

The Choice Before Us

Somewhere tonight in Iraq, a small girl lies sleeping who in a few weeks may be a lump of scorched flesh buried under concrete.

On a basketball court somewhere in the United States a young man lands a jump shot, who in a few weeks may have no legs, or eyes, or have tumors already brooding in his brain from exposure to the depleted uranium of our own weapons.

A young boy who is healthy and vibrant today will be racked with cancer. A mother will hear her children crying for food and have nothing to give them but tainted water to quench their thirst. Land that is today rich and fertile will, a short time from now, be contaminated with radioactivity that lasts longer than all the years between ancient Sumer and Babylon and now.

And young men and women who in the innocence of their hearts volunteered to serve their country will be led to perpetrate unspeakable crimes that will haunt their nights and blight the rest of their lives. When they complain of strange ailments, the Veteran's Administration will admit no connection. And for years afterwards, as has happened since the first Gulf War, they will take their own lives in a steady stream of suicides. They will not be the sons and daughters of the men and women who sit in Congress or the White House. A disparate number of them will come from communities in our own land who suffer poverty, dispossession, discrimination.

And all of this will be done at the command of men who have never themselves faced combat or fought a war, who rob our schools and hospitals to pay for their own weapons of mass destruction, who promote an empire-building agenda of their own that will not provide the security they claim. For the sheer injustice of our attack on a country that has not attacked us will provoke such fear and hatred against us that all our bombs and missiles and cops and spies will not be able to keep us safe.

The media and the politicians tell us this war is inevitable, that we can't stop it, that our protests and petitions and pleas make no difference. They murmur a constant incantation of our powerlessness, lulling us into a nightmare sleep.

But we can still wake up. We can choose to walk out of the nightmare, and dream a different dream.

All it takes is for each one of us who cherishes the lives of children to refuse to be silent, to say no to war, to say yes to peace.

And to ask ourselves, how have we abandoned our country, our fate, into the hands of callous men who have no compunction about wasting lives? What spell has been cast that fogs our eyes and binds our hands? What lies have we believed? What power have

we let slip away?

Replace the nightmare with this dream: that in the moment when one world power has amassed the unchallenged military might to make its bid for global empire, its own people rise up and say, "No. That is not what we want to be. We don't want to rule the world over the broken bodies of children. We don't want blood on our hands. We want children who are sick to have the best possible care, in Iraq and in our own country.

We want schools and jobs and parks and hospitals and food for the hungry. We want to join hands with the people of the world, and strengthen the institutions that are slowly and painfully learning to solve conflicts without bloodshed, and teaching us to respect our differences. We know that peace must be built on justice, and we want peace."

Dream that we wake up, stand up, speak out, not in the thousands but the millions, joining with millions around the world. Dream that soldiers refuse their orders, dockworkers refuse to load ships, secretaries shut off their computers, workers close their factories, and even politicians find the courage to stand for what is right. And make the dream real. If you have spoken out before, now is the time to speak again, to make another phone call, write another letter, stand in another vigil. If you have marched before, march again and this time bring more of your friends and neighbors.

If you haven't marched, if you have been immersed in the demands of your own life, if you feel that your small voice makes no difference, now is the time to speak anyway, to interrupt your ordinary pursuits, to become the one small drop that just might turn the tide.

If you can get to New York or San Francisco on the weekend of February 15-16 for the big marches and rallies, come—because the numbers are vitally important.

If you can't, there will be marches and rallies and vigils to join all across the country. Find one, or call one of your own.

Be public. Be visible. Be the loud, uncomfortable conscience that has disappeared from the halls of power.

And believe that truth is stronger than lies, love trumps fear, and no cabal of power can contain the multitudes when we awaken and choose life.

-- *Starhawk*

February 5, 2003

The **New York March and Rally** is on February 15, in solidarity with marches in capitols all over the world, and is sponsored by United for Peace and Justice.

The **San Francisco March and Rally** is on February 16, and begins at Justin Hermann Plaza, at 11 AM, and marches to the Federal Building. To join with the Code Pink women's cluster and the Pagan Cluster, meet us at 10 AM at Montgomery and Market St.

For details and a list of planned actions around the country, check www.unitedforpeace.org (will open in a new browser window).

Please feel free to forward and reprint this as widely as possible.

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