

CONA TODAY

CITIZENS OFFERING NEW ALTERNATIVES

Fall 2004

P.O. Box 649, Newcastle, ME 04553

Democracy Now

The democracy that we know is not the same democracy that we knew four years ago. We are in a time of great change as a polarized nation attempts to find its way toward a democratic process that reflects its values and convictions. There is no question that our democracy is under concentrated and purposeful attack from the right.

This newsletter, and our pre-November Community Forums, are designed to help us identify some of the more important issues as we struggle to define the nature of our civic society. An astonishing amount of our democratic process is on the table in this election. Who we elect at nation and state level will determine how deeply our accustomed democratic processes will be skewed.

Up for continued radical modification are the following:

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom to assemble
- Availability of un-biased information
- Voter access to the polls

In addition, we will be continuing the definition of the appropriate role of un-elected interest groups in the democratic process. Decisions once reserved for nation-states to make, are increasingly made by international trade bodies, huge international corporate entities, as well as well-funded interests groups both corporate and non-profits. Those whom we elect will determine how much voice is left to the people.

This is a dangerous time. This election will decide whether or not we have the democratic opportunity to re-think our positions or whether such decisions will be made by the radical right. We must use the time between now and the November elections to raise these critical issues and to insist that those running for office address them.

Tom Schmidt,
President of CONA



Mission Statement

CONA's mission is to provide education, research, discussion and action around such issues of peace and justice as poverty, rising income disparity, overpopulation and environmental degradation.

At the same time CONA members continue to support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the dismantling of nuclear arsenals both at home and abroad. They deplore the buildup, sale and proliferation of arms worldwide.

Our approach is to respect diversity. We wish both to be a community for our members and also to serve the larger community by providing opportunity for open, participatory discussion of alternatives to pressing problems of peace and justice at home as well as globally.



Thank You CONA Members and Friends

CONA members and friends have responded most generously to the Board of Director's request for additional funds to get us through this year's change in the fiscal year. To date 55 members and friends have contributed \$1,335 as extra support for our 2004 programs. We are most grateful.

Special Community Forum on Democracy Wednesday, September 15th

CONA will provide a special Community Forum on Democracy in America. The forum will take place at the Skidompha Library (rear entrance) at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 15th.

Forum leaders will analyze issues related to the current state of American democracy such as the inclusiveness of the process, the quality of information provided to voters, the role of unelected interest groups, how our democratic ideals may be changing and the practicality of exporting democracy to other countries, and if we do export it, what form are we endorsing?

The three forum participants bring a wealth of experience in analysis as well as working with the implementing various aspects of the democratic process.

Thomas McAdams Deford of Spruce Head has had a career in both the U.S. Foreign Service, and in the private sector of international banking and investment. He is President of the Mid-Coast forum on Foreign Relations, a board member of the Camden Conference and a member of the

executive committee of the International College, Beirut, Lebanon.

Wendy Hazard of Belfast is Assistant Professor of History at The University of Maine, Augusta where she teaches international relations and world history. She has studied in the Philippines on a Fulbright Fellowship and contributes to progressive publications such as "The Dissident".

Bruce Stedman of Westport has spent his entire professional life with the United Nations, retiring as Assistant Secretary General. He has contributed to the UN's work in economic development as Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Development Program, and has served on three peace keeping missions in the Middle East.

Kay Liss, Chair of the CONA Forums, will also be facilitating a Round Top Center for the Arts Study Group on Democracy from September 8th to October 27th. Round Top is cooperating with CONA on the September 15th Community Forum. Details of the Round Top Study Group appear elsewhere in the newsletter.



Study Group on Democratic Ideals at Round Top

Autumn is not far away, which means it's time to start getting the books and doing the reading for Kay Liss' literary study group at Round Top Center for the Arts in Damariscotta.

This session will be something of a departure from the usual literary themes explored in sessions last fall, winter and spring – the New England Transcendentalists, Irish Writers of the Literary Renaissance and the Romantic Hero in German Literature from Goethe to Thomas Mann. With national elections upon us, an extended study group on Democratic Ideals: Origins and Evolution, will be the timely topic, beginning September 8th and lasting two months rather than the typical one month.

Starting with the early Greek writings of Solon, Lycurgus and Pericles, then delving into Plato's "The Republic," the class will move on to Machiavelli's "Discourses," John Locke, the Federalist Papers and Thomas Paine. Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" will serve as a core text. Finally, the group will study selections from Karl Popper's "Open Society and its Enemies."

Classes will meet on Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on the Round Top porch. The cost will be \$75 for members and \$85 for non-members. To sign up, call the Center at 563-1507. Books can be purchased at Maine Coast Book Shop, but some readings will be distributed or available online. A complete syllabus will be available at Round Top's information desk.

Bill Moyers on Democracy

By Sharon Crosbie

This past June, journalist Bill Moyers presented an impassioned call to arms at the Take Back America Conference. For him, democracy is a social contract based on a people's right to governments that best promote their safety and happiness. Such a government strives to maintain a balance between wealth and commonwealth; its actions create institutions and infrastructure that enable its people to become one nation, indivisible, living in liberty, with equality, and justice for all. This is the fundamental contract between a government and its fundamental contract between a government and its society which forms our American democracy.

Bill Moyers traces the evolution of our quest for such a democracy through the Populist and Progressive Movements of the late 19th Century which fought for a better democracy, opposed unchecked privilege, and galvanized public opinion. This limited legacy was the early 20th Century legislative protection for the majority of the people. Mid-century New Deal legislation created infrastructure for social justice, arrangements for making life more fair for all, and further codified rights and responsibilities that offer opportunity, civil liberties, and a decent standard of living.

Moyers believes all this is under attack by the "unholy alliance between our government and the wealthy corporate ruling class" [...whose...] "right-wing wrecking crews would – if unchecked – dismantle every last brick of the social contract", bankrupt the government, and privatize public services. To him, this is a deliberate destruction of the United States of America.

"The nation can no more survive as half democracy and half oligarchy than survive half slave and half free." He appeals to his audience to get back in the fight, and organize for preserving democracy and defend social and economic justice... His ending summarizes his hope:

"Allow yourself the conceit to believe that the flame of democracy will never go out as long as there is one candle in our hand."

Newsletter Thanks

We thank Sharon Crosbie for the three years of faithful and talented work as the editor of CONA TODAY. We will miss her guidance, but we still have her voice (see her article above).

CONA Fall Schedule

- Sept. 15th** Democracy in America. Skidompha Library at 7:00 p.m.
- Sept. 19th** CONA at the Movies. Skidompha Library at 7:00 p.m.
- Oct. 13th** Discussion and debate by state senatorial candidates. Second Congregational Church, 7:00 p.m.
- Oct. 17th** CONA at the Movies. Skidompha Library at 7:00 p.m.



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Edward Myers on Elections

The following is excerpted from Ed's essay "How to Enjoy an Election Year" and was submitted by Julia Myers. The full essay may be found in *Turnaround – Musings on the Earth's Future*, Edward A. Myers, Tilbury House, 2004.

The main point of Ed's essay is that the excesses which accompany presidential election shake the very foundations of the American democratic process as well as our personal tranquility. Ed turns to Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1839) to provide both solice and understanding of election year hoopla.

Toqueville says: "The presidential election may be considered a moment of national crisis. Long before the appointed day arrives, the election becomes the greatest affair occupying men's minds. The factions redouble their ardor; then every forced passion imaginable spreads excitement in broad daylight. The whole nation gets into a feverish state."

Toqueville notes how national elections preoccupy the President of the United States. He says, "When the head of the executive power is reeligible, it is the state itself which intrigues and corrupts. The desire to be reelected dominates all the thoughts of the President of the United States... He can borrow the power of the government for his private use. It tends to degrade the political morality of the nation and to substitute craft for patriotism."

With his tongue-in-cheek, Ed suggests if we can't avoid the destructive hoopla of elections by going sailing, we can and should turn to authors such as de Toqueville to support and guide our thoughts and actions.

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