

STUDENT PEACE PROJECT

An Appeal for a Student Movement

Today we sit in classrooms in our universities while our friends, the kids we grew up with, the kids we played football with, the kids we stole our first beers with, are halfway around the world, fighting every day, and dying every day for a war we all know was a mistake.

Today, we know that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, there never were; and today we know there is no link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, and there never was; and today we know that over 1,000 of those kids we went to school with are dead because of those lies.

We know that they are dead, but can we really explain why they are the ones who went, they are the ones who died, and not us? President Bush and other military officials repeatedly refer to our armed services as an all-volunteer army, citing the fact that the selective service system is not currently in action. Conscriptation notices or not, the assertion that there is no draft in this war on the Iraqi people is an even more vile lie than the assertion that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

In low-income high schools across the country, many students talk to more military recruiters than college recruiters. This is a situation that the military is working to encourage, spending \$2 Billion each year recruiting young people in low-income high schools. At the same time, military recruiter's jobs are made easier by the current economy. With rapid job loss and wage depression, it often seems as if Uncle Sam is the only employer hiring.

While guidance counselors and military recruiters are pushing the military as the best, or only, career option for a growing percentage of high school graduates, college tuitions are consistently rising, making a real college education less and less of a possibility for more and more young people. Poor and even middle class young people are faced with the option of plunging into hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt or committing to just a few years to military service.

As we sleep in our dorm rooms, our friends in the military will tell us that we can never comprehend what war is really like; they are right. It is impossible for most of us to imagine what it would be like to go to sleep, not knowing if we will wake up in the morning. It is impossible for most of us to understand what it is like to watch out for suicide bombers and rocket propelled grenades twenty-four hours a day, and it is impossible for most of us to imagine being asked to kill another human being. The sheer inability for any human to fully absorb the true brutality of war without experiencing its horrors does not, however, preclude us, as civilians, from opposing this disaster.

Our friends in the military are being put in horrible situations, being asked to do horrible things. Each day they spend in war they, by virtue of living in a world where the option is to either kill or be killed, lose a bit of what it is that makes us human. Spending so much time in that living hell, we cannot be surprised to hear reports on the evening news of marines shooting unarmed prisoners and soldiers firing on civilians. These soldiers are not distant monsters or cold-blooded killers; when they left they were our high school football heroes, college students, and t-ball coaches. When they come home they are our history teachers and yes, university students.

The people who are being asked to kill or be killed half a world away are really no different than we are. Being honest with ourselves, we all must admit that today, the only reason that we sit in university classrooms while our friends die in Iraq, is we were lucky: We were lucky enough to be wealthy enough to be able to afford a university level education, or we were lucky enough to earn the one of the few scholarships that exist allowing a veritable handful of talented young people to dodge the economic draft, or we were lucky enough to see through the empty promise of a "free" college education and avoid the military by taking out student loans and plunging into as much as \$200,000 of debt for the simple privilege of earning a university level diploma.

This occupation in Iraq is one of the biggest disasters in American history. With over 1,000 of our old neighborhood friends and 100 times as many Iraqi fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters dead there is no end in sight. Historically, students have been a catalyst for social and political change, from the French revolution, to opposition to the war in Vietnam in the 60's and 70's, from demanding that our universities divest from South Africa during apartheid to working with the Global Justice Movement to demand fair trade coffee in our dining halls. Today, opposition to this brutal occupation is growing by the hour on campuses across the country. We who rallied, marched, and walked out of classes to voice our opposition to the initial invasion of Iraq must shout even louder to end this occupation.

Today, when we fight to end this war, we are not fighting just for the freedom of the Iraqi people, the future of the world, or the future of this country that we are uneasily inheriting; we are fighting for our friends serving in the military all over the world, for our little brothers and sisters who are going to talk to more military recruiters than college recruiters before they are even old enough to vote. We are fighting for our lives.