

Political Speeches by Stephen Pope

I have been asked several times over the last year to address peace rallies in Santa Barbara. this page collected three of the texts I wrote related to the recent world political situation and our approach to changing it.

Message to a Peace Rally -- October, 2002

I'm so grateful to have been asked to address you all today.

I'd like to divide my opening comments into three parts: the spiritual message of the Quakers to the current peace movement, a few simple facts, and my thoughts on how we have to proceed. After this, I will discuss some of the work we're doing to support conscientious objectors and those interested in alternatives to military service

Part One: The spiritual message of the Quakers to the greater peace movement

We often represent the spirit as coming from above (as in the Christian paintings of the tongues of fire on the apostles' heads at the Pentecost), but we know that there's no "up" to the spirit; we know that it is everywhere, and that it flows through every one of us and everything around us -- except sometimes our thoughts. Whenever we inhale, there's an energy in the air that came from somewhere; it's imparted to the air by plants and trees, as well as by animals and people. That energy is shared -- even by people I think I don't like or agree with. All of creation is intimately connected, and all people are forever capable of being lead by their spirits. Problems only arise when our thoughts are not permeated by the spirit.

So, for those of us who feel lead to raise our voices, it's as in the Bible quote from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (which is unfortunately only read at weddings these days) -- "If I can speak in all the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am just like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [...] If I have all knowledge and all faith, even so as to move mountains, but have not love, then I am nothing."

This is our entire message; it doesn't change based upon our audience, and we've been saying it for over 350 years.

Part Two: Three statements of my convictions that should influence us and inform our activism

I state these personal opinions in an emphatic,

almost militant manner for rhetorical purposes.

A: War is terrorism.

The way I see it, a war on terrorism makes about as much sense as a war on violence. War is terrorism. The United States has used terror against civilians in recent history from the 1972 Christmas-day firestorm in Hanoi to the decade-long sanctions against Iraq. The difficult issue is that the difference between soldiers, terrorists, serial killers, and madmen is a subtle one; the only real technique to classify these people is to look into their own intentions and organization. According to this classification scheme, the events of September 11, 2001 were acts of war; the last major act of terrorism against America was home-grown terrorist Timothy MacVeigh's bombing in Oklahoma City in April, 1995.

B: The media are not our friends.

It feels to me that to speak of an independent US news media is a misnomer. It's the nature of the commercial media to sell out to the Fortune 500. They are designed to be transparent channels for the messages of US industry (and business-friendly government), and the fact is that war is much better for ratings than an on-going economic slump or a looming environmental catastrophe. This applies to the major broadcast networks, the national newspaper and magazine conglomerates, much of the Internet, public broadcasting, and to our local newspapers.

C: It's the big picture that's disturbing.

I believe that it's urgent that we express our opposition, not only about the prospect that we may soon be paying for the killing of innocent people in Iraq, but -- far, far more -- for our country's on-going flagrant scoff-law attitude and bullying in the international arena, be it with respect to the Kyoto accords on the environment, the International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization, towards our neighbor Cuba, or in our unilateral abandonment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. Our administration is not playing the role of the world's policemen, but of the world's vigilante.

Part Three: How we do this?

As much as we are upset, as much as we are deeply angered by the words and deeds of people who purport to be acting on our behalf, if our anger makes us hateful, then we have lost and they have

won. What's central is that we be angry, but at the same time act out of our deeper selves and motivations. In our everyday dealings with people, one-to-one or group-to-group, if we are not aware of being filled with the spirit and motivated by love, then we should just stay home.

Gandhi put this most succinctly when he said, "you have to be the change that you want to see in the world."

To connect these three topics together -- attitude, context, and process -- I'd like to present you with the image of a flag (produced by Quakers in Pennsylvania) that consists of the words "united we stand" placed over a photograph of the earth as seen from outer space.

Next, I'd like to introduce you all to our group, "Conscientious Objectors and their Supporters (COS)," and to describe what we do and why. (outline form from here, since I'll talk impromptu.)

Who is COS?

- COs and related or interested parties

- Provide concrete practical services in our local communities

- Why am I a member?

 - My own CO experience

 - My faith and objection to war

- The Draft

 - Selective service registration, conscription, and the draft

 - Classification, options, and deferments

 - Conscientious objection under current law

 - The future of draft law

 - Helping COs in the military

- Registration and "no child left behind"

 - Opting out as individuals

 - Opting out as a group

 - The Ojai experience (try it at home)

- Counter-recruitment

 - Recruitment advertising (e.g., MTV)

 - Statistics of those in the military

 - Bank ad analogy

 - Ventura food bank statistics

 - CR activism in schools

 - CR activism in the media

COS, CCCO, and our activities

 - Draft counseling (UCSB, SBCC, schools, marches)

 - hot-line

 - Public awareness

To segue back to the "big picture" of what we're here for this evening, I'd like to read a short poem by SB CO (and COS co-founder) Wayne Ferren that bears the title "Universal Soldier."

The issue is not we versus they

Not allies versus foes.

The issue is War or Peace,

Soldier or civilian.

The choice is individual.

The choice is Universal.

If we chose Peace

And there is no one left to fight,

There is no way War,

There is only path to Peace.

The choice is individual.

The choice is Universal.

In closing, I want to note that our nation's poet-laureate Billy Collins recently reminded us that, "If political protest is urgent, I don't think it needs to wait for an appropriate scene and setting and should be as disruptive as it wants to be."

I can return to my grateful state now, and I thank you all for the incredible gift of your attention.

Stay Awake! -- Notes for the People's March -- May 17, 2003

"One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change [...] but today, our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change." These words were written by Martin Luther King over 35 years ago, but are even more true today than then.

The topic of the panel that I'll be speaking on this afternoon is "Understanding Occupation - The After Effects of War"; for me, this topic boils down to the question of what it means to be "freed" by the US. During my lifetime, our military has seen action in the following countries: Guatemala, Lebanon, Pan-

ama, Vietnam, Laos, Cuba, Panama (again), Indonesia, The Dominican Republic, Guatemala (again), Cambodia, Oman, Laos (again), Chile, Cambodia, Iraq, Libya, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Lebanon (again), Grenada, Libya (again), Bolivia, Iran (again), Libya, Panama, Liberia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, most of the components of the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Afghanistan, and now Iraq again.

Although it sound like we're freeing people in all parts of the globe, in some of the countries, we ousted elected leaders and installed vassal dictators (I think of Indonesia, Chile, Libya, Iraq, or Cuba here). Whether they're called Somoza, Batista, Pahlevi, Marcos, Suharto, or Saddam Hussein, we have a pretty dismal record for picking friends in the world at large.

What if the Afghani or Iraqi people elected left-leaning leaders like the Chileans, and the Cubans, and the Iranians, and the Granadians did?

Another problem that often arises in countries that we liberate is that we let our businesses and our military go there. After a well-publicized rape case in 1995 in Okinawa, Admiral Richard C. Macke, Commander of US Forces in the Pacific, told a reporter, "I think that [the rape] was absolutely stupid. For the price they paid to rent the car, they could have had the girl." The conservative Japanese newspaper *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, found that between US military personnel were implicated in about one crime per day over the last 25 years, and stated that the US troops in Okinawa are essentially an occupying force and behaved as such. In 1995, 85,000 Okinawans demonstrated to call for the withdrawal of U.S. troops and bases, and in 1996 they passed a referendum to rid themselves of U.S. bases. I could continue this train of thought with other stories from Asia, or from Central America for example, but I'd rather move on to the topic of War and Business.

Several US presidents over the years have spoken out against the military-industrial complex. Speaking almost 100 years ago President Woodrow Wilson asked "Is there any man, is there any woman, let me say any child here that does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry?" More recently, a highly decorated Marine once wrote, "War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.

The trouble with America is that when the dollar only earns 6 percent over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100 percent. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow the flag. I wouldn't go to war again as I have done to protect some lousy investment of the bankers. There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. I spent most of my time [in the Marines] being a high class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism." This was written by Major General Smedley Butler in 1935.

More recently, Chris White wrote "If one were to look closely at the [time since WW II], one would be hard pressed to find a single U.S. military or C.I.A. intervention that has brought us one iota of safety, or, for that matter, that has actually been done for national defense purposes. As Butler illustrated in 1935, and it is even truer now than then, the U.S. engages in interventions meant to protect the interests of the powerful and wealthy of our nation and our allies, and rarely, if ever, in order to actually protect its citizens."

If you doubt that oil was our sole motivation for the recent illegal invasion of Iraq, here are a few quotes from a report that came over the Reuters News Service (hardly a liberal organ) in April: "The United States plans to run Iraq's oil industry until an Iraqi interim authority can be formed to take it over. It is uncertain how long the United States would operate [...] the country's main source of revenue. The Defense Department is putting in place an advisory board of former U.S. oil industry executives to help run [the] industry. Does the United States want Iraq to remain in OPEC? 'It will be up to their government to decide.' said one U.S. official." The photograph that accompanied the story had the caption, "A U.S. soldier from the 173rd Airborne Division, guards oil facilities in the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk." I find it interesting that we could not manage to protect the most significant museum of antiquities in the world, but we can send battalions to guard oil wells.

It is very well documented that an infrastructure is being put in place just now to transfer something over \$1 trillion from our pockets to the major companies such as Haliburton, Bechtel, and Kellogg, Brown and Root, to rebuild Iraq. (Actually, this will

come from our children's pockets, since our federal budget deficit is growing at a faster rate than ever before in history and the senate just passed another large tax cut bill this week.)

To end this topic, I will remind you that in March, multi-billionaire Riley Bechtel (as in the Bechtel Corporation) was sworn in as a member of President Bush's Export Council to "advise the government on how to create markets for American companies overseas." Harvey Wasserman's comment on this was, "Have they no grace, no shame, no common sense? Why don't they just have Enron run America?" Ordained minister Bill Moyers says, "They're counting on your patriotism to distract you from their plunder. They're counting on you to be standing at attention with your hand over your heart, pledging allegiance to the flag, while they pick your pocket!"

I've segued now to the topic of the economic and social impacts of the militarization of US society. The administration plans to spend \$2.7 trillion on the military over the next six years, with a projected federal deficit of up to \$300 billion next year. According to the fiscal 2004 discretionary budget request, we'll be spending \$399 billion on the military. This is more than the next 16 largest budget items combined. Allow me to repeat that, we're being asked to spend more on the military than the total of what we spend on education, health, justice, housing, international aid, natural resources, the environment, veterans benefits, science and space, transportation, training, social services, costs of government, social security, energy, and agriculture, COMBINED.

A report from the Cato Institute (again, not a liberal organ) states that, "The United States has over 200,000 troops stationed in 144 countries and territories. At any given time, it usually has another 20,000 sailors and Marines deployed afloat on Navy ships. In the post-Cold War period, the number of armed conflicts has declined by more than half -- from 55 in 1992 to 24 in 1997. In addition, most conflicts now occur within states, not between them. Of the 101 conflicts occurring from 1989 to 1996, 95 involved combatants within a state and only six took place between states. A threat to U.S. security is more apt to arise from cross-border aggression than from civil strife. Most of the 100,000 troops in Europe, and almost all of the 75,000 troops in Asia are supporting wealthy nations against mild or declining threats." A report by our own Dept. of State

tells us that, "the world's average military expenditures per capita ratio, a general measure of security costs, fell from \$254 in 1989 to \$142 in 1999. Now, I'm being asked to contribute over \$1200 for next year, and I'm not happy about it.

It's time to stay awake, to take action. This afternoon, I'll be talking more about our work on counter-recruitment, our information campaign against JROTC, and the options we're supporting to the "No child left unrecruited" clauses to the US Patriot Act. You might ask, "what can I do?" The two problem areas where each of us can take simple and direct action are combating corporatism and reshaping our media.

The best thing that we can do to combat the global corporate powers is to buy locally. This applies equally well to food, clothing, entertainment, and many other goods and services. To start, see if you can take 10% of your expenditures and devote them to locally produced (and union-produced) goods and services. This can be as simple as going to a farmer's market, buying no-name clothing, or avoiding chain restaurants. In terms of things we are required to buy from large corporations, there are many web sites and publications that rank corporations in terms of their levels of social and environmental responsibility. There are web sites that list the corporate sponsors of right-wing causes and media, for example a list of the advertisers on the Rush Limbaugh show, or of the local radio stations owned by the Clearchannel corporation, including a local classic rock station that I used to listen to. If you remember that we vote with our dollars, then the word "boycott" re-enters our vocabulary. For a boycott to be effective, however, it has to be vocal; it has to be publicized, which brings me to the media.

Taking back the media is easy, and it's already happening, but the mainstream fortune-500-owned media aren't covering it. My litmus test for the last couple of months was that I refuse to patronize any news organization that referred to the US army in Iraq as "the coalition." This means that my US-based news sources are pretty much reduced to the Pacifica Radio network and the Nation magazine. If you want a truly broader view of what happened in the Middle East in the last 2 months, I'd recommend that you get the newest issue of the wonderful magazine called "World Press Review." It collects reports

on the Middle East form all parts of the world and of the political spectrum. After reading news stories from Spain, Egypt, Poland, Israel, Australia, Germany, Saudi Arabia, India, Japan, Jamaica, and Indonesia, you can call yourself well-informed. Believe me, you have a different perspective on recent events than if you get all your information from the Fortune 500 mouthpieces for the Dept. of Defense. We can influence our local media by demanding that they serve us. I'd like right now to ask the News Press and the Independent to cover today's event on several pages, and to print the full text of the speeches made here today.

There is lots of good literature on how to do what needs to be done. For example, this pamphlet on the basic rules for nonviolent direct action lists four principles: (1) define your objective; (2) be honest and open-minded; (3) love your enemies; and (4) give your opponents a way out. It's five strategic steps are: (1) investigate; (2) negotiate; (3) educate; (4) demonstrate; and (5) resist.

To close with another quote from Martin Luther King that puts all of the topics of war and peace, and of social and economic justice in relation to one another, "when machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation are incapable of being conquered. [...] I speak out today not in anger, but with anxiety and sorrow in my heart, and above all with a passionate desire to see our beloved country stand as the moral example for the world [but] we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. Our only hope today lives in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit."

Thank you all for the incredible gift of your attention.

Looking back at the revolution -- Notes for the Sept. 27, 2003 Peace Rally

Thank you; I'm very grateful to have been asked to address you today, and I bring you all some bad news, then some good news, then some even better news

The bad news is what we already know: A coup has taken place in our country; we have to accept that. Some speak of a "silent coup," but it wasn't even silent. We know of the situation surrounding the 2000 presidential election, the complicity of the US government in the Sept. 11, 2001 acts of war, and the tyranny

of the USA Patriot Act. In my mind, these things are uncontestable, but we need to move on and focus on how to respond rather than just reacting.

The fact is that we, as critical thinkers, as people of faith, as progressives, now qualify as an oppressed people. I say this not as an excuse for hand-wringing and self-pity, but simply as a reality check. As an oppressed people, there is much we can learn from other similar groups throughout history, from the Spartacan slave revolt 2070 years ago to the 1960s civil rights movement. It is important for each of us to concentrate on the message that the powers that be can take our money (as they do), they can take our rights (as they're trying to do), but they can never take our dignity, they can never take our hope. I am filled with hope. Anne Sexton wrote the wonderful line, "There is hope; there is hope everywhere. Today God gives milk, and I've got a pail." I find it helpful to recall to myself the image of those who, during the freedom struggle in South Africa, went before the sham courts singing loudly. Their voices eventually won. Let us sing!

The good news, and there is a lot of good news, is that the revolution has already started, and we have already won many significant victories. At the latest since the "battle in Seattle" in December 1999 (which was before the 2000 US presidential election or the events of Sept. 11, 2001), progressive forces have been coming together more and more to oppose globalization of trade, the rape of the environment, and the growing income and social disparities in the developed world. We now expect protest events at every meeting of the World Economic Forum or International Monetary Fund. We dare not overlook the recent 400 vs. 20 vote in the US congress against the FCC's deregulation of the public airwaves. We should remind ourselves (and others) that over 170 towns throughout the USA have successfully fought off WalMart. We need to study and re-study the Maine experience; in that state, public financing of campaigns leveled the playing field, and this led to progressive policies like universal health care.

Even more ambitious, the progressive movement in Austria was concerned with the entry requirements for the European Union, so they sponsored a referendum to state that they feel their society should be in the business of providing at least four services to its people: free single-payer health care,

free education through university level, free old-age pensions, and subsidized public transport. Much to everyone's surprise, the referendum passed.

I'd like to address the notion of "taking back the media." What comes up for me on this issue is, why would I want to "take back" CBS or Fox? What do I want with them? It's our task to make the so-called mainstream press moot; more and more people are becoming aware that the commercial media are simply doing their job as the opium of the masses and the mouthpiece of the Fortune 500. The question is, who cares? The good news is that in the last year, KPFK has registered a 123% increase in memberships. Progressive writers such as Michael Moore, Jim Hightower, Gore Vidal, and Noam Chomsky make it to the prestigious best-seller lists, but this fact is curiously not covered in the commercial press. Who cares? People are reading their books. People are passing these books on to their friends. KCBX, our own local moderate NPR station broadcasts Democracy Now and RadioNation. To my mind, the most positive development in the media in recent years takes place on Friday evenings when Bill Moyers hosts the program Now on PBS. Our voices are growing in strength. Let us sing!

As I see it, the best news is what has happened on the international stage so far this year. The US went to war alone, the vast majority of the international community opposed us vocally, and there were no ramifications. We don't dare actually doing anything against our most important traditional allies. Now George Bush is going begging to the UN. The sun is already most definitely setting on the American Empire. Our status as a superpower is rapidly being undermined by our own leaders, and this is very good news for the world.

In closing, I'm reminded of the speeches held 40 years ago at the march for peace and jobs in Washington. There were many great orators present that day, many speakers with data and with attitudes, speakers venting their anger and attacking the then-current power structures. There is, however, one speech from that day that we remember most. Martin Luther King was not the most famous person to rise to the podium that day; what was important was that he had a vision that he could articulate and make accessible. He had a dream and he told people about it. He appealed not to our fear and anger, but to our hope and our faith. What our movement needs is for us to be active and

vocal dreamers. Friends, I, too, have a dream, and if you spend long enough within ear-shot, you're certain to hear about it. Let us all sing!

Thank you the incredible gift of your attention.

Copyright (c) 2002-2003. Stephen Travis Pope. All Rights for reproduction and distribution granted, provided that acknowledgment of authorship is maintained. Responses are invited to email stp@create.ucsb.edu; tel (805) 967-2621.