

Consider! democracy

Why I'm a Proud Democrat

by Patricia S. T. Edmisten

When I was a little girl, I remember wearing an "I Like Ike" button. My dad, an Okinawa veteran, voted Republican then, and I dutifully supported him. Years later, as a Peace Corps volunteer in Peru, I developed my own political values, even though I still respected my father's positions. As a health worker in a Peruvian slum, I learned that, "but for the grace of God there go I," a humility borne from the realization that even when we claim to have pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps, there are multiple, intangible ways in which we've been boosted by others-- by family, friends, church, or just by the pure chance of having been born in the United States. I learned that the suffering of others diminishes me as a human being, the idea captured in John Donne's words, "no man is an island entire of itself." I learned that one's financial assets are as much due to domestic and international systems and inherited family values and wealth as much as to one's own merit. As a result of the religious values with which I was raised, and my years abroad, I believe that our obligations to, and responsibilities for one another, increase as our personal resources expand.

The word "God" is the Old English stem for the word "good." I believe that citizens, especially those who claim belief in God, must pursue the "common good," a good that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable among us. We choose our political parties because of the match between the good we want and the good these parties represent. When our neighbors here or in another country are elevated, our stations rise also. Putting personal or corporate gain first, at the expense of the most vulnerable, however, will ultimately threaten our own security. Of course we need a well-funded, well-prepared military, but we could ask if domestic security is best achieved through military force or by citizens who are optimistic about their personal and economic futures, conditions that stem from employment opportunities, decent wages, adequate medical care, and trust and confidence that their leaders tell the truth and represent their concerns.

My years in Peru, Brazil, and my research in Nicaragua, where one-party systems allied with wealthy oligarchies dominated politics, taught me that, for a society to advance, in addition to pursuing the common good, it must also have a viable multi-party system. The dialog and debate necessary for a democracy to flourish suffer when there's only one voice. With only one party representing Escambia voters at the State and national levels, our area needs alternative voices. We need democrats, greens, and libertarians to step forward and be counted.

Democrats envision a respected elderly population, with adequate health care and access to prescriptions; environmental policies that ensure clean water and air; public education that serves with excellence children from all economic backgrounds; the retention and development of jobs in this country; adequate financial and medical conditions for our veterans; protection of religion from government intrusion, and the guarantee of Civil Rights, including the protection of citizens from unwarranted government invasion.

Militarily and economically, we are the strongest country on the planet. We have achieved that

stature by dint of hard work, the vision of our ancestors, our geographical position, our public educational system, and our demographic diversity. A country so blessed has enormous responsibilities, especially in the area of peacemaking and peacekeeping. Our international policies, however, reflect an arrogant approach that fails to see that we're no longer isolated and protected by two oceans, the Caribbean Sea, and our neighbors to our north and south. We lack respect for other nations, and we twist their arms with promises of aid till they fall in line. We went into Iraq with no understanding of the political, economic, religious, cultural, and social ramifications, believing we would soon whip a complex country (and the region) into the shape we wanted-- hegemony, control over the oil, and less dependence on Saudi Arabia, which, along with El Quaeda, were the real culprits in 9/11, not Saddam Hussein, despite the continuing distortions of President Bush and his aides. Having done the damage, we are responsible for the clean-up and fall-out for which future generations will pay. If our legislators had known the truth and the cost, they would have been less sanguine about relinquishing their war powers to Mr. Bush.

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VIEWPOINT

There is a place for dissent in the time of war



PATRICIA S.T. EDMISTEN

I'm writing this for all those who have seen, heard of, or wondered about the Patriots for Peace, who for 21 Fridays stood in a silent circle around the Martin Luther King Plaza in downtown Pensacola, carrying signs that read, "War is not the answer." Many of you honked your horns, waved and gave us thumbs-up. Thank you.

In a military town, it isn't easy to dissent from policies that have taken us to war. One driver shouted, "Shove it up your a--!" Another, not realizing that many of us used our lunch hour to protest, yelled, "Get a job!" One man spat in our direction. A woman held up traffic to give us a brief lecture on the evils of the United Nations. Spring breakers, drunk on beer, pounded on their car doors and screamed, "We want war!" One man approached us and said, "I hate you!" An officer in a crisp ironed military uniform told us we were traitors.

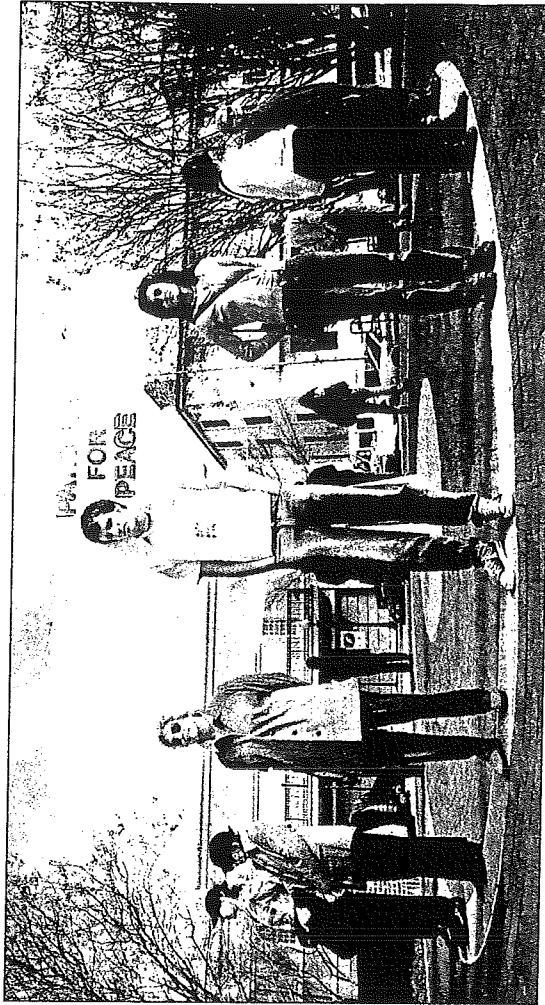
They should know the people at whom they leveled insults. We are veterans from the first Gulf War, Vietnam and Korea. We are clergy, teachers, academicians, homemakers, scientists, students, engineers and office workers. We represent diverse religious backgrounds. Although some of us were originally strangers to one another, we are now bound by our opposition to an administration that has manipulated the public to generate support for a war that has killed our precious troops and innocent Iraqi civilians, among them children.

The freedom to dissent is universal, inalienable and not the gift of governments. Dictatorships are evil, and the people dictators rule frequently suffer unimaginable horrors. But our country has a long history of supporting ruthless dictators — as long as they didn't undermine our interests.

About one man

Although many Iraqis are now celebrating, most Arabs view our aggression as a war against Islam. I'm reminded of a song my husband learned growing up in the mountains of North Carolina: "Run, get the ax; there's a hair on baby's chin." Wasn't this all about one man and his weapons?

I'm no apologist for dictators. I wrote about the evils of the Somoza regime in my book, "Nicaragua Divided: La Prensa and the Chamorro Legacy," and I would have been among the first to join the movement against Saddam had it not involved war. If our goal was to liberate the Iraqi people, then we should have been forthcoming. We could have recognized our historical blindness toward dictators



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Members of Pensacola Patriots for Peace put on a silent protest in January against going to war with Iraq.

NEXT SUNDAY: 'Support Our Troops' rally organizer Sam Mullins will respond in a Viewpoint.

2000 report, sponsored by The Project for the New American Century, chaired by William Kristol, editor of the Weekly Standard, called for pre-emptive attacks and the disregard of international opinion. It recommended massive expenditures to enforce the Pax Americana, the development of small nuclear warheads, and identified Iran, Iraq and North Korea as likely targets well before President Bush included them in his "axis of evil."

How will the U.S. preserve the new American Peace? Through "constabulary duties." This police work will "demand American political leadership rather than that of the United Nations." The 2000 report gave credit to a 1992 Defense Department document, written by then-defense Under Secretary for Foreign Policy Paul Wolfowitz. When leaked, that draft caused such a fierce reaction that it was rejected by the first President Bush. Wolfowitz is now deputy defense secretary. Vice President Richard Cheney was defense secretary in 1992.

Yale professor Donald Kagan, who served as co-chairman of The Project, said that it's highly probable we'll establish permanent military bases in Iraq: "When

we have economic problems, it's been caused by disruptions in our oil supply. If we have a force in Iraq, there will be no disruption in oil supplies."

We have arrogantly waged war against a land that is thousands of years old, the birthplace of Abraham, ancient Mesopotamia. Although we've nearly won the battle, we may well lose the peace. It will take years to know the real cost — the destabilization in the Middle East; yet-to-come reprisals at home; the billions wasted that could have been used at home to bring insurance to the uninsured, preschool to poor children, decent benefits to veterans, and relief to a suffering world, including Afghanistan. We have ruined international alliances and neglected the Americas to our south that simmer politically and suffer socially and economically, some already in the throes of civil war.

Syria next?

Although the majority of U.S. citizens supported the war, the majority of mainstream religious bodies condemned it. President Bush, a Methodist whose own governing body denounced the war, also dismissed the wisdom of Pope John Paul II, who sent his personal envoy to Washington to avert war. Although President Bush believes that God has led him to this juncture, "Humility," according to

Newsweek writer Kenneth Woodward, "not bravado, is the universal posture of anyone who dares to plumb the mind of God and seek to do his will."

Many of our detractors believed that, to show support for our troops, we should have stopped our silent vigils once war began. The term non sequitur is Latin and describes a conclusion that does not logically follow a premise. If we opposed this war from the start, why would we support it once we were bombing Iraq, losing our own valiant men and women, killing Iraqi soldiers who were following orders, and killing civilians to get one man and his weapons?

Most of us are not pacifists; we recognize the place of force, especially as required in self-defense, but the president and his advisors never made an honest case for this war.

Now, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is pointing his finger at Syria, and the 21,000-pound MOAB, offensively nicknamed "the Mother Of All Bombs," having been tested here, and in need of field testing, is on its way to the Persian Gulf. It may not be long before you again see us giving witness to our dissent.

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