ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

The Vigil II
By John N. Cooper
Jan 16, 2005, 07:00

At 25 F, it was a still, bright, cold January noon outside the county courthouse where we stood that Saturday, as we had so many before, in protest of our country's, our government's, policies, foreign and domestic. On a stick I carried a two-sided sign that I rotated to and fro: 'Out of Iraq Now, Bring the Troops Home'; and '200,000 Iraqi civilian deaths! Whose moral values are these?' Around my neck hung another: 'We don't need to fight a war for Oil; Solar is Free!'

Half-an-hour into the hour-long vigil, we were approached by young woman and her brother, each in t-shirts bearing the legend, USMC; his was worn over a long sleeved-shirt but she was bear-armed in the cold. I'd noticed her across the street some minutes before, sprinting along the sidewalk. Although technically a vigil is supposed to be silent, several of us, bundled to the hilt, commented on her fortitude. She said with a hint of pride, she would be much more uncomfortable before her training was done, a year-and-one-half further on.

Then she asked: "So what are you protesting about what we're doing in Iraq?"

"The killing!"

She nodded, "Our boys over there are giving their lives for your freedom!"

"Nonsense! None of them GIVE their lives! Theirs are TAKEN from them, involuntarily! And certainly not in defense of our freedom! Our freedom is not under attack except by a corrupt and dishonest administration here at home! But others' freedom is surely diminished by our being there!"

She paused, as if to think, then acknowledged: "Politics has always been corrupt!"

"It needn't be that way!"

"But it is!"

She was obviously thoughtful. "We're doing good over there!", she asserted.

"How?"

"We're bringing them democracy!"

"Whether they want it or not?"
"The Iraqis are happy we're there!"

"That's why you're holed-up behind barricades and fortifications, and travel in armed convoys?"

"You are too influenced by the media who want the story told their way!", she insisted.

"How do you know? Have you been there?"

"No! But I will be when my flight training is done in a year and one-half. I have friends over there!"

"So have we! You think we'll still be there then?"

"For sure!"

"It sounds to me as though you are as surely influenced by biased information sources as you think we are!"

Again that thoughtful pause.

"What do you fly?", I asked.

"For now, trainers!"

"What would you like to?"

"Helicopters! Apaches!"

Such enthusiasm, such commitment, such naivete' in such a mission! What a waste, I thought, were something untoward to happen to her as has now to ten thousand or more of her fellows, male and female, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in that mercilessly beleaguered, wretched land. How is it there must be first destruction for us to become constructive? Is there no viable, better alternative?

"I have to go now!", she said.

"God speed!", said one of us. "Be safe!", called another.

"Thank you!", she said, leaving as abruptly as she had come. Moments later she sprinted past across the street, a lonely bare-armed symbol, solitary in the waning sun.

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