

Confronting the Military-Industrial-Complex: The MIC at 50

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The majority of Americans oppose the U.S. government's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and believe that defense spending is the area that must be cut to reduce the federal deficit. However, many of us feel powerless to stop the ever-increasing bombings, invasions, and occupations of nations which pose no threat to us. Most of us have acquiesced to the "military-industrial complex" (a term coined by Dwight Eisenhower, who devoted his farewell address in 1961 to its "grave implications"). Having worked with abused people for more than 25 years, it does not surprise me to see that when we as individuals or as a society eat crap for too long, we become psychologically too weak to take action.

Democracy means that if the majority of us want to stop senseless wars and wasteful military spending, then this should be stopped. Are we in the majority? How can we take action?

A March 2011 ABC News/Washington Post poll asked Americans, "All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, or not?"; 31 percent said "worth fighting" and 64 percent said "not worth fighting." When a CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll in December 2010, asked, "Do you favor or oppose the U.S. war in Afghanistan?" only 35 percent of Americans favored the war, while 63 percent opposed it. A 2010 CBS poll reported that 6 of 10 Americans viewed the Iraq war as "a mistake." And when Americans were asked in a CBS New /New York Times survey in January 2011 which of three programs—the military, Medicare, or Social Security—to cut so as to deal with the deficit, fully 55 percent chose the military, while only 21 percent chose Medicare and 13 percent chose Social Security.

So, how exactly can we bring democracy to the United States? In Charlottesville from September 18-20, there will be a conference "MIC at 50: The Military Industrial Complex at 50" (see MIC50.org) that will energize Americans to take back their rightful power over when our soldiers are put in harms way and how the U.S. government spends Americans' money. At this conference, organized by David Swanson (who served as press secretary for Dennis Kucinich's 2004 presidential campaign and is the author of *War is a Lie*), the tools of empowerment will be provided. These include: (1) knowledge of the extent, influence, and destructiveness of the military-industrial complex; (2) tactics, strategies and solutions as to how to "move money from military to human needs"; and (3) acquiring the "energy to do battle" so as to overcome demoralization and defeatism

The MIC at 50 conference will feature over 20 speakers—including former procurement

executive and chief contracting officer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Bunnatine (Bunny) H. Greenhouse, retired Army Colonel Ann Wright, retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel and former Pentagon desk officer Karen Kwiatkowski, international affairs analyst Helena Cobban, retired CIA officer Ray McGovern, coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space Bruce Gagnon, executive director of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee Shahid Buttar, author and West Point graduate Paul Chappell.

I will be there to speak about the psychological and cultural building blocks of democratic movements and how we can transform the pain of subjugation into the “energy to do battle.” Activists routinely become frustrated when truths about lies and oppression don’t set people free to take action. They sometimes forget that there are a great many Americans who have been so worn down by decades of personal and political defeats, financial struggles, social isolation, and daily interaction with impersonal and inhuman institutions that they no longer have the energy for political actions.

Many Americans have developed what Bob Marley—the poet laureate of oppressed people around the world— called “mental slavery.” Social scientists have also recognized this phenomenon of subjugation resulting in demoralization and defeatism. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Ignacio Martin-Baró, the El Salvadoran social psychologist and popularizer of “liberation psychology,” understood this psychological phenomenon of fatalism, and they helped their people overcome it. We must first acknowledge the reality that for millions of Americans, subjugation has in fact resulted in demoralization and fatalism. Then, we can begin to heal from a “battered people’s syndrome” of sorts and together begin to fight for democracy.

See you at the conference.

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