Support Our Troops

There’s a group of victims caught up in the war with Iraq who don’t get much mention in pacifist media. This is probably because they get a lot of it in the mainstream news. They are, of course, members of the United States military. It’s hard to think of U.S. soldiers as victims. They do, after all, have vast advantages over the more sympathetic victims of the war, Iraqi civilians and soldiers. They get all sorts of praise from the mainstream media; their mothers send them (as reported on last Thursday’s NBC Nightly News) more care packages in a week than most mere college students get in a semester; they have the affirmation, goodwill, and prayers of every patriotic American. But maybe this isn’t what they really need.

In fact American soldiers are, from a certain perspective, victims of the same sort as the Iraqis they’ve been sent to kill. Granted, they’ve done what looks absurd and irresponsible to a pacifist: they’ve decided to obey the orders of the military hierarchy without question. But their fundamental assumption is that the hierarchy is the true measure of their responsibility; that their obedience is what they’ve been sent there to do. Yes, the decision to work for the army is based on assumptions that we know to be wrong: those who make bad policy (W. and company) and those who carry it out. Yes, the decision to work for the army is based on assumptions that we know to be wrong: that the government can be trusted to decide when war is really necessary, that a flag and a nation are worth killing for, that violence can bring about peace. These tenets are considered fact by the majority of the world around us. Is a person any less a victim if he is deceived by his victims? Is it their fault if, once that trust was given, it was betrayed?

It’s critical that, as pacifists, we differentiate between the people who make bad policy (W. and company) and those who carry it out. Yes, the decision to work for the army is based on assumptions that we know to be wrong: that the government can be trusted to decide when war is really necessary, that a flag and a nation are worth killing for, that violence can bring about peace. These tenets are considered fact by the majority of the world around us. Is a person any less a victim if he is deceived by his victimizers?

The people whose trust has been betrayed are not at fault for the betrayal. We pacifists must not condemn those who are even now dying for a trust the Bush Administration has abused. Instead, we should support those who are even now dying for a trust the Bush Administration has abused. Instead, we should support those who are even now dying for a trust the Bush Administration has abused.

Listen to the Silent Minority

By Rachel Swartzendruber

I am worried about the silent minority. This silent minority is too often silent. Ongoing conflicts such as those surrounding EMU’s College Night, the statement issued by the Board of Trustees, and mostly recently the U.S. war on Iraq have brought these problems to the forefront. Concerning College Night, we heard most from those who didn’t want any military recruitment on EMU’s campus. They expressed their reasons in great detail, well argued. The (seeming) minority party in our discussion, stayed silent.

During the formation of the student petition, in which 200 students expressed their disapproval of the Board’s statement, we heard nothing from the other 800 students in the student body. While a very small group of faculty, staff, and students discussed their support for the statement, the majority remained silent. Lately, our campus has been riddled with e-mails about peace, love and compassion towards the Iraqi people. Bulletin boards, protests, vigils, and rallies have been organized. Our e-mail was riddled with messages about peace campaigns and news from Iraq. How often do we listen to those who support President Bush?

In all three cases, it is assumed that the student, faculty, and staff population adhere to the beliefs presented by EMU. Instead of ensuring complete and total education of the Mennonite beliefs, it is simply understood that by being a part of the university one completely understands these beliefs. Statements are issued, debates are held, but inevitably attendance is poor, because the attendees are the people who organized the event in the first place. I’m certainly not advocating for the absence of protest. I don’t know how I feel about College Night, but I did sign the student petition and have always advocated the methods of pacifism. I am advocating, however, an open forum where education is held high and knowledge is valued.

It disturbs me that a member of the silent minority, such as a non-pacifist, may feel persecuted on the EMU campus. One such student recently commented (to me), “I’m not going to say anything pro-war. I’d get yelled at all over campus. No way.” In the same manner as we advocate for a safe place for the radical dissent, should we not also create such a place for the other end of the spectrum?

Every person deserves to have a voice, whether it is major- ity or minority. Both sides in a conflict need to understand the position of the other. Whether it is ignorance of each one’s beliefs, fear of the unknown, or a misunderstanding, I would challenge the faculty, staff, and especially the students of EMU to make an effort to engage in constructive, open, and applicable dialogue. Our university prides itself on allowing people to converse and “actively seek truth.” Let us create an environment in which this is possible.

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The Iraqi Civilian Body Count

min max
569 725