since last year, those divisions seem only to have deepened, making the job of peacemaker more challenging than ever.

The good news is that 56 million people voted AGAINST the foreign and domestic policy agenda leading to these divisions – the policy promoted by the administration of George W. Bush and those democrats who support it. At least half of those polled prior to the elections indicated that they were not happy with how George W. Bush is handling the situation in Iraq.

The bad news is both Bush and John Kerry were committed to continuing down the same road in Iraq. The two main-stream political parties did not provide a real choice for the peace and justice movement. While many worked hard to accomplish regime change here at home, we knew we would have our work cut out for us REGARDLESS of what happened on Nov. 2.

NJ Peace Action helped register close to 1000 new voters! We produced and distributed hundreds of voter guides and tabled at dozens of events. We were party to an ACLU lawsuit against the City of Newark for denying freedom of speech to those who wanted to leaflet in the city and those who wanted to protest in the streets. The City of Newark pleaded no contest to our challenge of a city ordinance requiring leafletters to obtain a permit before being allowed to distribute literature. We also obtained a temporary restraining order against a requirement to obtain insurance before being allowed to protest in the streets. That order allowed POP to march in the streets the Saturday before Election Day. It will also allow us to hold our 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace Train on Dec. 4. We believe the city will permanently drop the insurance requirement.

NJ Peace Action is also a plaintiff in a case challenging New Jersey's use of electronic voting without a paper trail. The week before the election, the judge dismissed the case but indicated her willingness to hear further arguments at a later date. We plan to pursue the case.

Our Election Night event at Luna Stage in Montclair drew almost 150 people and the speakers—POP Chairman Larry Hamm, Veterans for Peace President Dave Cline, and I—were broadcast live on WBAI as part of a local election night roundup.

In short, NJ Peace Action, its Board, its staff, its volunteers did EVERYTHING POSSIBLE in this critical year leading up to the election to inform, educate and agitate around peace and justice issues. And despite what happened on Nov. 2, "we're still here and we're not going away!"

There's no doubt our work will be very challenging over the next four years. The winning side is attempting to define what is American, what is patriotic and what is moral. As Ron Kuby pointed out so eloquently last year, the other side is trying to SHOUT out any opposition and dissent. Discussions with people of faith and organizations like POP and Veterans for Peace are already underway. We plan to hold strategy sessions in December or January. We can build off the tremendous energies of the newly registered voters, those now convinced that political participation is necessary and essential.

I know the task looks daunting. But I know that NJPA's members and supporters are strong and dedicated to peace and together, we will do whatever it takes to resist and change the direction of this country! But I also know that NJPA's Still Here and We're Not Going Away!