



January 27, 2007, Speech at Des Moines Peace Rally

by Frank Cordaro

It's an honor to be here at the HyVee Center, and an honor to speak to you about peace and seeking a peaceful world. I am a member of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community. We've been in Des Moines more than 30 years. We are a "radical lay movement." Yes that is what I said, a "radical lay movement." We were birthed in the 1930s by our founders Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. We see our world from the bottom up, liberation theology in practice, from a first world setting. It is from this perspective, from the bottom up, that we exercise our faith and belief in the nonviolent Jesus. We are pacifists--militant "in your face" pacifists!

I wondered why a guy like me was asked to talk to you today. In part, I believe it's because I am an old guy, been around a long time - trying to be a peacemaker for a long time, too. The first time I got busted was at the Pentagon, in August of 1977, for a Blood Spilling witness. I spent 30 days in jail for that effort. In total I've done close to five years of jail and prison time for acts of civil disobedience for the cause of Peace. So being old sometimes brings a bit of wisdom and a different perspective.

Today, I brought this cross and an oil can with me. I first used these props during the First Gulf War. Its meaning is clear. Don't be fooled. This war in Iraq is all about oil, and to get it, we are willing to crucify Christ over and over again.

Talking about perspectives... Gulf War No. One was the first time Saddam strayed off his US Global Reservation.

Off a reservation you ask? Yes, we have created many tyrants, dictators and human rights violators. They do our bidding, our dirty work and as long as they do as they are told,

they are rewarded. Did you know Saddam was our man for years? The CIA bank rolled him during the 1960s. And when he used WMDs during his war with Iran, the USA did not say a word about it. We actually helped him acquire the chemical weapons he used on the Kurds and Iranians in the 80s in his war with Iran. Ultimately, however, like Noriega before him, he ran afoul of USA interests with the invasion of Kuwait in the 90s which led to the first Gulf War.

In Gulf War Number One, George Bush One, a much smarter man than George Bush Two, got the whole world on his side, went to war and kicked Saddam out of Kuwait. It was a just cause, but not a just war. Win a war, and Americans rarely look to see how it was won.

Did you know that fewer than 5,000 Kuwaitis were killed when Saddam invaded their country? Don't get me wrong, this was a criminal act. I in no way intend to condone or bless Saddam's takeover of Kuwait.

Yet, in order to dislodge Saddam from Kuwait, the US killed as many as 200,000 Iraqis; thousands of them shot in the back as they were retreating. The name Timothy McVeigh comes to mind. Do you know the connection? He was a Gulf War One Vet. His job in the war was burying retreating Iraqis, dead or alive, under a giant earth moving vehicle, especially made for the military. And we all know what he did in Oklahoma City. Fewer than 200 Americans were killed in that war. With a kill ratio of 1,000 to one, the Roman Empire would have been envious.

During that same war, we executed a bombing campaign on the cities of Iraq in which we destroyed their water facilities, their electrical plants and their entire civilian infrastructure - roads, bridges and transportation. It was these US War Crimes that set up the humanitarian crises which followed that war.

Once we had Saddam pinned down in Baghdad, easy pickings, we stopped. Like I said, George Bush #One was much smarter than George Bush #Two. The USA told the Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north

to rebel, hoping they would finish Saddam off for us. However, Saddam brutally put the rebellion down, killing tens of thousands of Kurds and Shiites. After the killing was done, the USA established the no-fly zones and put in place the infamous sanctions which led to the humanitarian crises I just mentioned.

Five years into the sanctions the UN estimated that over a million Iraqis had died from the effects, half of them children under five years old. When asked if the deaths of so many innocent children were worth the sanctions, Madeline Albright, the then US Secretary of State told a T.V. interviewer, "Yes, yes it was worth the sacrifice."

One has to wonder for whom Madeline Albright was talking when she acknowledged that the deaths of half a million Iraqi children were "worth the sacrifice." It certainly was not worth it to the Iraqi families who lost their children. And the sanctions had no visible effect on Saddam. Early into the sanctions it was obvious, even to our own CIA, that they only strengthen Saddam's position in Iraq. And even with this awful history, the low point of USA criminal behavior in Iraq was still to come.

Then 9/11 happened. You know the story. George Bush Two took his eye off the hunt for Bin Laden, another renegade USA-made tyrant and killer. Bush Two told us that Saddam had WMDs and that Saddam had a hand in the 9/11 attacks. And despite the entire world's opposition, we invaded Iraq, took out Saddam and four years later we are in this quagmire.

Let's be clear, friends. This war was not a mistake. This war was not mismanaged. This war from the start was "immoral, unjust and illegal!" And these are not my words. These were the words of Pope John Paul II, delivered directly to George Bush one week before the war started.

AND FRIENDS, DON'T BE FOOLED BY THESE POLITICIANS COMING TO IOWA IN THE NEXT YEAR.

John Kerry was no peace candidate. In 2004, he was not against the war. He just believed

he could fight the same war better than George.

The problems we face as a nation today were created by a bi-partisan consensus of both the Democrats and the Republicans. The Nuclear Arms race, the Cold War, where millions of 3rd World Peoples were killed in surrogate wars, the Vietnam War, all of these were bi-partisan efforts. Indeed, the 40 years of dirty wars in Latin American, where the USA backed, trained and kept in power "Saddam look-a-like" dictators, human rights violators, butchers and murderers, was sustained by bi-partisan majorities. Does the name School of Americans ring a bell?

The USA position today, as the singular World Empire with military bases in more than 100 countries and a military budget equal to the combined military budgets of all other countries in the world, is the product of a bi-partisan consensus.

AND, DON'T BE FOOLED ABOUT VOTING, EITHER.

Even if we had fair and open elections, where every vote really counted and money did not buy our elections (which is not the case), voting is nothing more than you putting your ante in the "poker game" of being a responsible citizen. And just like in the game of poker, your "ante," your vote, is never enough to win. You've got to play the cards you're dealt. And to win, you have to put in more than an ante; you have to place a bet to win the pot in electoral politics in American.

As good as my friend and neighbor Ed Fallon is, he and other politicians like him will only be as good as we push them to be. Simply getting them elected will never be enough. They will need people like us in front of them, pushing them all they way to peace.

The ancient wisdom of the Greek philosophers states that "The first casualty of war is the truth." And we all know that if the truth mattered we would not be in this war in the first place.

Lies got us into this war in Iraq, and blood keeps us in it. Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, more than 10,000 Iowans have left the state to fight in these wars of the empire. 10,000 fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters have left their families, their jobs and their communities for months on end. Hundreds have come back home wounded physically and mentally. They come back crippled for life, physically from the wounds of bombs and bullets and mentally from the cruelties of killing and war making. And so far, 50 have made the ultimate sacrifice and returned home in coffins. Though misled and lied to – their sacrifice must be respected

Let's not forget that George Bush won the state of Iowa in the presidential elections of 2004 with the blood and personal sacrifice of the Iowans who left our state to fight his wars.

We in the peace movement need to make our own personal sacrifices. Having the truth on our side and knowing the facts and history alone, is not enough. Hearts will change and bad policies will be reversed only when we in the peace movement start taking some risk and putting our lives on the line to stop this war. Then we can begin to change our nation's imperial global designs and return to being a true republic, one nation in the community of nations. Perhaps then we can join the rest of the world's peoples, working together to rid the world of the scourge of war, poverty and injustice.

When I was a parish priest, people used to ask me, "Father, do you have to do Civil Disobedience?"

And I answered, "No, you do not have to do civil disobedience, but it's the American way, as American as mom's apple pie."

Exercising our right of free speech in expressing dissent, attending rallies, protesting and doing civil disobedience is how we change things in this country. Every social progress and advancement made in the USA, starting with the American Revolution was done through protest and civil disobedience. It's as patriotic as any other thing we as

citizens can do, including defending our country in a just war.

Picking up on Chet Quinn's invitation to go to Washington DC in March, for those who can't go to DC and do not want to wait until March, let me invite you to join the weekly vigil that takes place at Nollen Plaza every Thursday between 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. These good people made up of Quakers, WILPF-ers, CW-ers and friends have been doing this vigil for nearly three years now.

And for eight weeks, beginning Feb 8th, they will be joined by the local organizers of the National Occupation Project, organized by the Voices for Creative Nonviolence. The National Occupation Project is calling for sustained acts of civil disobedience to take place at Congressional Offices to impress on our elected officials the need to stop the funding of this insane war and occupation. If you are interested in being part of this occupation force in Iowa and exercising your patriotic duty to resist this criminal war, contact us at the Des Moines Catholic Worker.

Thank you and God Bless.