

anchorage anarchy

Issue #4

May 2004

\$1.00

The War Parties Fight It Out

In preparation for the election in November, Bush and Kerry are each trying to convince voters that he and his party are the better warriors. As the carnage in Iraq goes on, with the abuse and murder of non-combatants and prisoners by the American military there, Kerry is making it clear that, if elected, he will continue the occupation and do his best to expand the military.

Most of the opponents of the war who vote will, of course, vote for the Democrats, despite their pro-war positions. Too many believe there is an important difference between the parties and will thus try to elect Kerry the war-monger because of their hatred for Bush the war-monger.

During the last Democrat presidency, the United States military invaded Haiti, bombed innocent people in Serbia, Sudan, and Afghanistan, and continued the bombing and sanction campaign that devastated and impoverished Iraq, resulting in the deaths of thousands of regular people. In fact, during most of the decade preceding the September 2001 murder by airplane of hundreds of people in New York and Pennsylvania, it was Democrats who controlled the American military and foreign policy establishment. It was their meddling in the affairs of other countries that created the loathing for the United States government that led to these killings. Meanwhile, at home, Clinton did his best to get his own version of the Patriot Act passed in order to make it easier for the government to monitor residents of America who speak out against government murder and repression.

Whatever their differences, and there are some, the parties are united in their contempt for individual freedom and their dedication to violence to get what they want. It is foolhardy for anyone to believe that a Democrat president will end the war, free the prisoners held and abused in secret in Iraq, Cuba, or the "homeland," or make anyone more free. By voting, people simply strengthen the institutions of government and give aid and comfort to the enemies of liberty. The time spent campaigning for Kerry (or Nader or Sharpton or Kucinich) by those who seek an end to war and a freer world is being wasted. The state will never be a friend of freedom or a force for peace. Even if the candidates were motivated by the best intentions, which is clearly not the case, they could not accomplish good ends by using the evil means which would be at their disposal as president. Taxation, the police, the military, and the laws, rules, and regulations by which the lives of people both here and abroad are ordered, restricted, and sometimes ended, are what make government what it is. Force and violence are its lifeblood, and nobody elected to office can change the basic nature of politics and government. Nobody can use the military, police, and legal system, institutions based on hierarchy, servile obedience, and violence, to expand anyone's freedom. Only by abolishing government can we advance the cause of liberty.

Nobody who runs for office will end the war, abolish taxes, dismantle the FBI, or make you free. So don't waste your time, vote for nobody.



Cultural Incompetence

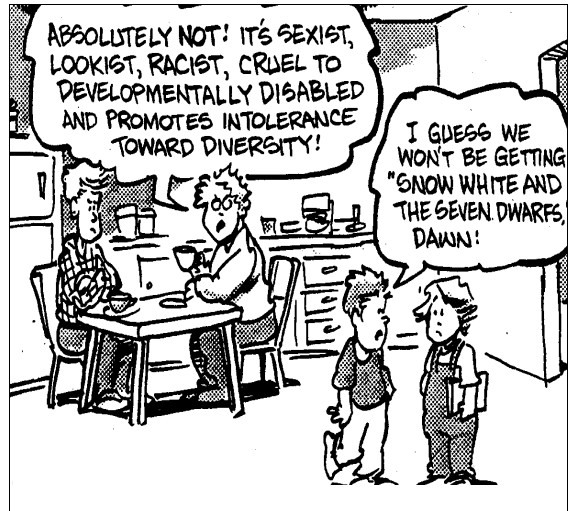
We hear an awful lot of talk about culture and its importance these days. There are workplace cultures, all kinds of religious cultures, good and bad corporate cultures, and any number of ethnic, sexual, and criminal cultures and subcultures. According to people who conceptualize the world in this manner, any time people who are like-minded, similar looking, have sexual tastes in common, or are working on a common project come together a culture is formed. And once this culture comes into existence, it somehow acquires the power to dictate the ideas and actions of those who are part of it. Believers in this model of human behavior seem to think that one can therefore find out important information about someone just by learning about their “culture.”

Multiculturalism or Individuality

This reliance on culture to explain people’s motivations and behavior underlies the currently faddish theory of multiculturalism, which has generated an entire industry of self-proclaimed experts who conduct “diversity” trainings, write “cultural competency” texts, and “manage diversity” in corporations. Although it was developed with the intent of increasing understanding among people, multiculturalism in fact only serves to promote inaccurate generalizations and stereotypes about people. Multiculturalists believe people are simply the products of the various cultures of which they are a part and that learning about other cultures helps people better communicate and work with other people. But they are wrong.

Each person is a distinct individual, about whom one can learn only by asking, listening, and observing. Surely, people are influenced

by all the other people in their lives. But that does not mean that everyone exposed to the same kinds of influences turns out the same. Even within a family where all the children are raised in the same neighborhood, participate in the same religious rituals, speak the same language, and attend the same schools, each will likely turn out quite different from the others. One becomes an anarchist, while a sibling joins the navy; another prefers homosexual sex, while his sister finds pleasure in heterosexual relations; one is an atheist, and her brother a devout catholic. If the experience of growing up in an institution as intimate, and sometimes overwhelming, as a family does not determine a person’s beliefs and activities, it is absurd to think that one can learn much of value about any individual person simply by gaining knowledge of their “culture.”



But that does not stop some from continuing to push the idea that cultures are monolithic and that people who are part of them can be expected to think and act alike. Here in Anchorage a group called Bridge

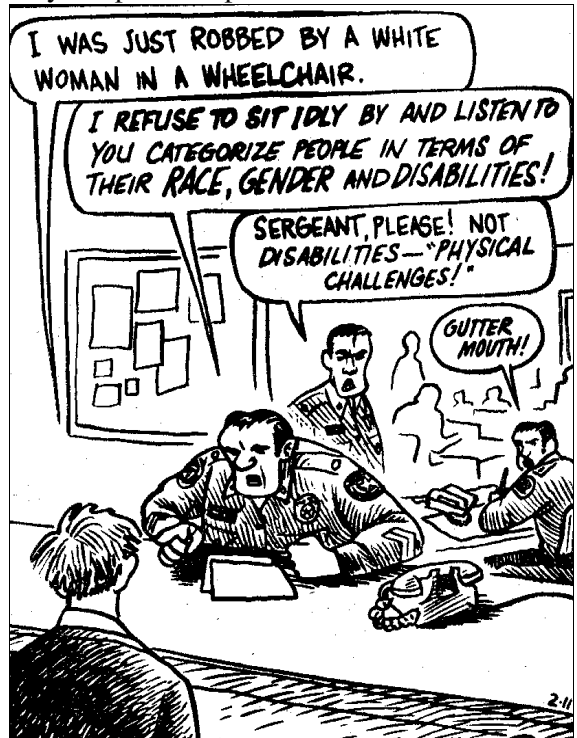
Builders has published a booklet titled *Passport to Anchorage*. In it they list what they believe are the habits of members of various ethnic and immigrant groups. It includes such absurd blanket statements as: women from india do not drink alcohol; displays of affection between filipino men and women are considered inappropriate; and people from laos are frank, open, and friendly. Since these descriptions are seen as either positive or neutral, people may not be as likely to question them as they would be if people from a certain country were described in more negative terms, but that does not make such generalizations any less stereotypical or inaccurate. While the authors of this booklet clearly recognize that americans come in all sorts of varieties and flavors, they often fail to see that this is true of people in other countries and among the different ethnic, religious, and immigrant groups within this country. Indians, laotians, and filipinos vary among themselves as much as americans do, and people from these countries who live in the united states are as likely to identify and be seen as "american" as they are to feel and be considered representatives of their country of origin.

Any sort of sweeping statement about cultural or national characteristics is unlikely to give an accurate picture of an individual person from a nation or ethnic group that is made up of millions of different people. This does not, however, stop the diversity trainers and authors of books such as the *Passport* from continuing to promote such nonsense.

Cultural Relativism and Cultural Supremacy

Some believers in the cultural view of people's behavior do not stop at providing simplistic and inaccurate pictures of individuals. They use culture as a means of justifying disparate treatment of people who are considered to be from different cultural

groups. Advocates of this view argue that actions and beliefs that would otherwise not be acceptable can sometimes be justified if they are part of a person's cultural traditions.

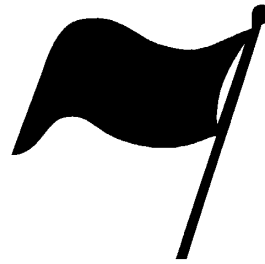


For example, jewish basketball players have sought to be able to wear yarmulkes on the court, practitioners of an american indian religion have argued that they should have the right to use peyote in rituals, and muslim students have sought the freedom to wear islamic headscarves in schools. Whatever the merits of any of these practices, their advocates do not argue that dress codes or drug laws interfere with *individual* freedom of choice, and that anyone should be free to dress as they please and ingest whatever substances they like. Instead they contend that yarmulkes, peyote, or headscarves are of *cultural* importance to some group of people and therefore members of this group should be allowed to do something other people continue to be barred from doing. When

someone asks for special treatment based on their culture, the clear message is that the traditions of groups are more important and valuable than individuals' beliefs and preferences.

Although advocates of cultural competence might argue that these are instances where a dominant culture is showing sensitivity to a minority culture, what is actually taking place is that one culture is being valued more than another. This is inevitable in a setting where people are seen as cultural representatives, not unique persons whose choices are respected just because they are those of peaceful human beings. If arguments for or against such practices are based on group traditions, the conflict inevitably comes down to one between different traditional—"cultural"—practices. And only one culture can win in such circumstances. Favoring the traditions of a minority cultural group is no better than elevating the practices of a majority to a special status and disregarding the needs and wants of those who differ. Inevitably, someone will feel their culture or group identity has been slighted.

Another result of looking at the world through the lens of culture is that it can lead people to believe some cultures are superior to others. Often they consider their "own" culture to be the best, but some look around and find another that they think is better in some way: more humane, more eco-friendly, more peaceful, or some such. But, although various groups have differing histories and current practices, there is no culture that is all good or all bad. Members of every cultural, religious, ethnic, and national group have engaged in atrocious behaviors over the years. The european invaders of the americas killed and enslaved indian people, but so did the aztecs and tlingits. White people have engaged in barbaric wars and attempted genocide, but so have asian and black people. Muslims have murdered infidels and



anchorage anarchy
is an occasional publication
of the Bad Press,
an anti-government anarchist
project.

It is edited by Joe Peacott.

Subscriptions are available for
\$1 per issue.

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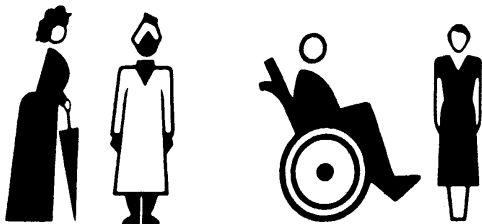
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christians have slaughtered heretics and witches. Women have been treated differently from, and considered inferior to, men in virtually every society that has ever existed. And most human throughout history have treated, and continue to treat, other

animals abominably. Despite these horrid actions, of course, people in every land and of every religion and skin color have also done wonderful, kind, and humanitarian things. People who favor one culture over another pick and choose the things that they think best represent a culture and tend to ignore (or explain away as unimportant aberrations) the blemishes.

People who believe a certain culture is superior to others will at times go so far as to celebrate certain traditions of one group, while condemning the same practice when it is engaged in by others. This culturally relativistic view is quite common. For instance, one of the speakers at a couple of anti-war rallies in anchorage over the last year or so, proudly stated that she was part of a "warrior people," the tlingits. She and those of her listeners who applauded her speech did not see the dissonance between this statement on her part and their participation in an event supposedly organized to oppose war. The implication was clearly that there are good warriors and bad warriors, the tlingits among the former group and the american military people waging war in iraq in the latter. While the speaker and protestors rightly condemned the murderous behavior of united states troops in iraq, their sensitivity to "cultural" differences led many of them to romanticize the war-like traditions of another group. This double standard serves only to dilute the anti-war message of such protests and call into question the ethical consistency of the participants.



Some actions are acceptable and some are not, and the fact (or belief) that a practice is part of one's cultural heritage is not what makes it right or wrong. What matters is whether it harms other people or restricts their freedom to peacefully live as they please. Any person who leads a nonviolent life and does not interfere with the freedom of other people should, at a minimum, be tolerated and left alone. But someone who engages in violent or otherwise coercive



activities directed at others should be considered a threat and isolated, boycotted, or resisted by others, even in circumstances where they invoke their culture to justify bad behavior.

Individuals and cultures

Despite claims to the contrary, each human being is one of a kind. We each have our own desires, ideas, aspirations and habits. While we may share some of these with others from the same country, region, tradition, or religion, there are many ways in which we differ from our neighbors as well. This can be demonstrated just by looking at the people we live or work around. Each individual thinks and lives in ways that make them different from every other person, even

those with whom we allegedly share a culture. People embrace any number of religious faiths, support various social or political movements, eat different kinds of foods, and engage in a multitude of sexual practices. But when people are encouraged to view culture as the determining factor in what makes a person who they are, all too many let their own common sense experience of the infinite variety among people be pushed aside.

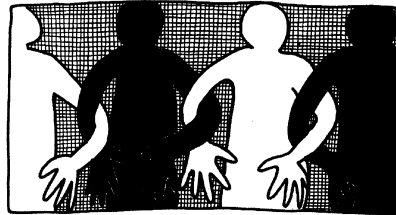
Those fighting discrimination and wishing to improve communication and cooperation among people of different skin colors and heritages at one time encouraged them not to make assumptions about others based on their complexion or culture, instead suggesting that they evaluate people based on their character and behavior. We need to return to this outlook and strategy. The only way to determine what another person believes or does is to engage them on a personal basis and learn about their unique qualities and activities. While this may not be as easy as sitting in a cultural competency class and learning what "those people" do and think, interactions between individuals, unsupervised by "experts," can provide real knowledge about others, instead of the inaccurate assumptions and general nonsense offered by the diversity hacks. Only such personal interactions can lead to the respect, tolerance, and trust between people that is necessary if we are to have the kind of mutualist and voluntary society sought by anarchists.

In the West we are supposed to be democratic and individualistic and we make choices according to some intellectual judgments and we love justice. In fact, we are not like that at all. We are infinitely malleable and indoctrinable, and we run off to leaders for orders and we don't make our own

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THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUIVALENTS,
LABOR FOR LABOR;

THE MOST DISAGREEABLE LABOR, ENTITLED TO THE HIGHEST COMPENSATION.

The following essay was written and published as a pamphlet by Josiah Warren in Boston in 1865. The author participated in a number of anarchist communities in the nineteenth century, and wrote and lectured extensively, advocating non-statist solutions to social problems and economic rather than political methods of social change. He also strongly influenced writers such as Stephen Pearl Andrews and Benjamin Tucker, who perhaps did more than anyone else to disseminate the ideas of the anarchist individualists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I have corrected apparent typos and changed some of the archaic spelling found in the original, but have left the punctuation, italicization, and capitalization as the author intended them to be.

A direct exchange of LABOR FOR LABOR between the laboring or useful classes, measured by the time employed and according to the *disagreeableness or Costs* of the labors performed, would convert *Time* into capital; and all would have an abundance [of] "*capital*." Money would represent Labor or its products as bank notes now represent metals; and, instead of being the blind, stupid, unintellectual accident that it now is, the holder of Labor Notes would know what he could get for them from day to day and from year to year. Estimates of the labor in different products once obtained by investigation, might remain unchanged for many years, unless new and better modes of production should reduce their *Costs*. Consequently, all ruinous fluctuations in prices would be at an end, and all speculations upon them would be knocked in the head; and "profits in trade" being abolished, ruinous competition and the principal cause of modern wars would cease to be.

The burthen of necessary labor would be reduced to from one to perhaps three hours a day (according to the style of living,) for each person. All anxiety about future sustenance would be dispelled—with this *security of condition*, the motive for large accumulations would die away, and the degrading scramble for "money making" would come to an end.

The hardest worker would be the richest person, without reference to sex, color, or nation, and in the common, vulgar estimation, would be the most "*respectable*": then there will be as great a rush into the useful pursuits as there has been to shun them and force them upon the weak and defenseless. We now see the origin of all forms of slavery and the legitimate remedy for them.





It is folly to expect that men will prefer starved, ragged, insulted labor, however useful it may be, rather than an easy situation with a sufficient income and the respect of their fellow men; nor is it surprising that the ranks of respected professions are crowded till they are forced to live by fraud, that we are over run with speculators, thieves, defaulters, counterfeiters, burglars, robbers, incendiaries, rapacious officials and other vagabonds, or that the bible is tortured into

the defense of slavery and poverty by those who are revelling in idleness and luxury; or, that when the opportunities for speculation and office holding opened by one war are all filled, the next step is to get up another war. This pandemonium miscalled "society" will continue as long as men are tempted to live by profitable crimes, rather than starve in useful pursuits.

Let not this word *Cost* be misunderstood: it has no reference to the *money* that has been given for any thing, but it refers to the trouble it has cost; whether it be painful exertion of body or mind—anxiety, sacrifice of any kind; in short, the endurance of any thing that is *disagreeable* is here called *Cost*.

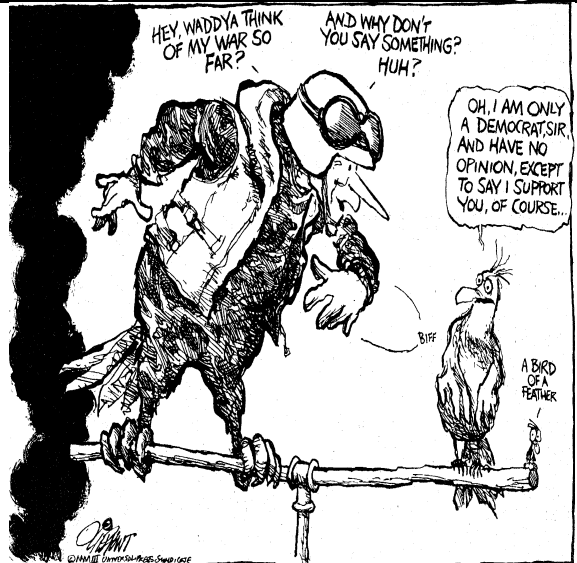
This idea or principle would probably give the highest salary to the scavenger; because he is least respected and because his labor is otherwise, perhaps, the most disagreeable; while it would give comparatively nothing to ignorant officials because they get compensated in *glorification*.

All will be workers or live upon benevolence. The whole burthens being thus distributed, the share of each will be so



light and so “fashionable” people will prefer to do that little, rather than take the trouble of encroaching upon their neighbors; then the great excuse for aggressive governments will not exist, and their very *costly* if not very valuable *services* can be dispensed with.

Labor for labor, is not labor for land nor for any of the metals found in it, nor for wood or coal nor for any other of nature’s spontaneous products except so far as labor has been bestowed upon them, or in transferring them; but it opens the prospect of homes and comforts to those who have been deprived of them by the want of a principle for the regulation of prices. In short, a direct, equitable exchange of labor between the useful classes, just in proportion as it progresses, will cheapen common money and finally render it worthless, and invest LABOR with all its products, and all the power and “*respectability*” that material wealth can confer; and all that constitutes good or successful society will be within its reach. None need be excluded—those who have



no useful business can learn one when opportunities are opened and this principle opens the opportunities.

The greatest of all considerations is, that by making the *cost* of labor the *limit* of price, every one becomes *interested* in co-operating to reduce the cost and consequently, the price of every thing; and thus men will be employed in lightening each others’ burthens through mere self interest, which is now so destructive. Thus does this simple but sublime justice out strip the sagacity of legislators and solve for humanity the greatest of all human problems—turning every man’s hand to work FOR, instead of *against* his fellow man!

Harmonizing the material interests of men will harmonize the feelings and action of individuals and nations; and the reign of permanent peace, plenty and successful society will have found their root in simple, scientific JUSTICE TO LABOR!

It is this *harmonization* of interests that has always been aimed at by the profoundest statesmen, and it is the great

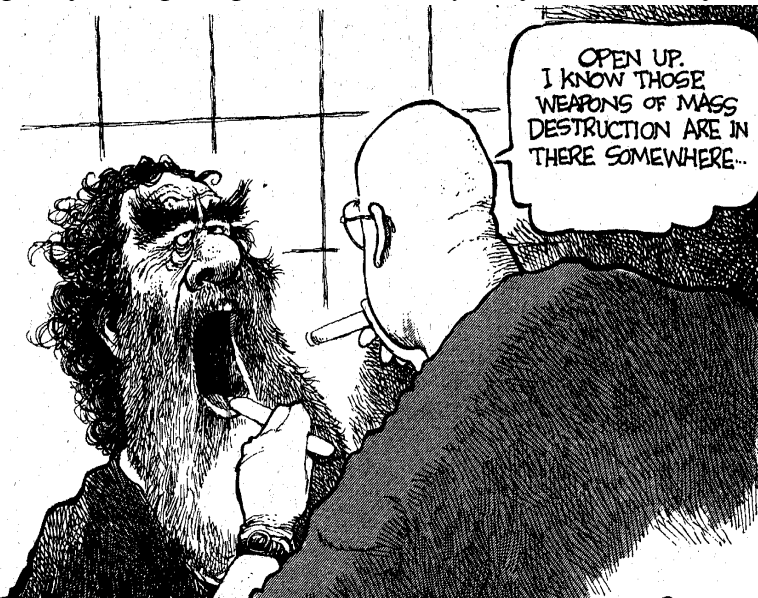


central ideal of Communism; but it has been mistakenly sought in Combining or *Uniting* those interests! But, where interests are *United*, all have a right to a voice in the management of them; but the natural and inevitable *diversity* of minds growing out of the *Individuality* of each, immediately develops itself and inaugurates conflict and confusion that have only two possible terminations—Despotism or *Disintegration*. If despotism is adopted, its first act is to make war on this natural Individuality and to demand unhesitating obedience, loyalty or conformity; the governed must have neither eyes, tongues, brains nor life; they must all suddenly become of one pattern according to the master's orders, like so many dried herrings upon a stick, and those who decline the prescription are gentiles, schismatics, heretics, outsiders, outcasts, rebels, traitors, outlaws; to be expelled, crucified, excommunicated, imprisoned, shot or hung; and whom any may plunder or murder with impunity, or perhaps "make money" by

taking them alive to be murdered or tortured according to the will of the master! Government by a "majority" is worse than that of some despotisms, because it annihilates *Individual* responsibility; which, is the only reliable regulator of human intercourse. All these evils are the natural consequences of the first blunder or "original sin" of *Uniting* instead of harmonizing the interests of men!

If the planets were all *united* or bound together by artificial means, it would result in collisions, darkness, destruction and death, corresponding to what are now seen and always have existed in all artificial organizations of men, from that of the smallest partnership to that of a nation, just in proportion to the number and magnitude of the interests at stake and the mental diversities of the persons involved. War has been waged against this diversity from first to last, for thousands of years and every means to enforce conformity have been exhausted; and now, there is more individuality than ever, and it is more

clearly seen than ever that it is the very germ of all improvement, order and peace among men—that this is the stone so long rejected by the builders that is to become the head of the corner—that it is the very "key to the age"; that to persecute it is to deny the persecutor's right to differ from the persecuted and it is making war upon humanity's instinctive struggle to correct its own most fatal blunder. But personal individ-



uality being adverse to artificial organizations, they must be abandoned before much progress can be made. They originated in the purposes of attack or defense; but the principle of equivalents neutralizing all motives for attack, would render defense unnecessary.

What we want is *Co-operation* or coincident action between all the human race without "entangling" our material interests or our *responsibilities*, and thereby subordinating man to the ignorance and cruelty of man. The principle of equivalents enables us to attain these long sought and unspeakably important ends. It lifts us up out of the chaos of political systems, into a clear, bright atmosphere that enables us to discern the direct road to true order and repose.

The subject is inexhaustible, but a very few words must suffice here. What has been said against organizations was thought necessary as caution against the continuance of a dangerous and costly mode of defeating the ends in view.

COINCIDENCE of thought, feeling or purpose, makes us society for each other; but there is no power on earth that can make us so beyond this limit. The principle of Equivalents producing this coincidence in our material interests, abolishes the principal elements of repulsion and contest and gives us a reliable basis of calculation which will continue for a long time to surprise the student of human

problems with solutions too beautiful and too sublime for expression here.

It is believed that this idea of labor for labor originated in England. Its practical development in this country has been an unwavering life purpose during the last thirty eight years, in a series of noiseless experiments, as the chemist conducts his analyses in his laboratory or as the mechanic tests his machine in his own sanctum before he presents it broadly to the public. There is scarcely any kind of business between men, to which the principle has not been successfully applied. The conclusion from these experiments is, that as this principle, together with others necessary to its operation, require to be *studied* like any other exact science, in connexion with practical illustrations in the business of life, the best way to inaugurate the movement is by establishing Industrial Colleges for young and old, right among the people in any or every town and neighborhood, upon *Individual* responsibilities and with *Individual* means, with such aid as may be voluntarily offered free from all defeating conditions. Not attempting to *form* or organise societies any more than we would organize or *form* the fruit upon a tree: but inviting all people to look into the movement and co-operate with it so far as they may find it for their moral or material internal interest to do so, but no farther: trusting to the *Coincidence* of these interests to change, by degrees, the character of what is now called civilization.



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Some Thoughts on Public Protests

In discussions of anti-war protests and activists, one often reads or hears supporters of the slaughter of iraqis claim that the killers are in iraq to defend our “right” to protest. Of course, most of those who say or write this actually wish we would shut up and go home and not speak freely. But whether or not they really are committed to free speech and public dissent, I fail to see how killing children in Fallujah protects my diminishing freedoms.

Other supporters of the government believe that we should “earn” our right to protest, as John Kerry apparently did by participating in the killing in vietnam before wising up and seeing that war for the horror it was. It boggles the mind to think that people can believe that someone who was once so servile as to follow orders and kill other people, is thus more entitled than other people to protest further killing. In fact, those

who never participated in the war in indochina are really the ones who had the moral high ground. They saw from the beginning that murdering people in cambodia, laos, and vietnam was evil and had the courage to say so in public, at times suffering arrest and beatings for their efforts. Publicly saying what we think and opposing the actions of our rulers are virtuous activities, and no one should have to earn the right to engage in them.

It is great that, despite the contempt shown for us by supporters of the war, so many people have come out on the streets to protest. But I am disappointed whenever speakers or other participants at these actions say that, although they oppose the war, they “support the troops.” Which troops do they support? The ones who “accidentally” shoot or bomb children and reporters? Or the ones who had their pictures taken while they tormented prisoners? While the government and military officials who made the decision to invade iraq are responsible for the slaughter and abuses there, the individual members of the (all-volunteer!) american military who are doing the shooting and bombing are responsible, as well. “I was just following orders” is not a valid excuse for murder and the other atrocities being carried out by my american troops in iraq. One cannot oppose war while “supporting” those who wage it.

