

NOT IN OUR NAME

Women Oppose War Machismo

Women have always been at the forefront not only of peace movements, but also of campaigns to highlight war-time atrocities, publicize incidents of rape, organize movements on the 'disappeared' and to take the lead in humanitarian efforts in a post-conflict situation. It has often been noted that women oppose war, as they are the victims – losing their family members, becoming widows and single parents and forced by the circumstances of war into leaving their homes. They form the vast majority of 'displaced persons.' Women in wartime also undergo numerous types of sexual and other harassments. But women are also forced by war to assume leadership and responsibilities which have been placed upon them by events.

Women oppose war because they are enlightened members of civil society who understand the havoc that can be caused by macho-aggression and militaristic war-mongering conducted by men – irrespective of the consequences on the lives of people. The present war in Iraq is an example of such a worst-case scenario. The New York Times noted recently that there are two superpowers in the world – the USA and world public opinion. Certainly there is a non-stop expression of public anger.

Women all around the world have spoken out against the ghastly events of the past weeks, not because they are women and soft-hearted, but because they are responsible citizens who can see the war for what it is – an illegal invasion of a sovereign country, going against the UN Charter and against the tide of world opinion, endangering world peace, and probably begetting more religious fundamentalism and terrorism.

Global Protest

In the world-wide demonstrations against the war, women have figured prominently. Today, thanks to the internet and e-mail there is immediate communication and contact between women's groups opposed to war. Perhaps the most important peace demonstrations have been in the countries euphemistically called the 'allies' – the USA, UK and Australia – where women are in the forefront of the 'Not-in-our-Name' campaign. In Britain women have led the protests at the R.A.F. airbases from which the U.S. planes set off to bomb Iraq. One such recent demonstration in Britain has been in Fairford where US troops stormed the peace camp and ripped the protestors' banners off the fence. Even before the war, women were active in protesting the Bush-Blair policies at mass rallies held around the world. In the USA, many prominent feminist leaders and authors have opposed the war, among them Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan, Alice Walker, Angela Davis and bell hooks. Last weekend massive rallies were held in New York

and other cities. The banners from the New York rally included "Thou Shalt Not Kill Children," "Almost 50% of Iraq's population is under 15 years old," and "How did our Oil get under their Sand?"

Celebrities Against War

In the film, theatre and music worlds of the USA opposition to war has been openly expressed. Many celebrities have joined the peace marchers. Some film stars kept away from the recent Oscars awards, while others who participated protested the war by wearing peace brooches of the Picasso dove, and by making anti-war acceptance speeches. Among singers, the famous award-winning group the Dixie Chicks also bravely spoke out – one of them saying she was ashamed that George Bush was from her home state of Texas.

Michael Moore, author of the best-seller *Stupid White Men* and winner of an Academy award this year for his anti-gun documentary *Batting Against Columbine*, made an anti-war statement at the Oscars. Also in a letter to George Bush he stated: "The Pope has said this war is wrong, that it is a Sin. The Pope! But even worse, the Dixie Chicks have now come out against you! How bad does it have to get before you realize that you are an army of one in this war?" In his letter Moore also wrote that: "Of the 535 members of Congress, only one (Sen. Johnson of South Dakota) has an enlisted son or daughter in the armed forces! If you really want to stand up for America, please send your twin daughters over to Kuwait right now and let them don their chemical warfare suits. And let's see every member of Congress with a child of military age also sacrifice their kids for this war effort."

South Asian Women Protest

In Sri Lanka over 15 women's organizations have joined to strongly condemn the war as illegal and to express concern for the people of Iraq. The protest is endorsed by the leading women's organizations – Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR), Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC), the Women's NGO Forum, Women and Media, Voice of Women, Kantha Shakti, the Women's Development Foundation (Kurunegala) and the Women's Development Centre (Kandy).

Similarly women's groups in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have denounced the war and are participating in street demonstrations protesting the holocaust being inflicted on the Iraqi people. Last Sunday, masses of women joined the protest in Calcutta on the war.

Picasso's Guernica

The e-mails from around the world are flooding in. One particularly revealing one is the following:
"The reproduction of Picasso's famous anti-war mural, Guernica, hanging at the entrance to the United Nations Security Council... has been censored. Considered to be Modern Art's greatest statement against the horrors of war, officials at the U.N. had the mural covered with a curtain so as to prevent embarrassment for United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, as he gave a speech that advocated the bombing and invasion of Iraq."
As Maureen Dowd, in the New York Times, wrote:

"Mr. Powell can't very well seduce the world into bombing Iraq surrounded on camera by shrieking and mutilated women, men, children, bulls and horses."

Well said Maureen Dowd and all the other women dissidents who have opposed the war and whose voices are mounting in protest.

"So what did you do during the Iraq war, mummy?" should be our banner (in imitation of the famous line on the First World War which said "What did you in the war, daddy?") The answer this time is "We got on to the streets and protested, and protested in many other ways too!" ■

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THE USE OF FORCE IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

As military operations in Iraq wind down and the dust settles on bombed out Baghdad, the international community has to take stock of not only the destruction in Iraq but also ascertain whether coalition action has undermined the status and legitimacy of international law and the United Nations. It cannot be denied that the coalition's use of force in Iraq has put in question the status of the United Nations and the legitimacy and force of the international legal framework that has been in existence since post World War II. U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell in his address to the UN Security Council on 5th February 2003 warned that the UN placed itself in danger of becoming irrelevant if it allowed Iraq to "continue to defy its will without responding effectively and immediately". Paradoxically, it appears that it is the "effective and immediate" use of force by coalition forces that has placed the UN in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter prohibits the use of force. There are however two exceptions- use of force for individual or collective self-defence (article 51) or for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security (Chapter VII). Iraq evidently does not fall into either category, as neither the United States nor the United Kingdom or any other state was attacked by Iraq. It should however be noted that the definition of self-defence has evolved over the years to include the right to use force when an attack is "imminent". This is said to be justifiable when the need for action is "instant, overwhelming and leaving no choice of means and no moment of deliberation". Once again however, it clearly is inapplicable in the case of Iraq. It is important to note that even Article 51, which allows for the use of force in self-defence, does so only until "the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security". This clearly suggests that the use of force is not justified if there is time to bring the matter to the attention of the Security Council, which was so in the case of Iraq. In addition, all members of the United Nations are bound to exhaust all possible means set out in Article 33 of the UN Charter to resolve a conflict, which was not done in the present case.

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