



# American Friends Service Committee

## Peace and Economic Security

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does – Margaret Mead*

AFSC's Peace and Economic Security Program, based in Cambridge, has been busy building social and political movements across a wide range of issues. Our staff – Joseph Gerson, Paul Shannon, and Stephen G. Cary Fellow Sofia Wolman – work as a team to move our nation to prioritize human needs over military-industrial complex wars and profits.

The Budget for All referendum that we initiated won in all 91 Massachusetts cities and towns where the ballot question appeared on Election Day. Voters told Congress to protect social services, invest in jobs, and pay for these by increasing taxes for the very wealthy and cutting Pentagon spending. In July, over 40 supporters testified before a State House hearing on the Budget for All resolution.

The Obama Administration is pivoting from Afghanistan and Iraq to Asia and the Pacific, and so are we. As a leading authority on U.S. Asia-Pacific policies, the PES Program created the Working Group for Peace and Demilitarization in Asia and the Pacific, which is connecting the U.S. peace movement with issues affecting the region.

With partners, we have launched a major petition campaign to press President Obama to work to achieve a nuclear weapons-free world. At the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in Hiroshima, we worked with international partners to revitalize the world's nuclear abolition movements and impact the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

In addition to her contributions to the Budget for All campaign and the Asia-Pacific Working Group, Sofia has worked primarily with students and local activists to build on the program's tradition of organizing for a just peace in Israel-Palestine, now with a focus on developing boycott and divestment campaigns.

We hope that you will join us at our open house in September to celebrate and further strengthen the foundations of our work.



Roxanne Reddington-Wilde rallies a crowd of 80 supporters before the Budget for All State House hearing

### Open House to Celebrate and Support the Peace and Economic Security Program

**When:** Sunday, September 22  
3:00 – 5:00pm

**Where:** Joseph and Lani Gerson's home  
4 Washburn Street  
Watertown, MA 02472

*Please RSVP: [JGerson@afsc.org](mailto:JGerson@afsc.org)  
More information to follow*

### **Peace Movement Leadership**

Joseph Gerson plays leadership roles in educating and organizing on U.S. Asia-Pacific policies and militarization, national budget priorities, nuclear disarmament, NATO, and the Afghan War.

Joseph initiated the Working Group for Peace and Demilitarization in Asia and the Pacific, which brings together U.S. peace movement, Asian-American, and religious leaders, as well as engaged scholars to impact U.S. policies.

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**(‘Leadership,’ cont.)** Recently, he has spoken about U.S. Asia-Pacific policies at conferences in San Francisco, Japan, South Korea, and Germany, and was interviewed by Huffington Post Live, the BBC, and local Boston radio stations. He published articles about national budget priorities, the Boston Marathon bombings, the Asia-Pacific pivot, and nuclear disarmament, and spoke at Columbia, Brandeis, and Towson State Universities and Emerson College.

The Program also arranged speaking engagements for Phyllis Bennis (Institute for Policy Studies) to discuss Middle East issues, and Medea Benjamin (CODEPINK) to discuss drone warfare.



Iraq War Veteran Michael McPhearson (United for Peace and Justice), and Phyllis Bennis (Institute for Policy Studies) meet with AFSC activists

With Peace Action and the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, Joseph pulled together more than twenty peace and disarmament groups to deliver a letter urging President Obama to engage more deeply in multilateral disarmament initiatives, and launched a nationwide petition (available on the AFSC-PES website). He arranged for filmmaker Oliver Stone to address the World Conference against A- & H-Bombs in Hiroshima, and during the Conference Joseph co-convoked a gathering of leading nuclear abolitionists to build toward the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

Joseph participated in a remarkable conference of Afghan exiles, opposition leaders, and European activists, continues to serve on the steering committee of the No to War/No to NATO network, and is collaborating with European partners to plan commemorations of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First World War.

## **Building on the “Budget for All” Referendum Campaign**

Paul Shannon manages AFSC’s national film collection, represents AFSC in the United for Justice with Peace coalition, and is an organizer for AFSC’s Majority Agenda Project. His recent organizing has focused on bringing together peace, labor, community, and social justice groups in the Budget for All Campaign.

On Election Day 2012, by an average 3:1 margin, Massachusetts voters sent a message to Congress and the president: protect Social Security, Medicaid and other vital programs; invest in good jobs; fair taxes on corporations and very high incomes; cut the Pentagon Budget and redirect the money to programs that address human needs. We won in each of the 91 cities and towns where the ballot question appeared – including some that voted for Scott Brown or Mitt Romney!

Representative Sciortino and Senator Wolf subsequently filed the Budget for All Resolution as a bill in the state legislature. At the July 10 hearing before the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs, the Budget for All campaign organized panels of 40 different speakers including Mel King, labor leaders, advocates and people affected by budget cuts, economists, professors, veterans, military families, national security experts, elected officials, and researchers.

Most importantly, the campaign is building connections with groups across the state and is becoming an organizing center for anti-austerity work that aims to impact Washington’s decisions about the future of the country.

## **Links to Our Work**

**AFSC PES Program** - <http://afsc.org/program/peace-economic-security-program>

**Budget for All** – <http://budget4allmass.org/>

**We Divest** – <https://wedivest.org/>

**Working Group for Peace & Demilitarization in Asia & the Pacific** – <http://asiapacificinitiative.org/>

## Challenging the Asia-Pacific Pivot

In January 2011, Hillary Clinton promulgated a major transformation in U.S. foreign policy: the “pivot” to Asia and the Pacific. In many ways a continuation of a century and a half of U.S. ambitions and policies, increased engagement with the region would now be underwritten by “forging a broad-based military presence.” The Pentagon followed with its “strategic guidance,” naming Asia-Pacific and the Persian Gulf as the nation’s two geostrategic priorities. Senior officials then made high-profile visits to the region, with President Obama announcing that “as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future,” and that U.S. Asia-Pacific forward deployments would be “more broadly distributed ... more flexible –with new capabilities.”

Joseph Nye, a primary author of U.S. Asia-Pacific policy, has provided the rationales for the pivot and has warned about dangerous rivalries between rising and declining powers. He emphasizes that twice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the U.S. and Britain failed to integrate Germany and Japan into their world order, resulting in catastrophic world wars. To avoid repeating this deadly history, he urges the simultaneous engagement and containment of China. He has also written that “Asia will return to its historic status, with more than half of the world’s population and half of the world’s economic output. America must be present there. Markets and economic power rest on political frameworks, and American military power provides that framework.”

While President Obama repeats that “a thriving China is good for America” and pursues engagement, the U.S. is hedging its bets. The Pentagon plans to deploy 60% of its nuclear and high-tech navy and air force to the region. Military alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand are being revitalized, and military relationships with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, and Myanmar are being strengthened. With the United States’ tacit alliance with India, expanded “partnerships” with New Zealand and Mongolia, and plans to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan until 2024, China is effectively being encircled by U.S. military presence abroad.

As importantly, the U.S. is pressing negotiations for a Trans-Pacific Partnership to create the world’s largest free-trade area, deepening economic and social integration of its Asia-Pacific partners while reducing their economic dependence on China. This complements negotiations for a U.S.-E.U. Free Trade Agreement. If successful, these agreements will place the U.S. at the head of enormous economic blocks, ensuring its “leadership in a polycentric system of international relations.”

The expansion has come at a price. In Japan it means the U.S. is reaffirming the nuclear alliance, supporting an administration that refuses to admit Japanese wartime aggression, and threatening to fight on Japan’s side against China if Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe provokes a war over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. In Korea, it means continuing U.S. control over all South Korean military operations in wartime, construction of a massive new military base at a World Heritage site on Jeju Island, and simulated U.S. nuclear attacks against North Korea.

In Southeast Asia, the pivot involves the return of U.S. forces to Vietnam and the Philippines and responding to China’s increasingly militarized claims to nearly all of the mineral-rich South China Sea by declaring (U.S.-policed) free navigation of the seas a U.S. strategic priority. Meanwhile, Guam’s Chamorro people bear the brunt of the pivot. U.S. bases already occupy 28 percent of the small island, and massive base expansions are underway.

The Peace & Economic Security Program is leading efforts to replace the pivot with human and common security policies. In addition to our independent education and organizing, we have organized the Working Group for Peace and Demilitarization in Asia and the Pacific to build the U.S. peace movement’s capacity to impact U.S. policies. The Working Group has published resources, organized panels, conducted numerous media interviews and is planning future activities.

## Working for a Just Peace in Israel-Palestine

As the Stephen G. Cary fellow, Sofia Wolman has revived AFSC's work for a just peace in Israel-Palestine and provided critical support for the Asia-Pacific Working Group and the Budget for All campaign.

With the AFSC's commitment to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), Sofia works closely with Jewish Voice for Peace, students, and local activists on the local We Divest campaign, which is pushing TIAA-CREF to divest from companies profiting from the Israeli occupation. She also initiated and convenes a group that is pressuring businesses to de-shelve SodaStream home carbonation products, which are manufactured in an illegal Israeli settlement. These campaigns have been energized by CREF's recent removal of SodaStream from its portfolio.



100 activists participated in a We Divest national Day of Action to protest TIAA-CREF's involvement in the Israeli occupation and silencing of shareholders

Sofia played a lead role on the coordinating committee for the Right of Return Conference, initiated by Boston University's Students for Justice in Palestine. The Conference illuminated groundbreaking work on the practical implementation of Palestinian return. And, growing from a speaking tour program by Abir Kopty – a leader in the Palestinian popular resistance movement – we now co-sponsor First Fridays – an activist open mic night geared towards young people in Jamaica Plain.

Sofia manages the Working Group website, which provides news from the region, a calendar of events, and opportunities to take action to support Asia-Pacific- and U.S.-based peace and justice organizing. She also convenes the Outreach committee for the Budget for All campaign, which aims to connect, collaborate, and deepen relationships with local groups, a critical and empowering process.

Sofia's work highlights the importance of providing organizing opportunities for young activists and strengthening local partnerships in order to grow movements for peace and justice.

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