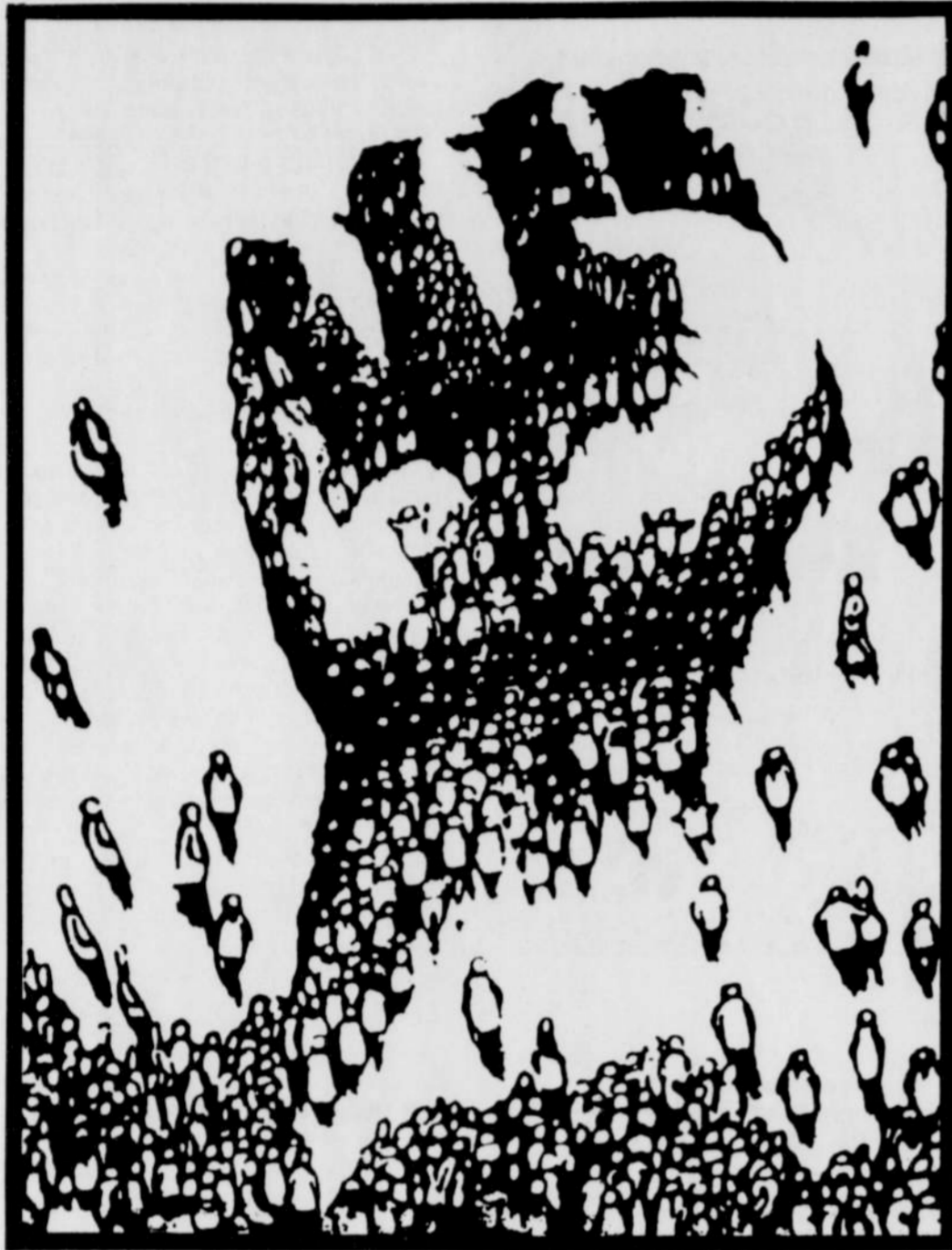


KEEPING THE PEACE



ARTIST UNKNOWN

BY PAUL LOEB & GEOV PARRISH

"If you want peace, work for justice."

~PAUL S

With millions marching worldwide, we hoped to avert Bush's war on Iraq. But given one of the most insular administrations in America's history, we failed. No matter how powerful our argument, and the unprecedented breadth and strength of our movement, Bush and his cohorts went ahead with a war they have wanted for years. So we must work now to lay the groundwork to prevent it from leading to wars on Syria, Iran, North Korea, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil — maybe even France. This means we will need those now surging into the movement who had hoped to prevent the war to stick around for the long haul and not melt away when times get hard.

During the first Gulf War, arguably more justified, the U.S. peace movement got kicked in the gut. Then as well, major protests surged through American and European cities, hoping to stop the war before it started. But once the war began, mainstream debate over the wisdom of war was quickly supplanted by the insistence that anything other than relentless cheerleading was disloyal to the troops — and to the country.

In previous fights against Contra aid and the nuclear arms race, polls said our fellow citizens were with us. But Americans overwhelmingly supported the first Gulf War — because it worked militarily, and because the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who died were faceless and anonymous. Those who continued speaking out for peace quickly felt marginalized, isolated and silenced. Some blamed their compatriots for not doing enough. Most quickly retreated into private life, many entering a political cocoon they would stay in for years. Either way, visible public opposition quickly faded.

So how do we encourage the newly engaged to continue? How do we keep on ourselves, and keep reaching beyond the core converted? History never fully repeats itself, a lesson the Bush administration seems to forget. But Bush has gone to war despite massive global opposition and the peace movement needs to be prepared for some unsettling possibilities.

Because the war has gone well militarily Americans are likely to rally behind Bush as their worst fears have so far

been averted. The mainstream media praises our President's heroic leadership and seems to largely avoid covering civilian deaths though thousands might be dead. Most Americans are hesitant to speak out, fearful of undermining the troops or too discouraged to think it matters. The administration implicitly brands those who challenge their policies as disloyal and irrelevant.

But the same casualties our media minimize are highly visible to the Islamic world. The "accidental" bombing death of an Al Jazeera reporter has further enflamed the Arab street. Whether through satellite image or word of mouth, Muslims worldwide are hearing of the dead and wounded, the fleeing refugees, the destruction of homes, power stations and sewage plants. Just as our conduct in the first Gulf War helped shift Osama bin Laden from an ally to a murderous foe, so attacking Iraq has ultimately created further enemies, in ways we can only hope we will never know.

Perhaps the results of this rage will be delayed. But an uglier immediate scenario is also possible — that the attack on Baghdad and crackdown on Palestinians in Israel will trigger counterattacks on American and allied targets throughout the world — including on U.S. soil. Forgotten in the Bush II administration's relentless propaganda campaign, equating Saddam Hussein and his purported weapons of mass destruction with terror and 9/11, is that many of the actual perpetrators of 9/11 are still out there — quite possibly including Osama bin Laden himself. And Islamic terror groups have been planning for response to the invasion of Iraq for at least as long as the Pentagon.

If terrorist bombs do go off in Chicago, Des Moines or Philadelphia, America will no longer simply be conducting an invisible war in a faraway land. If bombs here at home kill innocent American civilians most citizens are likely to feel overwhelmed with anger and fear. Just as was true after 9/11 they will hardly be receptive to the truth that America's own actions will have helped set those terrible events in motion — and that we as well have taken innocent lives again and again. It will be hard to resist the administration's permanent evisceration of due process, the Bill of Rights and other inconvenient nuisances. If unprepared, the peace movement risks being isolated and obliterated.

Having failed to persuade the Bush administration to not invade Iraq, the antiwar movement needs a Plan B. It needs a message that will play well after the war, even if terrorist counterattacks begin; it needs a plan for getting that message out to the public, despite all the media cheerleading; and it needs a strategy for not only retaining its current massive numbers, but expanding them to the point where we can reverse government policy. We need to take account of these possibilities now, in our message and approach, anticipating the public mood, so our actions still count.

In the face of such grim possibilities, we might begin by connecting the waves of new participants just beginning to speak out with communities of longtime activists. That sounds almost trivial but there is nothing more demoralizing than staying home in isolation watching Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld on TV. Even with supportive communities, keeping on will be difficult. But the more disconnected we are, the harder it will be. And if we're connected with enough sympathetic people, we can support each other, pass on alternative perspectives, and talk about all the issues that remain following Saddam Hussein's removal from the Baghdad palaces where we helped install and maintain him.

Community also lets us gather to mourn. We did this far too little during the first Gulf War, and suffered as a result. It is sometimes necessary to admit we feel angry and powerless. Then we can remember we still have the power to act, and

that our actions still matter even when things seem bleakest. Supportive community reminds us that whatever men like John Ashcroft may think, true patriotism means engagement, not silence.

This past December, a Seattle antiwar coalition called SNOW gathered 2,000 people from the city and suburbs at a local high school and divided them into neighborhood groups. The resulting 80 groups are now operating on their own with local facilitators and e-mail listservs. Some are conducting vigils and neighborhood marches, others door-to-door canvassing and handing out yard signs, others peace fairs, petition drives and potlucks. These efforts reach people who would never go near a downtown march.

We could build this infrastructure at every point we speak out. Our marches and rallies have grown in nearly every city in the country to create carnivals of homemade signs, still-walkers, puppets, belly-dancers, marching bands, grandmothers, ministers, punks, and all manner of ordinary citizens. But they have also missed opportunities. Speakers have focused, with reason, on how Bush has failed to make the case for a war that will make us less safe, not more. But they have talked little about what it means to work in an on-going way to address the root causes of these crises we now face. They have taken for granted the need to give people psychological bread for their journey.

Our marches and rallies have also done far too little to connect the tide of new participants to concrete networks that could support their involvement. Some of us are linked with a hundred different groups, juggling endless invitations to act. But most of America, including most participants in the huge recent marches, aren't connected in this fashion. Despite the growing involvement of religious and labor groups, most march as individuals, not through organized institutions. Except when local peace and justice efforts are most visible, those newly involved can easily miss them, particularly if they live, like most Americans, in neighborhoods outside the urban core which is the focus of so much visible alternative politics. When the propaganda barrage escalates into a full-scale blitz, those just beginning to act will find it particularly hard to resist isolation.

But peace movement participants don't have to be disconnected. We now have the technologies to keep people involved. Imagine if at every march, rally, or door-to-door campaign organizers put major volunteer energy into gathering names, e-mails and zip codes, then used the Seattle model to set up local meetings.

Organizers could at least do their best to ensure that no one left a major march without knowing about the key local websites that could allow them to plug in and get connected. Integrating the flood of new participants would take serious volunteer energy, but if we can link even a fraction of those just coming in to each other and to existing communities of concern, far more will persist when the going gets tough. That is also an argument for continuing our coordinated local protests, in ways that can keep reaching new communities. Encouraging this kind of connection should be as high a priority as getting people to march to begin with.

We need to remind ourselves and our fellow citizens that winning the war doesn't change the fact it is a betrayal of law and of justice, and an incitement to bitterness and terror. Which is why, for all the need to build community, we also need visions sufficiently compelling to help participants new and old keep going. We need to raise these visions to all just beginning to raise their concerns, including those who backed Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, served in other wars, or even consider themselves honorable Republicans.

Given how continually Bush plays the fear card, we might acknowledge that Americans have some reasons for fear. And then make clear that reckless zealotry and a willingness to make entire populations expendable does nothing to bring real security. That is part of why so many major military figures — like retired Generals Anthony Zinni, Wesley Clark and even Norman Schwarzkopf — have expressed strong reservations about the war in Iraq.

Think of Osama bin Laden's original vision. His Al Qaeda militants justified their anti-American jihad on three grounds: American military desecration of the Islamic holy land of Saudi Arabia; American support for Israel's brutal military occupation of Palestine; and (despite Al Qaeda's loathing for Saddam Hussein himself) the massive suffering of ordinary Iraqis during the Gulf War and the medieval siege of Iraq, punctuated by occasional bombings, that America led up until its recent invasion.

From every indication, Osama bin Laden hoped 9/11 would provoke the United States into perpetrating such atrocities against Muslims to inspire a global Islamic holy war against the Western oppressors. Or at least that it would trigger a regional jihad bringing militant Islam to power in the Middle East. After some initial bows to multilateral restraint, the Bush administration has complied more fully than bin Laden could ever have dreamed. It has given a blank check to unprecedented levels of Israeli brutality; it has openly plotted for a widespread permanent military presence in the Middle East; and it has now accomplished its objective of invading Iraq to remove

**Old Town
Framing Co.**



1287 COMMERCIAL ST.
ASTORIA 325-5221



VAN DUSEN BEVERAGES

ASTORIA, OREGON 325-2362

*OH NO!! Mary and Evan are
Kneedeep in Books!*

Same great books, same great location!
1052 commercial, Astoria
503-325-9722