

# JVP News

Winter 2016 Jewish Voice for Peace Newsletter

## We're Not Alone - So What?

**W**ERE NOT ALONE – THAT'S the main thing I've been telling myself, and hearing from other movement leaders, since the election. So my question – which I hope is yours too – is what do we do together? And who do we need to reach out to and convince to join us?

I have no doubt that Hillary Clinton would have pursued destructive policies on Israel/Palestine. And so far, what we know about Donald Trump's vision is deeply disturbing – increasing military aid to Israel, moving the embassy to Jerusalem, and within the first few days after the election, elevating open white nationalist and antisemite Steve Bannon to chief strategist.

But there are still a huge number of

questions. At the top of my mind is thinking about how to best deploy our resources to protect the people whose rights and safety are likely at stake under a Trump administration. We are making space now to strategize how to best use our resources, networks, and experience to do this right, because we have to.

I also want to make sure JVP remains what we've always been and need to be more than ever: a welcoming, diverse, creative community that partners deeply with other movements while staying focused on Palestinian rights.

So I hope that the following four perspectives, each from movement leaders I deeply respect and admire, will be a small contribution to the ongoing work of thinking through what has changed, what

hasn't, what opportunities may arise, and what we need to be vigilant about.

The one thing I'm certain of? We have to get stronger, and we can. We have to build the power of our movement, and we have to pool what we've got – time, talent, money, connections, analysis, determination – to bring even more people to us. We need you in this moment. I'm so grateful to be in this community with you as we move ahead.



With hope and determination,

Rebecca Vilkomerson  
Executive Director



OMAR BARGHOUTI

Palestinian human rights defender, co-founder of the BDS movement for Palestinian rights.

Let our action for justice trump our fear and despair!

The *Make America WASP Again* agenda has trumped the *Make Wall Street Even Greater* agenda. This spells even more trouble to minorities, to people of color, to movements for racial, social, economic, environmental, and gender justice.

As a human, I am alarmed. As a Palestinian, I am profoundly concerned. But panic and paralysis are luxuries we can never afford.

The rise of the xenophobic right in the US will undoubtedly boost like-minded far-right parties elsewhere, causing immense suffering to many of us. But let us explore the silver lining that is faintly shining from a distance. Naked racism and unmasked savage capitalism may help to shake every complacent progressive into action and incentivize us to double our efforts in fighting racism, injustice, and oppression in all forms.

But this possibility is only likely if our reflection and

action for justice and rights outdo their gutter politics of bigotry, despair, and further enriching the richest 1%.

The challenge ahead requires all those struggling against oppression to nourish our educated hope, to explore and enhance the intersectionality of our struggles, and to generate an even fresher, more creative, morally-consistent, and popular praxis to assert our undeniable, inalienable, and irreducible right to freedom, justice and equality.



## CECILIE SURASKY

Former Deputy Director,  
Jewish Voice for Peace

Trump's win is a challenge unlike any other I have experienced in my lifetime. If ever there was a time to step outside of our issue silos, our liberatory but also constricting models of identity politics, and to create an intersectional multi-issue resistance, that time is now.

Because you know how to organize, because so many of you come to this work from

other struggles, because Israel/Palestine sits at the nexus of so many issues we must confront right now, JVP members have a critical leadership role to play.

It would be a mistake to reduce Trump's election simply to racism – he won, after all, by turning Rust Belt states that had gone for Obama. And it would be a mistake to similarly narrow our vision of Israel/Palestine politics.

I believe that US unconditional support for Israel's military, while it may have Christian religious undertones, fueled by Islamophobia and racism, is at its core still about maintaining US financial/military interests in an oil-rich region. And billions in US military aid benefits no one more than US weapons manufacturers.

If we don't address neoliberal capitalism's rapacious economic exploitation – the growth in

global inequality and privatization that impacts virtually every aspect of our world, including Israel/Palestine – we will be back here again and again like a nightmarish Groundhog Day.

We will have more Standing Rocks, more militarized police killing Black men and women, more publicly funded weaponry being used on Palestinians. And the inevitable result of inequality unchecked is more scapegoating of the other: of Muslims, of immigrants, of Jews.

I would love to see JVP political education continue to explore this analysis; JVP open up virtual organizing school to anyone who wants to attend; JVP members officially represent JVP in local and national multi-issue efforts. In a way, it would be going back to our political roots, but with a much deeper, lived connection to other struggles. ■

The week of the election has been surreal. The week before, I joined with thirteen other people (including Miriam Grossman and Ariana Katz, rabbinical students and JVP members) at the North Dakota State House in a direct action to protest the oil pipeline that is destroying the water and the sacred ground of the Sioux tribe at Standing Rock.

JVP was extremely supportive the entire time we were there. At Standing Rock, I was struck by similar feelings that I had when I went to Palestine last summer. Here was an indigenous people who love their land, who treat it with deep caring and total respect, and who is consistently treated as less than fully human while their land is claimed by others to use for their own purposes, damaging

## RABBI LINDA HOLTZMAN

Jewish Voice for  
Peace Rabbinical  
Council Member.



it as it suits them. Palestinians and Native Americans, for all their differences, have remarkable similarities.

Arriving home for the election has been painful. The racism, deep fear of anyone different, and violence that has been awakened by Trump has clearly been a part of our country all along. It was so blatant at Standing Rock. But watching it celebrated and highlighted is so disheartening! I am certain that Trump will value

neither Native Americans nor Palestinians and that the same fear and hatred that he applies to one will be applied to the other.

Our work for the next four years needs to be intensified so that we can support the indigenous people of America and of Palestine. We need to pull together to help people understand the similarities between both people in our work. ■



## DONNA NEVEL

Co-founder of JVP's Network  
Against Islamophobia and  
coordinating committee  
member of Facing the  
Nakba.

This moment is a very frightening and sobering one for all of us, but that is especially true for those who are being directly targeted.

This reality is one that did not begin on November 9th, but, rather, is one that builds on the injustice and violence upon which this country was founded.

So, too, does powerful organizing against injustice have a long history. Together with movements that have a rich history of organizing within and across communities, we at JVP need to continue to stand firmly – with love and dignity – for justice in Palestine, against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, in support of the Movement for Black Lives and Standing Rock, and with all movements fighting to dismantle state-sanctioned violence, imperialism, and white supremacy.

No small task, to say the least, but engaging deeply with communities across the US – and, indeed, across the globe – in this work, and envisioning together what justice can look like, will help propel us and sustain us in our fight for justice. ■



# Our Power in DC Grows Outside DC

*More than ever, we have to think through the connection between building a grassroots movement and policy change. But that's always been the assumption of our legislative program. So we got **Rabbi Joseph Berman**, Government Affairs Manager, and **Alana Krivo-Kaufman**, East Coast Regional Organizer, to talk about how they work together.*

## WHAT ARE THE ROOTS OF JVP'S CONGRESSIONAL PROGRAM?

**Alana Krivo-Kaufman:** We started the Congressional program with a workshop at our National Member Meeting in 2013. And it was sort of a testing ground: are people even interested in that work, or was the analysis "Congress is horrible, we have no power, they're never going to change, no sense wasting our time." And it was just a wildly popular session. That shift in analysis was happening in our base: it was time to start engaging in DC.

**Rabbi Joseph Berman:** I have to admit: at that time I was a chapter leader and really wasn't interested in this work. I was a co-chair of the chapter in Boston, and I got a call every couple months saying "you guys should be setting up meetings in Congress" and I really resisted.

What finally convinced me was this interaction our chapter had with Elizabeth Warren's office, where we and others in the movement had an impact on her position. And that totally changed my perspective.

**Alana:** Her Chief of Staff reached out to us, which was totally shocking!

**Joseph:** And it really shows how we approach this work. When I walk into an office, the first thing I tell them is the

number of people we have in their district – and almost always they're surprised because our numbers are actually much greater than lots of organizations with higher profiles in DC.

**Alana:** And I think our activist leaders then also see that – and it's really helpful to understand both the limits and possibilities of what we're able to push people in power to do. And that's a super helpful exercise for Congressional work and beyond.



**Joseph:** Can I add to that? Last summer on the Iran Deal, there were chapters who met with their reps and then got calls back from the office that they had an impact – that they were getting information about supporting the deal. In places where that happened, there were chapter leaders who were like "oh, that matters, this has an impact."

And I think that's a meaningful lesson: not that we automatically win, but that the size of our ask has to be backed up by the power we can leverage.

## HOW DO YOU WORK TOGETHER ON A DAILY BASIS?

**Joseph:** Every morning around 7:30, Alana sends me an assignment for the day.

**Alana:** It's totally the opposite! Or [JVP Board Member] Karen Ackerman sends us both instructions!

But seriously there is a whole Congressional advocacy team in our membership – real political brains who are always thinking about this who are part of shaping the work.

What we're looking to give people are opportunities to express anger and display power. And I think people are often driven to the work by anger, but that's actually not the most useful relational tool for moving the reps who are closest to us –

so a lot of my and Joseph's work is in harnessing the anger and pouring it into a container where relational work can happen.

**Joseph:** And using that grassroots, relational approach in DC isn't rocket science. We simply applied the power that we had built. It says to me that our organization and our movement are coming into maturity. In the past year we supported congress

sional offices on two of the best letters in Congress we've ever seen.

One letter directly addressed the concern that US military aid may be used for gross violations of human rights in Israel and in Egypt. A second letter, signed by 20 Members of Congress, supported human rights for Palestinian children, saying "As far as US policy is concerned, we should expect an Israeli child and a Palestinian child to receive equal treatment from the authorities and the legal system." It is not enough, but it's a start.

**Alana:** I also know the reality is that even if the grassroots power drives it, you can't know what's happening in DC without being there. I cannot get the information I need to move a Congressional office from a chapter meeting. Having someone in DC is what guides our power: which office is move-

able, which staffer is friendly, so we know where to actually try to put our power.

**Joseph:** When we get a Member of Congress to do something and they get pushback, that office then relies on us to provide support, and that's when we really do work together – to get them support locally, and that's crucial to making sure that member can do it again next time. ■



## JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE 2017 NATIONAL MEMBER MEETING MARCH 31 – APRIL 2, CHICAGO

### Join us this Spring!

NMM.JVP.ORG

"Beyond taking the pulse of the movement, it was important to be at the JVP conference in order to gain insights into the changing discourse around Israel/Palestine in America. In a sense, the Israel/Palestine battleground in the United States is all about shaping the discourse. How are Palestinian rights defined these days? What are the goals of the movement? How and in what form can/will Jews and Palestinians live together?"

– Nadia Hijab, Executive Director of Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network, in *The Nation* on JVP's 2015 National Member Meeting.

JVP National has a limited amount of support available for travel scholarships, offered on a rolling basis. Can't make it to this year's NMM? We still need your help to bring our full community together. Two thirds of all participants will receive support from JVP – help make JVP's largest ever convening accessible:

[nmm.jvp.org/travel](http://nmm.jvp.org/travel)



# LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

*As ever: the more you give, the more we do, the harder it is to report back on even a decent slice of it! Here are a few highlights we don't want you to miss:*

JVP-Boston forced the withdrawal of an anti-BDS bill designed, like dozens around the country, to attack free speech rights.

Movement 4 Black Lives releases a historic policy platform. JVP and the Jews of Color Caucus are two of only three Jewish organizations to unequivocally endorse the proposals - in the face of a huge backlash from major Jewish organizations.

For the first time, a sitting Congressperson, Rep Mark Pocan's (D-WI), asked JVP to host a discussion on a West Bank delegation trip last summer. Our base really is what is building our power in DC!

Welcome! Phyllis Bennis, Scout Bratt, JoEllen Chernow, and Jessie Spector were elected to JVP's Board of Directors.

LDI: For the first time in five years, we hosted a Midwest Regional Leadership Development Institute for 25 local leaders in Zionsville (seriously?! ) Indiana.

De-Cal Class: Working alongside Palestine Legal and SJP students, we got the abrupt cancellation of a student-led class on Israel/ Palestine at UC Berkeley reversed!

High Holydays Livestream. 700 people were able to participate in five different services around the country this year through our first-ever, free High Holydays Livestream. Together we made services that fulfill our spiritual and political needs a reality like never before.



# FACES IN THE CROWD

*As we wrap up the year, some of our members reflect on the work they're most proud of over the last twelve months.*



PALESTINE IS PROGRESSIVE

I am proud to be a part of JVP's presence at the Democratic National Convention because of the amazing work we did centering Palestine as a progressive issue and standing in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, a critical and important fight for justice here at home.

**Egina Manachova**  
JVP-Philadelphia



FAITH IN JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Liberation theology strengthens many border activists here in Arizona, and I am thankful to be part of the wave of developing more opportunities for faith-based activism within JVP. As a lay spiritual leader, it was wonderful to have the support and input of our Rabbinical Council in developing the text for the collective teshuva/repentance for the interfaith service on both sides of the wall in Nogales, AZ and Nogales, Mex. at the School of the Americas Watch Convergence.

**Deborah Mayaan**  
JVP-Tucson



MEET MONA'S PARENTS

*(from the insert in this mailing)*

Mona's mother:

**Ghuzlan Abu-Ayyash**  
75-years old,  
Palestinian mother  
of four, living in  
Jordan today.  
Originally from the  
town of Beit Ummar,  
near Hebron.

Mona's father:

**Ali Abu-Rayyan**  
83-years old, Palestinian father  
of four, living in Jordan today.  
Originally from the town of Halhoul,  
adjacent to Hebron.

Jewish Voice for Peace? They are good. I am with them because they defend the rights of Palestinians and are fair to the Palestinians. I get their articles and messages all the time.

Jewish Voice for Peace are very decent, very human. They have defined themselves, as Jews, separate of Israel. They are objective and they are not afraid to say the truth in the United States and outside, despite the pressure, and despite the fact that people are so misinformed. Those who speak out against Israel have a lot to lose, especially in the US. They are brave for speaking the truth. I respect them and hope that, one day, they will really be heard and make a difference before it is too late.



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