

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence.

The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (and more than 90 of our previous interview programs and special programs) at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the TV programs link to reach www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch.

Many of our website's TV program listings also include a .pdf document describing the program.

JULY 2010

“UNDERSTANDING AND PROTECTING CIVIL LIBERTIES”

by GLEN ANDERSON, PRODUCER AND HOST OF THIS TV SERIES

How can we create a society of grassroots activism for peace and social justice when so few Americans understand and support our basic constitutional rights? Bit by bit, governments and right-wing agitators try to squeeze people into conformity, restrict free speech, impose certain religious beliefs upon the rest of us, expand police and surveillance powers, undermine due process, and reduce our constitutional freedoms and human rights in other ways.

In the late 1700s, Britain's Lord Acton said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Americans across the political spectrum from left to right oppose the growing concentrations of political power. Progressives also oppose the growing concentrations of economic power, which also can interfere with human rights. Now only a few corporations own the vast majority of US media, and they bias media coverage in favor of big business and other powerful interests.

Since the 1970s the “tough on crime” mania and the futile “War on Drugs” have expanded police power, reduced the rights of ordinary people, and made the US much more punitive and much less free.

After September 11, 2001, the Bush regime and other right-wing elements intimidated Congress and rammed through the PATRIOT ACT, which vastly expanded the federal government's powers to spy on Americans and slashed some of our basic constitutional rights.

Likewise, the US unashamedly promoted torture and denial of basic human rights to people our military captured in other countries. The US blatantly violated internal law and international human rights standards.

Partisan politics have corrupted the process even further. Many Republicans who knew better supported Bush's roll-backs of constitutional rights and his blatant use of torture. Although Obama campaigned for “change,” he has continued a great many of Bush's abuses, and loyal Democrats who used to crit-

icize Bush now quietly give Obama a “free pass” to commit the same abuses and crimes.

Public opinion surveys and decades of public policy have shown that the American people have a shallow and distorted understanding of the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the various amendments and laws that protect our various freedoms and civil liberties.

The public cannot protect what it does not understand or value.

The Olympia FOR’s July 2010 TV program will help the viewers better understand the range of civil liberties and how important they are for a free society. The program also will help viewers understand how to protect them from neglect or abuse.

Our three guests, Gery Gerst, Don Clocksin and Kevin Wimsett, are active in the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington. The ACLU-WA works statewide to protect the Bill of Rights and other Constitutionally protected civil rights and civil liberties. (See www.aclu-wa.org or call 206-624-2184.)