

FOUR YEARS ON FROM THE KINGS BAY PLOWSHARES SEVEN ACTION: MEMORIES, PERSPECTIVES, REFLECTIONS

I: Questions for KBP7 Members Mark Colville, Clare Grady, and Martha Hennessey

1. The Action

I'd like to start by asking a few things about that day, the hours before, during, and after your amazing and audacious 'symbolic disarmament' of Kings Bay. It was not, of course, 'day one' for you, after such a long period of intense prayer and preparation, and my first question is how real and/or strange it felt to finally go 'into action,' break into the base and go about your radically, subversively peaceful business? Did any one moment or passage of the Action stand out to you at the time, or when you first had time that night – in county jail – to reflect? How much has the day stayed with you – awake and perhaps even dreaming – since, and how much did the realization of what you actually had the courage to accomplish help (or haunt) you through the darkest times you had to face?

Clare: "It was a warm evening, I remember singing on the drive to the base. The two years leading up to that night, were rich with preparation. The three questions I carried with me in my discernment were: 1) does this need to be done? 2) does it need to be done now? 3) does it need to be done now, by me? The answer for the first two were a clear YES for me, but I was still discerning my role in the action up until shortly before. I did not want to hurt my children by taking the big risk involved in our action. Things changed when shortly before the action, we decided that once we got inside the base we would go to three different sites: Liz, Carmen and Steve would be going to the highly militarized, highly 'secured' bunkers where the Trident II D5 missiles were housed. Mark and Patrick felt called to topple the 'Missile Shrine,' a concrete replica of the missiles, displayed at an easily accessible intersection inside the base, and Martha and I chose to go to the Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic (SWFLANT), the administration building nearby the 'Shrine'. My choice to go to SWFLANT, and not the bunkers, lifted a great deal of weight I had been feeling, and allowed me to breathe with my choice.

When we got to the 'out of the way' gate we chose to enter, the night of the action, it didn't take long to clip the lock, and for all seven of us to walk in. My clearest memory that stayed with me throughout the action and jail, even till today, is how utterly beautiful it was where we were walking, under the stars, under the Georgia pines, surrounded by the reassuring sounds of the creatures in the woods. I felt at peace, and grateful. After walking about 20-30 minutes, we circled in prayer before Liz, Carmen and Steve made their way north to the bunker area. It was emotional for me, to see them go and to take in the profoundness of the offering they were giving. The remaining four of us headed west under the stars, making our way to the 'Shrine' and SWFLANT. I remember there were deer in the clearing just before arriving at our destinations, that seemed like an extra blessing. When Martha and I arrived at SWFLANT, we could see cars in the parking lot and lights on inside. The first thing we did was hang our banner 'The Ultimate logic of Trident is Omnicide,' then we put up Crime Scene and tape a copy of the indictment that we had prepared, indicting the chain of command from the Commander of the base to the President of the United States, for War Crimes, and Crimes against Humanity, and Crimes against the Peace. Then we spray painted on the ground a big heart and words, 'Love One Another,' and a few other sentences. We poured a small bottle of blood on the ground there

in front of the door, and left the Daniel Ellsberg book *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*. After a few prayerful moments and a few photos to send out to the world, we walked across the grass to where Mark and Patrick were addressing the ‘Shrine’. We joined with banners and more spray-painted words and then sat, read the mass readings for that day, and prayed while we waited calmly for ‘base security’ to come. The civilian security fellow came first – it was the most gentle and human encounter that I had ever had with police.”

Martha: “Much of the time was suspended as it unfolded. The sky was dark but starry, the land quiet but for a few frogs awakening to their spring songs. I was afraid but exultant, knowing the time had come for what we had prepared to do over the course of 24 months. Of course, the preparation, the seeds planted for this moment were sown further back in my life. God help me in my helplessness. Being there felt dangerous and yet right. Cutting the padlock was our big crime, while the nuclear subs troll the seven seas, ready to lay waste whole cities and countries. I remember the moment I poured blood on the threshold of the door to the Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic. Alarm bells rang in my heart and head, this sacred blood is being poured out for You, for the prevention of the greatest sin of all, threatened destruction of God’s creation. When we were approached for the first time by base officials, it was a simple affair, like we were expecting each other and understood why we were all there, and what is at stake. At one point while being interrogated by a naval security team, I repeated what our banner said; “The ultimate logic of Trident is omnicide.” They were silent for a moment as these words hung in the air. Nearly 24 hours after entering the base and having no sleep, I laid my head on a rough blanket in the Woodbine County jail and a great dread and loneliness swept over me. Oh God give me the strength to walk this path. All of this stays with me as we now threaten war with Russia through Ukraine, what we are warning about by walking onto the Trident naval base.”

Mark: “Kings Bay was my third Plowshares action, and the emotional intensity of the experience was no different from the previous ones. The internal wrestling match that begins the moment one’s face turns toward the task at hand – that holy struggle against the kind of fear that paralyzes both body and spirit – was at least familiar this time around, if no less agonizing. Thankfully, I’ve come to understand that it is the mentoring provided by community life that girds me for that solo battle. We are never really alone.

The over-riding practical concern, as always, was to avoid being discovered before we reached the “site of the sin”, as we’ve become accustomed to calling the locations where nuclear weapons are stored and “worshipped”. The most unnerving thing that I remember from that night was the loud audio recording that would blare every fifteen minutes or so across the area of the base where we were moving, warning us incessantly that we were in a “deadly force zone”, and that lethal force was authorized. Believe it or not, at some point I recall praying fervently for God to deliver me into a jail cell that night! Ironically, imagining the cold steel of a jail bunk beneath my back began to give me great comfort, because it would mean that I was out of danger. Ultimately, though, it was the actual moving of the feet, the swinging of the hammer, the marking of that weapons shrine with blood and truth-telling, that gave me serenity and courage. The path is made by walking. I also recall feeling extremely confident in my friends, my co-conspirators, all of whom I’d grown to trust with my life. At the end of the day, we were simply doing what we always do, what we’ve been doing together for decades now: that is, through community and hospitality, we carry one another to the holy work of nonviolent resistance.”

2. The Impact of the Action

How some of the above questions might be answered presumably depends in part of how effective you believe the Action has proven. And the answer to that, I guess, depends on who you were most trying to reach, energize, and change? Obviously there were many audiences: the people on the base (and their families and community); members of the law enforcement and legal profession certain to ‘process’ and prosecute you, oblivious of their complicity in legitimising the world’s most illegitimate weapons; the Catholic peace movement (including the Pope!); Catholics yet to see the anti-nuclear light; people of other faiths (and none), dangerously unaware of the nuclear Sword of Damocles; young, progressive Americans never taught the full truth about Dr. King’s ‘evil triplets’; peace and social justice activists outside America, especially in other nuclear-armed and nuclear-dependent nations; etc., etc. What did the Seven as a whole, and you yourself, most hope to achieve, and what is your assessment or sense of how far you have met or exceeded those expectations? And more plainly, perhaps: given everything you (and your loved ones) have been through, was it worth it?

Martha: “We were held for two months in a vacuum and silence, not knowing the impact. The women in the jail saw us on the TV news that day and many cheered on our arrival. We were dubbed the Guerrilla Grannies by our sisters in resistance. To ask the question “was it worth it” is a betrayal of Christ on the Cross. Each small act of faith, hope, and love builds upon the next, we must each do what we can from where we find ourselves in this world of precariousness. Later, I was able to understand more of the ripple effect of our sacramental action for nuclear abolition, everyone we touched along the way, from the military base to the prisons, to the courtroom, to the social fabric of our families, communities, and institutions. Great courage is given to the peacemaking movement around the world when a ploughshares action happens. We brought thousands of people with us onto that death-dealing base. A cry of NO! in the face of rapacious Empire resounds widely despite the culture of amnesia and brainwashing. God is happy to see that there is hope, and repentance still exists in some of our hearts. One heart filled with love of God and neighbor is enough to save us in God’s eye.”

Mark: “As I see it, we were not nearly as attentive to accelerating the action’s political or social impact as we were with maximizing its clarity, particularly by our own personal conduct and in the care with which we made use of the symbolic. Our faith tradition commissions us through baptism to a lifestyle in which we engage the world in ways that are both sacramental and prophetic. To be sacramental is to call forth into reality a hope that is not yet fully realized, a divine promise yet to be fulfilled in history. To be prophetic is to discern the movement of good and evil in the world, to articulate the present reality in such a way that it illuminates the path ahead, presenting the choices humanity faces, and their implications, thereby stirring the collective imagination and offering the possibility of change. Communication with the world in this way often requires one to go beyond words, into symbols, theater, and the use of our own bodies as signs of the change we are calling into being. In my opinion, our group has a robust faith in the power of the sacred; each of us came to Kings Bay bearing a wealth of experience from seeing that power unleashed collectively, through symbolic nonviolent action undertaken in beloved communities choosing to bear a gospel message of peace from the place where we stand. Exactly how that change happens, or what reactions we intend to elicit from others, or what the

roadmap is from swinging a Plowshares hammer to the nonviolent demise of a rogue, serial killing nuclear state – these are not issues that we delved into very much. We were focused on discerning exactly what the times demanded of us and, through mutual love and adherence to gospel truth, helping one another find the courage to accomplish that in community. To me, Plowshares is not a social action campaign, nor is it even primarily a political action. My motivation for this kind of witness has always been more internal and self-focused than, say, the need to make a statement that will move others to do something. It is a personal path of repentance for me, an effort to set things right between myself and the rest of creation by asking forgiveness from God, neighbour, and the earth herself, for my multi-levelled complicity in the pre-meditated murder of everything we hold dear. Alice Walker said, ‘Resistance is the secret of joy.’ The liberation of the world from nuclear weapons is impossible apart from my personal liberation from them.”

3. Cruel-as-Usual Punishment: Inside the American Injustice System

In his wonderful 2007 book *American Furies: Crime, Punishment and Vengeance in the Age of Mass Imprisonment*, Sasha Abramsky describes, with bitter irony, mass incarceration as “the holy experiment” of the American Republic. He begins his study by describing the State Correctional Institution in Greene, Pennsylvania, of which “many locals aren’t aware”: “The prison, Tara Kinsell, the town’s 38-year old tourism officer told me, is largely invisible: ‘After you’ve driven by it so many times, you don’t even give it another thought. It’s just another business.” Perhaps the only thing in America as well hidden in plain sight as prison is another (very big) business: the Bomb, that paradoxically invisible Idol! (How many people, for example, working at or driving by the Kings Bay base see or sense what it is?) This was, of course, one of the goals of your Action, to render the veil obscuring the culture from its false God: for which ‘crime’ you were all promptly ‘disappeared’ into various circles of (pandemic-compounded) carceral hell, unforgettably evoked in your letters from jail. I wonder if you agree that if the growing prison abolitionist movement could more explicitly join forces and make common cause with the nuclear abolitionist movement, and vice versa, that both these streams of protest could deepen, sustain, and empower each other? And are there any particular moments that stand out from your own incarceration that illuminated or encapsulated the intimate, obscene linkages between the many violences saturating American life (and death)?

Martha: “The faces and voices of the women I left behind at Danbury Federal Prison Camp are still with me. They are mothers of young children, daughters of aging parents, spouses, work partners, and all the other myriad roles we all fulfill in our lives. They come from varying class backgrounds, but the one uniting factor is the cultural norm of deprivation, violence, addiction, and discrimination. The capitalist system exacts a great toll from all of us, the more vulnerable we are the further we are likely to fall. As a trained occupational therapist, it became rapidly evident to me how our social and educational system fails so many family members. The resources applied to cause further impoverishment and scapegoating is desperately needed for social and economic uplift and equality. Who baptized capitalism as so sacred? As more valuable and esteemed than human life and our natural environment? We are all part of the Mystical Body of Christ, but this is rendered unrecognizable when all is reduced to insatiable material gain. The end game of capitalism, inevitably resulting in wholesale slavery, is now being understood for

what it is by young people of today. The air we breathe and the water we drink is now threatened, the future is being waved away with careless hands. I believe the joining of forces is already happening, and the resistance will always be present in some form. Love will never die.”

Mark: “The most prominent way in which we tried to make this connection between nuclear abolition and prison abolition was by focusing on the biblical theme of idolatry. At Kings Bay we tried to unveil the simple truth that nuclearism is a religion, the practice of which has been rendered compulsory for us as citizens of a national security state. To worship the national security state is to supplant the biblical notion of God as the source and sustainer of creation, life, love, justice and truth, with a devotion to weapons of omnicide and a perpetual state of war as that source, sustainer and, ultimately, arbitrator. Through our collective immersion in biblical studies, then, we came to realize two crucial facts. First, that nuclear weapons have become the idols of the national security state, and second, that the most prominent effect of worshipping idols- both in the Bible and in the United States of America, is that they demand human sacrifice. As I wrote from jail at one point, ‘The god of the national security state feasts upon the blood of the poor.’ For that reason, I came to view the fifteen months spent before trial, in an atrocious maximum security holding facility disproportionately populated by low income people of color, as an extremely appropriate and necessary journey to make, as a captive, from Kings Bay. ‘The Ultimate Logic Of Racism Is Genocide,’ was the message we brought to the site of the sin, on a banner bearing the face of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the truth of that statement only went deeper for me with every night passed as a prisoner. Mass incarceration is but a contemporary piece of the genocidal project initiated on this continent with the extermination of native peoples and accelerated through the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow, all of which is now underwritten, entrenched and sacralized by the mining, production, and lawless wielding of nuclear weapons.”

4. Steps To and From the Brink: The Precarious Nuclear Balance Sheet, 2018-2022

What is your assessment of progress towards nuclear disarmament made in America and globally since your Action? The vicious chaos of the ‘fire and fury’ Trump presidency may have raised consciousness of the intolerable dangers of nuclear weapons (though perhaps only in ‘the wrong hands’), and the gross class, race, and gender inequities brutally laid bare by the pandemic may have exposed as well the economic folly and waste of nuclear ‘modernization’ – but that modernization was started by Obama, not Trump, Biden is hell bent on continuing down the same path, and both parties in Congress are uniquely united (though with some fissures on the Democratic side) on the need to throw record amounts of money at the Pentagon. Meanwhile, internationally, as you have all celebrated, the Nuclear Ban Treaty has entered into force and is gathering encouraging momentum, as dramatically evidenced in the US by the recent decision of New York City (following the State of California) to endorse the Ban and order its pension funds to divest from nuclear weapons producers and enablers. How do you read the alignment of progressive v. regressive forces, and weigh the chances of sanity prevailing?

Martha: “Every US administration goes along with the interests of the war machine. War is the health of the State. Eisenhower warned the nation against this innate inclination. We walk away from a twenty-year war in Afghanistan, leaving the people in shambles and starvation. On to the

next war in Ukraine as the weapons industry's stocks soar, along with oil and gas prices held artificially low for years. We will move away from fossil fuels out of sheer necessity or perish. Dorothy Day pointed out that we are not praying to be delivered from our enemies, but to be delivered from the *fear* of our enemies. Who is the enemy? The weapons industry. We are committed to spending \$100,000 a minute to upgrade the nuclear arsenal over the next 30 years. Who approved that while we have crying needs for health care, education, housing, childcare, environmental protections, and retooling for renewable energy? The US citizens are constantly told we can't afford what is needed for social uplift and support, but there is endless money for military spending. The obscene Pentagon budget of \$750+ billion is incomprehensible. Ukraine is the next pawn in this global war game. China thinks it could defeat the US militarily but for the question of nuclear war. Russia has threatened to use the nuclear warheads if pushed further by the US. Meanwhile we have the TPNW that is signed by nearly half of the world's nations. The nuclear weapons states think they will have their way with the rest of us. Against most evidence and behavior, I will still believe there is always hope for the kingdom to flourish here and now."

Mark: "I draw no hope, nor do I place any credence or practical value in negotiations among nuclear states about disarmament, because their leaders by definition need bear no accountability to anyone or anything but the weapons to which they've sacrificed the freedoms of their own people. As Phil Berrigan used to say, 'Whenever they move their lips they're lying.' I do believe that the TPNW is an important sign of progress, because it offers a hands-on legal mechanism to abolish nuclear weapons – a mechanism that can actually be accessed and implemented by local communities all over the world. These initiatives are already blossoming (with New York City as one good example), which is an extremely hopeful development, particularly with regard to possibilities for intersectionality with issues like racist policing and mass-incarceration. The treaty also could quite possibly be a sign that the global consciousness is shifting with regard to the criminality of nuclear weapons, and how nuclearism poisons all efforts toward diplomacy, global security and international cooperation, but that remains to be borne out through more similar concrete steps taken. Has the Kings Bay Plowshares action played a role in this possible movement of the collective conscience toward disarmament? I can only say that this was our intention, the hoped-for fruit of our collective process, and that I am personally unattached to any need for demonstrative proof. We threw a pebble in the pond, knowing that the ripples were not ours to direct, but convinced that the deep, dark, filthy waters of obedience to the status quo needed to be troubled."

5. Four Years: What Would Your First Term in Office Have Looked Like?

The time since your Action will soon equal a full presidential term in office. If I can ask you to engage in what may perhaps be bitter-sweet thought experiment, I'd be fascinated to know what the priorities of a 'KBP7' Administration over the past four years would have been? America, I have no doubt, would have joined the Ban Treaty, would have rather less than 800 military bases around the world, and the three quarters of a trillion dollars spent on the Pentagon annually (\$85 million each hour!) would be in the process of conversion to a massive peace dividend. But what other paradigm shifts and policy transformations, domestic and international, would you most like to see?

Martha: “Our massive peace dividend will never come to us through our political or economic system. As Peter Maurin (co-founder with Dorothy Day of the Catholic worker movement) showed us, we need to build a new world within the shell of the old. A revolution of the heart from one of stone to flesh, how does that come about? Democracy is a great ideal, but we will corrupt it as flawed humans. How do we practice real democracy within a capitalist system, is it possible? How do we bridle our greed and desire to share? Radical anarchism calls us to love God and do what we will. Raising children to be peaceful, healthy, and kind will get us there faster than any current president. Whether it is Trump or Biden, the killing continues. Mothers of the world unite; all depends on resisting the warring patriarchal model.”

Mark: “If it was up to me, given the fact that this nation has essentially been fighting interventionary wars for its entire existence, the first four years of a KBP7 administration would prioritize reparations on a massive and global scale. There simply is no other way forward for the soul of this country. I would also convene a war-crimes tribunal to investigate the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the purpose of which would be to initiate the smashing of the wall of secrecy that has utterly destroyed the possibility of representative government in the United States.”

6. Citizens’ Assemblies on Nuclear Policy: a Complementary Path to Civil Resistance?

In a recent *Spectator* article ([‘Some Assembly Required?’ - The Cape Breton Spectator](#)) I proposed the establishment of a Citizens’ Assembly to review Canada’s nuclear weapons policy. Our local anti-war group, Peace Quest Cape Breton, is currently collecting endorsements, aiming to launch a public campaign this spring. I am interested in your views on the merits of campaigning for such a Citizens’ Assembly in the US? Waiting for representative democracy to deliver disarmament seems futile, but would advocating an experiment in participatory democracy – which would also be an exercise in desperately-needed public peace education – help invigorate debate and ‘move the needle’?

Martha: “This is such a great idea and an antidote to nuclear tyranny! Is our country too big and ignorant to pull it off, this exercise in clarification of thought? I think it is just what we need and the voices that would come out of it would be very powerful and hopeful. Black and Indigenous women know and understand what needs to be done here in the heart of Empire. Their bodies and souls have taken the hit for centuries. The many tentacles of our for-profit system have such a grip on us all at so many levels. Those in power won’t listen to us until we withhold our work and our consent, our minds, and spirits from the diabolical model. We will take down the elite through nonviolent ways of living, repairing our relationships to each other, the earth, and to God.”

Mark: “I have no doubt that in Canada, such an initiative is valuable and worth pursuing, if only for its possible educational benefits. But not in the United States, because privatization, secrecy and so-called ‘dark money’ have so poisoned the political process that there is very little relationship anymore between what most of the people want or demand and how their ‘elected’ representatives vote. In freer times, back in the 1970s and 80s, there were myriad iterations of the citizens assembly in many places throughout the U.S. which took up issues of nuclearism and changing our nation’s role in global security, etc., and they were probably instrumental in

stoking the national and international movement for nuclear disarmament which brought a million anti-nuclear protestors to New York City and the United Nations in 1982. Since then, unfortunately, the United States government has been swallowed by the Pentagon. It is crystal clear to me at this point that I'm living in a terminally ill nation. As a lifelong community organizer, having worked on dozens of campaigns for social improvement through the past forty years, from the most local of concerns to the most global, I believe there is no possibility for substantive change anymore in this nation that can come from working within the systems and structures that we've allowed to become so corrupt."

II. Questions for KBP7 Spokesperson and Advocate Bill Ofenloch

1. The Case

I would be fascinated by your retrospective assessment of how the KBP7 case was handled, by both defence and prosecution and the judges involved. Were you surprised by any of the rulings, for example with regard to admissibility of evidence and the applicability or otherwise of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act? Were you surprised by the sentences, particularly the insistence on incarceration (except for Elizabeth McAlister) during a pandemic?

In preparing these questions I re-read a May 2019 article in the *National Catholic Reporter* ('Action by Kings Bay Plowshares 7 puts Religious Freedom Restoration to the test') which cites Magistrate Benjamin Cheesbro's opinion, described in the article as "surprising," that long prison sentences would not constitute the kind of 'substantial burden' on the offenders that the RFRA was designed to alleviate. Do you believe that the RFRA itself failed the test – that the KBP7 case exposed its severe limitations – or that it was incorrectly interpreted and this prevented from having its desired affect? And more generally, to your knowledge, did the KBP7 case attract attention and generate debate and controversy over the RFRA in the wider legal community?

The Plowshares did establish at the RFRA hearings that their action was religiously motivated and therefore subject to the special consideration of the act where they should not be prosecuted or their religious practice unduly burdened unless there were an overriding government interest. However, the judges ruled that the government had such a need to protect the submarine base from protest disruptions. Another part of RFRA calls for the government to use the least restrictive means necessary to protect its interests and here the government just stated that heavy charges with prison sentences were necessary to deter others. Another possibility would be a Ban and Bar letter which is given to some protestors but this was not offered. The least restrictive means issue has now been appealed to the Supreme Court but the case has not been accepted yet (given certiori).

This was the first use of RFRA in a case like this so no one knew how it would play out and the law be interpreted. But it appears that the government's political interests to protect nuclear weapons can sway the legal process and relegate international law. Mark Colville and Patrick O'Neill point out that the courts are another arm of the Pentagon. I was not expecting the charges be dismissed by the RFRA arguments but thought the sentences might be lessened. However, the court did accept that the action was sacramental, symbolic disarmament. Most sentences were not as harsh as they might have been, but home confinement could have given during the pandemic. This was probably for political considerations more than legal necessity.

After all politics and the legal system are intertwined in maintaining the military domination of the country and the economy. I don't think the case raised widespread interest or discussion in the wider legal community.

2. The Campaign

You were at the heart of both the legal defence of the Seven and the public campaign to generate attention and support: a campaign which received widespread coverage in the progressive press (and secured over 100 'distinguished signatures,' including the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, on an eloquent Petition to the US Attorney General) but was almost entirely ignored by mainstream media. What is your overall sense of how well the campaign went? Did it, for example, succeed in reaching a younger audience, especially – given the Action's emphasis on the words of Martin Luther King – young activists in the Black Lives Matter movement?

There was some media attention to the KBP7 but not much in major venues. Nothing ever in the *New York Times* and only an initial story in the *Washington Post*. Local TV coverage in GA and Jacksonville, FL centered mainly on the incursion into a supposedly secure base and not much about the bigger issue of nuclear weapons. I don't know about it reaching the younger generation but the local group that is developing in Brunswick, Beyond Trident, has made connections with the Ahmaud Arbery supporters.

3. Cruel-as-Usual Punishment: Inside the American Injustice System

I was wondering how deeply linked you think these two levels and systems of extreme violence – the nuclear and the carceral – are? You would obviously like to see radical progress made towards abolishing nuclear weapons, but are you also, given all you've seen of the American justice and prison system, an advocate of prison abolition?

I would just say that the prison system as it exists in US is a disaster. Both for the people imprisoned and the cost involved. But it is a big business for many communities.

4. Steps To and From the Brink: The Precarious Nuclear Balance Sheet, 2018-2022

I would value your assessment of progress towards Global Zero made in America and globally since the KBP7 Action? Internationally, the Nuclear Ban Treaty has entered into force and is gathering encouraging momentum. And in the Catholic world, the Pope's unprecedented condemnation of nuclear possession as sinful has now (perhaps also inspired by the KBP7 case?) – prompted Archbishop John C. Wester of New Mexico to pen an electrifying Pastoral Letter, 'Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: a Conversation Towards Nuclear Disarmament,' described by father John Dear ([Nuclear Disarmament Urged by Catholic Archbishop in New Mexico, Birthplace of Nuclear Weapons | Democracy Now!](#)) as "the most important document in US Catholic Church history". Yet as I write (February 7), Biden seems on the brink of issuing a Nuclear Posture Review retaining the 'right' to use nuclear weapons first, in a wide range of scenarios, and on the

authorization of a single human being, and there are no less than four nuclear war scares threatening and terrorizing swathes of the planet (in Europe, over Ukraine; in the Middle East, over Iran; and in Asia, over Taiwan and North Korea). It is of course not a coincidence that, just as nuclear weapons have finally been banned, nuclear war looms larger than at any time in the last 40 years: but how do you weigh the chances of sanity prevailing?

There is some progress towards disarmament internationally with the TPNW treaty and ICAN but the United States seems to be heading in the other direction with plans to upgrade warheads and build a whole new Trident fleet. Right now there is greatly increased talk of how smaller tactical weapons might be used by Russia in Ukraine and how the US and NATO would respond. If we get through this crisis without going nuclear, God help us, maybe there will be more serious consideration of nuclear reductions or disarmament. And the pastoral letter from Archbishop Wester is encouraging, as are papal statements, but people don't seem to be listening in the US general population or church. Nuclear weapons are accepted by most as part of what they think will keep us strong even as the empire is crumbling. And many don't even want to think about them, they are just part of a huge military. Let's hope that changes.

III. Questions for Peace Quest Cape Breton Activist Christine Gwynn

1. The Seven – but not the Bomb – on Trial

How strongly has your obviously intense experience of meeting the Seven – and standing in support of them at their trial in Georgia in October 2019 – stayed with you and helped shape your sense of both the nuclear threat and your own politics and activism? Absurdly, the Seven were not allowed to call on expert testimony on the evil reality of nuclear weapons, in order to make their case meaningfully to the jury that they felt compelled to ‘symbolically disarm’ Kings Bay. But do you think that their Action – and such acts of dramatic civil resistance more generally – can help put the Bomb itself on trial, outside if not in the Court?

I really struggle to find the words to describe just how impactful the time I spent in Georgia has been; it has truly influenced all spheres of my life from my politics and activism to my academic pursuits and spiritual health. But it is the ways in which the KBP7 and their community of supporters have helped alter the way I relate to and perceive the Bomb that has had the greatest impact on me. Before the trial, my awareness of the Bomb was dominated by its physicality, it was really the measurable effects the bomb has on people, places, animals, and things that concerned me. Yet, while the physical Bomb remains incredibly important, the KBP7 helped me to understand the Bomb as a diptych, made up of a physical *and* a symbolic side. Like Foucault's panopticon, the Bomb stands in as the ideal form for a mechanism of power, it becomes a paradigm. Clare Grady often refers to the Bomb as a ‘cocked gun’ held to the head of humanity and this is just one example of how the Bomb is wielded as a symbolic form, how it is used to threaten, coerce, and legitimize violence. The effects of the symbolic Bomb are massive, too massive to begin to detail here, but I owe the KBP7 for helping to open my eyes to the Bomb in its entirety.

Only hesitating slightly, I do think the brave actions of the KBP7 and civil resisters in general will help to put the bomb on trial, at least in the court of public opinion. Weapons states have long controlled the nuclear narrative and, at least in my lifetime, they have done a good job covering up the absurdity of the bomb. But acts of civil resistance help to take back the narrative, exposing the truth of nuclear weapons, and producing new ways of seeing and engaging not only with the Bomb but also with ourselves and our futures. I think more than anything the KBP7 brought us closer to putting the Bomb on trial by helping to cut through the collective numbing we experience. The threat of nuclear annihilation has been with us since 1945, and it has led to an intense sense of hopelessness and political apathy. Robert Lifton has written that feelings of hopelessness is a self-fulfilling prophecy of universal doom in which we feel that we have no other option than to kick our feet up and wait for the bombs to drop. The actions of the KBP7 helped to cut through this hopelessness and give us something to hold onto. But, I do want to acknowledge that while singular acts of civil resistance renew the strength of the anti-nuclear movement, it is up to peace activists as a whole to grab on to those actions and sacrifices and build off of them so that they can culminate into something that cannot be ignored by governments, media, and the public.

2. Cruel-as-Usual Punishment: Inside the American Injustice System

I was wondering how deeply linked you feel these two levels and systems of extreme violence – the nuclear and the carceral – are? And do you think it would make sense – strategically, as well as morally – for the prison abolition and nuclear abolition movements to link up more dynamically and make common cause? Anti-nuclear activism, for example, is not currently a significant part of the Black Lives Matter movement, despite the centrality of ‘banning the Bomb’ for King and many other civil rights leaders, and despite the centrality of anti-racist and anti-colonial critiques to the contemporary anti-nuclear movement (and the text of the Ban Treaty itself). Is the problem just that so few BLM activists get to hear about actions like the KBP7’s, or goes the problem – the strange unfashionability of nuclear protest – run deeper?

The link between the nuclear and the carceral is incredibly strong. First and foremost, both systems operate through the subjugation of the same demographic of people. The correlation between race and incarceration, while it never ceases to be shocking, tends to be well known. But seemingly less known is the racial underpinnings of nuclearism. The development, testing, and storage of nuclear weapons and their waste by-products have always occurred on Indigenous homelands. From the mining of Uranium in colonized Congo and Canada, to nuclear test operations carried out across places like Kazakhstan, Algeria, the Marshallese Islands, and the U.S., it has long been Black, brown, and Indigenous lives and lands that have been sacrificed in the name of the Bomb. Just look at the countries that have been threatened with nuclear annihilation, including North Korea, China, North Vietnam, and Iraq, and the racialized language that accompanied these threats and the element of race embedded in the nuclear becomes obvious; Even the decision to bomb Japan was largely influenced by racial hatred.

These two power paradigms share many other similarities, from the interests they serve, to the way they are financed and structurally maintained, but what is perhaps most important is that they are both structures of violence which fundamentally undermine our principles of democracy. Abolitionism is a political project which attempts to reimagine what a just society,

outside the control of class, race, and patriarchal structures, could look like. It is about tearing down oppressive systems and building our social structures anew, with the values of peace, care, and protection in mind. To this end, it not only makes sense for these two movements to link up, but the link *must* be made. An important question, which the KBP7 address, is whether or not a just society can be obtained within nuclear weapons states, or even within a world in which the Bomb continues to exist. The bomb, as Clare Grady often laments, is the capstone of violence and its existence not only legitimizes all other forms of violence, but it dilutes our ethical imperative. All of this culminates into a sad truth, that there cannot be justice, including racial justice, while the Bomb exists.

Why BLM has not expanded their anti-racist, anti-colonial critiques to encompass the Bomb is a difficult question, which deserves a nuanced answer that I just cannot give. But what I will say is that it is hard to focus on a more abstract impending threat when you are facing an immediate and nameable threat. Also, there is a lack of understanding, particularly among young people, regarding the nuclear issue. Though the looming threat of nuclear annihilation has never gone away, the mainstream cooling of the nuclear discourse that occurred in the 90's has meant that most young people are not even conscious of the bomb and the existential threat it poses. But beyond lack of awareness, I also think that we cannot overstate the effects our media communication networks have had on our political culture. Our media systems often don't allow for complexity and because of this our political messaging has been whittled down. This often isn't the fault of activists, but of the public and media outlets that report on them. We've seen this very thing happen to Black Lives Matter, which has always been a Black, queer movement, but the mainstream media has scrubbed away that intersection. Black and Indigenous activists have always been at the front of the anti-nuclear movement, but the shallowness of our communicative networks, and to be honest our commitment levels, often means that those that give voice to complex ideas and intersectional links are not being widely heard.

3. The Chimney and the Cloud: a Connection Still Waiting to Happen?

Another critical linkage, of course, is between the two existential threats to life on Earth, climate collapse caused by either industrial pollution (global warming) or nuclear war (global cooling). This question is a little off topic from the KBP7, as the Seven didn't explicitly make the linkage between 'the chimney and the Cloud,' but I wanted to ask if you share my pessimistic sense that this connection remains dangerously marginal in the climate justice movement (and the broader public and political discourse)? And again, is the problem simply that not enough climate activists get to know about the nuclear threat, or that that can't even conceive of an issue comparably serious to – and demanding as much attention as – their own?

I most definitely share your pessimism. A few years ago there were few people, including yourself, speaking on the connection between climate breakdown and the Bomb. Since then, the linkage has permeated more academic and activist spaces. What we are waiting on now is an outward embrace of, as you say, 'the chimney and the Cloud' as well as a creative action plan. But this just hasn't happened yet, particularly within the climate movement. I think a lot of this can be blamed on a lack of awareness, which is highlighted in the large age discrepancy between the two movements. Climate activists tend to be from our youngest generations, anti-nuclear activists from our older generations. The lack of younger people in the anti-nuclear and broader

peace movement was a hot topic of discussion when I was in Georgia and it seems to boil down to the fact that younger people are further removed from the bomb, not by level of threat (the bomb threatens everyone) but by lived experience. Younger people haven't lived through the Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the years of nonstop nuclear testing, the signing of the NPT, the Gorbachev-Reagan years, etc. and what is more, most have never been taught about these things or about the continued threat of nuclear annihilation. This is not to say that young people have not experienced the horrors of nuclearism, that is unequivocally false, but many are not consciously aware of it the same way that they are aware of air pollution, or water contamination. But what might be having a bigger impact on the lack of mingling between climate and anti-nuclear activism is the sheer weight of it all. These are incredibly bleak situations we are dealing with, and when mixed, perhaps it feels too overwhelming. I feel compassion for those that shy away from the chimney:cloud connection because of an inability to cope with the combined weight of it. But I would point out that the world cannot end twice, literally speaking, and by failing to link these two existential threats activists on either side can only manage to change how the world ends, not stop it. I also think it is important to emphasize that recognizing the deep connections between the anti-nuclear struggle and the climate struggle does not double the work for individuals, it doubles the size of the movement. The only extra work that is needed is in the building of communal bridges, partnerships, and support systems. It is time that we acknowledge each other and promote each other, because our goals are unequivocally the same.