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Continental Walk planned to protest militarism

By Lenny Rhuilman

Organizers from Binghamton, Albany and Syracuse met last Saturday to plan the upstate New York participation in the Continental Walk for

Disarmament and Social Justice.

The walk, sponsored by various peace, religious and political groups, will begin in San Francisco Jan. 31 and end in Washington, D.C. more than 5,000 miles and 10 mon-

the later.

The main route will go through Los Angeles, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland and Pittsburgh before ending at the Pentagon with a non-violent civil disobedience

demonstration sometime in October.

At least a dozen feeder routes will intersect the main route, including one starting in Syracuse.

According to Larry Erlbaum, a national staffer of the Walk, attempts will be made to educate people about non-violent resistance as a means of defense, to demonstrate how economic problems are connected to militarism, and to encourage cooperation among people working for peace, social change and social, racial and economic justice.

"We will be calling for disarmament," Erlbaum said, "and a shifting of priorities away from military toward meeting human needs."

"While human needs remain unfulfilled," staffer Steve Ladd elaborated, "the desires of the military industrial complex are being met with vast sums of money, material resources and human energy. Every community that the Continental Walk will go through has very pressing needs that are not being met."

As a result, the walkers hope to become involved with the issues of the communities they pass through. Organizers of the Walk believe issues must be discussed and action begun in neighborhoods and communities.

"Organizers in each community are encouraged not to simply see the walkers through, but to relate the Walk to local concerns," explained Walk staffer Ed Hodemann.

"If local people are holding a proposed nuclear power plant or the closing of a day care center, then the Walk can incorporate a people's housing, a debate, anti-guerrilla theater or hold a demonstration to contrast the specific needs of the community with what is being done by government."

"The emphasis," said Erlbaum, "is on walking local areas, not 1,000 miles. All locales can set their own routes and schedule, although we'd like to average about 15 miles per day."

Beginning in late August, walkers from Syracuse will either head west through Rochester in Buffalo and then south to Cleveland, or south to Albany and south to New York

City, joining a feeder route from Boston heading toward Washington, D.C.

Proposed points of protest include the Nine Point nuclear power plant near Oswego, presently closed because of high radiation levels, and General Electric plants in Binghamton, Syracuse and Albany. Two GE plants north of Albany are under investigation for violating state water quality standards by discharging polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Hudson River.

Although many people have been raised to believe national security depends upon developing sophisticated weaponry, Erlbaum said, he feels the Walk can reach people by stressing a "peace before" position.

"We are going to tell people what disarmament could mean to them practically and morally," Erlbaum said. "By reversing the trend of military escalation and nuclear development, billions of tax dollars and industrial production could be redirected to meet human needs, instead of military wants."

The Walk will also emphasize the area of employment. "We want to disarm the 'make a bomb... create a job myth,'" Erlbaum said.

Ladd quoted a Bureau of Labor Statistics study that "dollar for dollar, more jobs can be created by non-military spending."

These studies show that each billion dollars redirected from military production into civilian production can produce 5,000 to 100,000 more jobs," he said.

Sponsors of the Continental Walk include the American Friends Service Committee, the Catholic Peace Fellowship, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the War Resisters League, the Gray Panthers, the Socialist Party and the People's Party. Individual supporters include Ralph Abernethy, Bill Along, David and Philip Berrigan, Allan Glasner, Daniel Ellsberg and Julian Bond.

Locally, the Walk is initially being sponsored by the Syracuse Peace Council and the American Friends Service Committee.