

Save the Water — Now!

By Linda Park and Nancy Price

It's been a busy three years since WILPF selected Save the Water as one of its priority campaigns. Such an essential subject as water for people, for our communities and for nature led us to create a range of initiatives reflective of our ambitious, idealistic goals and the diversity of interests among members and branches.

There have been many successes both for the campaign nationally and for branches, especially on bottled water. We are enormously satisfied that more than 250 study guides were sold, and more than 25 branches were engaged in one way or another directly with the campaign, some working consistently on education leading to specific action.

We thank members and branches for making the campaign visible in their communities through their commitment to table at events with our literature, co-sponsor events with other like-minded groups, write letters to the editor, speak at public meetings, and raise their voice in song with the Raging Grannies.

The many actions and materials we created are available on the website. Here are some highlights of what we set out to accomplish.

1. Educate on corporate globalization and free trade agreements that facilitate trading away water rights and cross-border trade in bulk water, and impact access to safe, affordable and sufficient water for people and communities. A particular threat came when Presidential Trade Promotion Authority (Fast Track) was up for renewal in 2007, after passing in 2005 by just one vote. We developed and distributed a post card to send our legislators to stop Fast Track renewal, and team members and staff gave talks on trade and Fast Track. No doubt, grassroots opposition contributed to President Bush's decision to avoid a fight with Congress and let Fast Track expire.

2. Educate the public about privatization, issues of public/private partnerships and government public duty to provide water and wastewater services. Copies of the films "Thirst" and "In the Light of Reverence" were purchased to loan branches, many of which hosted showings that generated discussion and inspired groups to further action; team members also made presentations on privatization to branches. Nancy Munger spoke at a three-day conference on water privatization in Amherst in the winter of 2006, where Cape Cod WILPF tabled.

3. Educate on the "U.N. Convention on the Right to Water." We created a petition to present to the United

Nations in support of General Comment No. 15, adopted in 2002 by the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizing that the "right to water" is a prerequisite for realizing all other human rights and leading a life in dignity. Supported by global civil society, General Comment 15 is an important step toward an enforceable treaty that U.N.-sanctioned human rights will prevail over corporate rights and effective remedies will be spelled out for individuals and communities denied their right to water. Our petition has been circulating for close to a year at meetings, street fairs and other public events. In reaction, water corporations are setting up the "CEO Water Mandate" at the United Nations to influence water policy and access public funds for private projects. WILPF will sign on to a letter to the U.N. General Secretary opposing this corporate influence. Team Member Nancy Munger participated in a panel organized by U.S. WILPF on "Water as a Human Right" at the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development Conference (March 2007).

4. Educate about issues of bottled water and the environmental/health impacts of its use. Team member Nancy Price collaborated with the Winnemem Wintu Tribe in their struggle against Nestlé's plan for a huge bottled water operation on tribal land at Mt. Shasta in northern CA. Tribal members spoke at three events, along with showings of "In the Light of Reverence." Some 150 people turned out in Ashland at Southern Oregon University where the WILPF Branch was a co-sponsor. Nancy made presentations at Bay Area, Monterey, Carmel, and Fresno Branches, often with repeat visits. We also presented a workshop on a "Bottled Water Boycott" at the National Conference on Organized Resistance (2006). Team member Olivia Zink gave a presentation at Goucher College to students working to get Coke and bottled water off the campus; Nancy Price spoke at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. A "Pledge Form" to not drink bottled water was developed for tabling at events, available at the website.

A future action is to create "Bottled Water Free Zones" in schools, restaurants and public spaces. WILPF co-sponsored a workshop at the U.S. Social Forum titled "Our Bodies, Our Water" on the health effects of water contamination and plastic production.

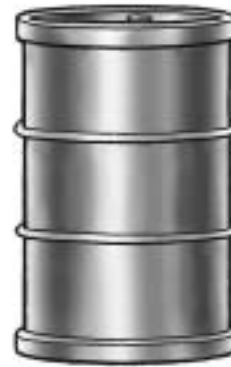
5. Encourage and support branches to pursue local democratic control of water services and resources. Team member Olivia Zink collaborated with community members in Barnstead, NH to pass a "right to self-gover-



EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE SOME OF THE **BEST** AND **SAFEST** TAP WATER IN THE WORLD...



AMERICANS STILL BUY UPWARD OF **28 BILLION** BOTTLES OF WATER A YEAR.



MANUFACTURING THIS USES AS MUCH AS **45 TO 50 MILLION** BARRELS OF OIL AND PRODUCES UP TO **3 TONS** OF CO₂ A YEAR.



80 PERCENT OF THE USED BOTTLES WIND UP IN LAND-FILLS, NOT IN RECYCLING.

PLASTIC BOTTLES HEATED IN THE SUN CAN LEACH CHEMICALS INTO THE WATER.



AND ON A PER-OUNCE BASIS, BOTTLED WATER COSTS TWICE OR MORE WHAT **GASOLINE** DOES, AND CAN BE UP TO **1,000 TIMES** THE COST OF TAP WATER.



BUT ISN'T IT WORTH IT, SINCE THEY NO DOUBT BOTTLE IT FROM SOME PRISTINE, MYSTERIOUS SOURCE?

nance” ordinance to prevent groundwater from being exported out of the community and denying corporate rights of personhood (2006), which was followed by a similar ordinance in Atkinson, NH (2007). Barnstead recently amended their ordinance to include the “Rights of Nature.” She is supporting this community rights-based approach in other New Hampshire towns and working to pass state protection for groundwater — also an attractive initiative for Maine WILPFers. The Maine Branch co-sponsored the “Maine Water Symposium” with Maude Barlow at Bates College in Lewiston this March. Great Lakes members have been working to prevent diversion of Great Lakes water out of the watershed basin and for final approval of the Great Lakes Compact.

6. Assist WILPF and branches to develop partnerships with like-minded environmental and social justice organizations. In March 2006, WILPF had a table display in the Democracy Tent, organized by Nancy Price, at UFPJ’s Anti-war March and Democracy Rally in New York. Team members were instrumental in creating a water track at the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta (summer 2007). WILPF team members presented four workshops, tabled, and decorated the Water Tent with the beautiful art piece “living river” created by Team Member Terry Futvoye-Micus. Members have tabled at Bioneers conferences in several regions, and a list of “tablings” and co-sponsored

local events would be long, indeed. In keeping with our global connections, Nancy Price and Olivia Zink participated in the first Peoples Water Forum at the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City, in the spring of 2006 (a tri-annual international gathering of government and corporate executives who want to privatize water services and water resources). They proudly held the WILPF banner in the opening-day march. Team member Yoshiko Ikuta attended the 2007 WILPF International Congress in Bolivia where she reported on the work of the U.S. Section on water.

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Clearly, the above summary shows the wide-range of themes that can be covered under “Save the Water.” a reflection of the diverse interests and experiences of leadership team members, as well as how the team reacted to opportunities and issues that arose. The many actions and materials we developed allowed for a kind of strength in diversity — that is, there were choices for members and branches that might fit local interest, hot topics, and capacity. However, the lack of a single, more tightly focused framing or message meant we did not set WILPF apart from other national groups working on water, though this may not have been true for local branches.

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The “Save the Water” campaign will continue as an issue committee. We see great potential in developing more cross-cutting analysis and strengthening our efforts through increased collaboration with existing issue committees, such as Challenge Corporate Power/Assert the People’s Rights, WCUSP, DISARM! and Building the Beloved Community. This kind of synergy can enrich our work together.

As WILPF restructures, we see a need to create a clear national framing of issues to strengthen the national presence, while supporting the diverse interests and capacities of the local. Such framing might more precisely articulate peace and freedom with women’s issues of today as linked to an analysis of democracy, sovereignty and community rights, and sustainable development and the rights of nature.

There is opportunity to work more closely with International WILPF on the U.N. Water as a Human Right Convention and to include water in the international work for sustainable peace and development.

Water is fundamental to the rights of women, their families, children and communities to live in dignity and security.

It is extremely difficult to carry out an ambitious (as it should be) national campaign with an all-volunteer leadership team. We were frustrated by our inability to get grants written that would support our work, in particular, for more systematic “field support” of branches engaged with the campaign. Such field support will need to be carefully thought out as energy costs of travel increase, especially compared with the type of well-directed and effective support a staff person in the office might provide.

We especially thank the inspired members of the Cape Cod Branch who created the “Save the Water” Study Guide and the unique “bottle-shaped” water brochure (soon to be available in Spanish, thanks to the Santa Cruz Branch). We thank Yoshiko Ikuta and Linda Park for the T-shirt design. We are enormously grateful to Kate Zaidan, WILPF’s former program coordinator, who helped create, design, produce and mail all the materials we created, including water bottles and T-shirts, helped maintain the campaign website, set up branch conference calls, assembled branch mailings materials, and sent out “email news.” Most importantly she pushed us to stay on task and meet deadlines.

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Linda Park and Nancy Price are Water Leadership Team Members with the Save the Water Campaign. Special thanks, too, to the rest of the Water Campaign team.