

Movements

From Anti-war to Democracy

by Mike Ferner

In his provocative bestseller, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Christopher Hedges explored how individual and national psyches are emotionally invested in war. Even the peace movement would do well to mark his point about the emotional power of war. Put another way, could it be that because war's suffering is so horrible, opposing it gives activists' lives a heightened sense of purpose?

If so, what does that mean for the anti-war movement when our troops finally come home and at least US casualties stop? Beyond that, how do we do more than just react the next time Empire demands war? More fundamentally, will the peace movement and its sister organizations get better at not just opposing war and other social ills, but learn how to strip corporations of their ability to turn what's supposed to be our own government into our greatest obstacle?

Without looking at those kinds of questions we will be no more successful than previous efforts like the safe energy movement of the 1970's which greatly curtailed nuclear plant construction but was unable to usher in sustainable policies, let alone establish citizen authority over energy industries; or the US labor movement which urges its members to oppose the war by writing Congress instead of laying down their tools or shutting down munitions transport as in some other countries.

Why such limited horizons? Consider that while activists were trying to keep Armour Co. from selling rotten meat (Pure Food and Drug Act); or Standard Oil Co. from spewing quite so much poison (National Environmental Policy Act); or members of the National Association of Manufacturers from killing and maiming workers on the job (Occupational Safety and Health Act), attorneys for corporations and business associations were finding ways to use the Constitution for their clients and against us.

They convinced their fellow elites on the Supreme Court to grant the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection to corporate "persons;" then Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches; then First Amendment protections so their clients could tell us what kind of energy policy we need, what kind of warnings to put on dairy products; and how to vote on ballot issues.

If we're serious about not just stopping this war, but stripping corporations of their usurped privileges, dismantling their power to govern, and ending their ability to direct our hard-earned wealth



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into butchery and empire, we need to learn the histories and ask the questions that will point to something more successful.

If we are content to be an anti-war movement – meaning the Empire defines our existence and purpose—then when war drums roll next we will reassemble from a hundred different fronts, throw ourselves into the fray, and work against the government's well-oiled killing machine until we are exhausted. When do we ask if we want to be more than a brief parade of colorful banners and heartfelt slogans passing an empty White House?

Cindy Sheehan poignantly writes, "I knew that our leaders were bought and paid for employees of the war machine, and yet, when Casey came of age, he put on the uniform and marched off to another senseless war to bring his employers that rich reward of money and power. The warning for American mothers and fathers is this: the war machine will get your children, if not now, then your grandchildren. It is a hard and steep price to pay for the certain knowledge that the people in power think of us, not as their employers and electorate whom they swear to serve, but as their tools to be used as cannon fodder whenever the impulse strikes them."

If we want Cindy's words to mean something we have to learn how to transform the anti-war movement into a democracy movement. Our reward will come when we are finally able to move beyond opposing one war after another to build the kind of peaceful, just world we deserve...and the planet is waiting for us to create.

Mike Ferner works with the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. His book, Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq is just out.