May 13, 1996

Dear Friends,

Activism seems to follow a natural cycle. Every spring we are inundated with proposals for new projects, notices of events and more inquiries than at any other time during the year. I guess people are a lot more like other animals than we admit. Winter is a time to take shelter, store up reserves and survive the harshest weather (that was certainly true this past winter!).

Unfortunately our challenges seem to never take a break. So we need to emerge from our seasonal hiatus with renewed energy to organize the campaigns and projects that keep us headed toward a nonviolent and just society. This issue of Muste Notes carries news of how some of this work has continued during the last few months. We hope this report will help you find the time to join in working for peace. The enclosed letter will tell you even more about the work we're doing and how you can help us carry it on. Have a great spring.

Sincerely in peace,

Murray Rosenblith

Murray Rosenblith
Executive Director

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How A.J. Helped Bring Antiwar Protest Inside the Pentagon

In the spring of 1965, protests against the war in Vietnam were beginning to emerge from a small group of pacifist and left organizations. In April, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) brought between 15,000 and 20,000 people to Washington, DC, for the largest demonstration up to that time in opposition to the US military presence in Southeast Asia. As more and more US troops were deployed in Vietnam, a growing number of people began to question the pursuit of the war.

The Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), of which A.J. Muste served as chairperson, sought to bring this opposition right to the doorstep of the government officials who were pursuing the war. Following up on the large spring demonstrations, CNVA planned to protest inside the Pentagon itself. At first, they expected this to be a civil disobedience. Neil Haworth, writing in the New York Action Bulletin (the precursor to WIN Magazine) reported, "the group announced in advance that they intended to carry to the employees of the Pentagon at all levels a statement of radical opposition to the military policies generated and administered there."

Defense Department officials were especially apprehensive because this protest came on the heels of the larger, boisterous and angry spring actions. In the past, demonstrators had been

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A.J. Muste, at right, addressing demonstrators from the Pentagon steps, June 16, 1965.

PHOTO BY NEIL HAWORTH.