

What Can Americans Do To Oppose the Warfare State?

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Americans who voted for peace last November but are getting only more war are becoming increasingly disillusioned.

The majority of Americans, polls show, would slash the military budget by over 30 percent yet President Obama has increased it by four percent. A majority of Americans want U.S. troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan but the Pentagon will garrison 50,000 in the former country indefinitely and dispatch perhaps 20,000 more shortly to escalate the war in the latter.

Since voting doesn't bring the desired change in national policies, people wonder what they can do individually. The answer is quite a lot. "Things have gotten bad enough in the minds of enough Americans that there is an opening for creating a mass movement for real change, and that movement is already growing all around us," writes citizen/activist David Swanson of Charlottesville, Va., in his new book "Daybreak" (Seven Stories Press). Swanson is cofounder of the anti-war After Downing Street Coalition.

He ticks off a number of examples where grass-roots citizen groups won a round vs. the Establishment:

In North Dakota, farmers defeated efforts by St. Louis-based Monsanto to sell genetically engineered seeds.

Threatened by corporate big-box stores, Utah local businesses created a successful "Buy Local First" campaign.

Hundreds of towns and cities have enacted resolutions against enforcement of unconstitutional provisions of the USA Patriot Act.

Chicagoans who had no good grocery stores banded together to create an organic urban farm and sell produce through a local market.

Recognizing that America's Great Plains are the "Saudi Arabia of wind power," Rosebud Sioux are building windmills on their South Dakota reservation.

Americans have created some 300 worker-run businesses.

More than 100 towns have stopped corporations from dumping toxic sludge on farms.

Residents of Tallulah, La., banded together to shut down an unwanted juvenile prison.

Swanson writes, “We will not create the necessary rebirth of American democracy by sending e-mails and making phone calls. We must do those things (but they are not enough). We must educate. We must create new media. We must lobby. We must march.”

“Unless we creatively and non-violently block the path the empire is headed down and redirect the nation,” he continues, “we will be increasingly ignored, repressed, manipulated, abused, and disappeared for the remaining days of this once bright and hopeful republic.”

“What is needed in US civil society is a (non-violent) revolution... No amount of violence or strategic placement of violence could possibly create a more democratic republic. In our struggle for peace and justice we must not only avoid violence, but reject it so completely that no use of it can be plausibly attributed to us,” Swanson writes.

If there is no peace group in your community, you can take the lead and form one from among your friends and acquaintances or members of your congregation. It’s up to you to speak out against war and in behalf of peace before City Councils, church groups and youth organizations. Try to relate not only the damage done by war to innocent millions overseas but to the cost in your own community in lost lives, lost taxes, lost business, and lost opportunities. Point out how foreign boycotts are impacting sales of American brand products around the world and contributing to the recession and job losses here at home.

You can find a lot of “local” information on the web site of the National Priorities Project of Northampton, Mass., which shows the cost of aggressive wars by states. Feel free in your literature to emphasize “America First!” The numbers of Americans who are jobless, in poverty and without decent health care are growing rapidly.

Distribute anti-war leaflets outside theatres showing war movies to reach youth and at bingo games to reach seniors, emphasizing in the latter case how the military siphons off their tax dollars.

Distribute articles to motorists in parking lots about how the Middle East wars have increased gasoline prices to motorists. Leaflets can also show how much war is costing each American family and how it is starving large sectors of American economy for capital, causing non-defense factories to close and limiting entrepreneurial start-ups.

Display Anti-war placards at major intersections where pedestrians and motorists can see them.

Go door to door in neighborhoods with anti-war leaflets urging families to pressure their teen-age children not to enlist. This is particularly important in poor and minority neighborhoods that have been targeted by Pentagon recruiters.

Organize a Peace Now motorcade and drive slowly through communities and downtowns. Point out how taxes wasted in wars could finance needed projects in your city or town.

Distribute non-violent leaflets with a photograph of the Rev. Martin Luther King stressing his opposition to war and aggression.

Urge city councils to close down military facilities and convert them to peaceful uses.

Urge the public schools to create courses on non-violence to curb crime domestically as well as aggression against foreign states.

In his book, Swanson names a number of groups that are working for non-violent change that you could contact. These include "The National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance," "No War, No Warming," "Port Militarization Resistance" of Washington State, and "The International Longshoreman's and Warehouse Workers' Union" that "has shut down West Coast ports in opposition to the occupation of Iraq."

Swanson also urges joining and supporting groups such as his own After Downing Street, Democrats.com, Progressive Democrats of America, the National Accountability Network, the Peace Team, the World Can't Wait, CODE PINK: Women for Peace, Veterans for Peace, High Road for Human Rights, the American Freedom Campaign, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the National Lawyers Guild, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Of course, Quaker action groups should be on everyone's list.

"Work on what moves you, what would make a difference in your life and your family's life," Swanson advises. "Mobilize your community, your school, your clubs and organizations. I can't provide a complete list of useful organizations that you might want to join to work for the cause of peace and justice, but hundreds of good ones are listed at <http://afterdowningstreet.org/coalition>."

Sherwood Ross formerly worked in the civil rights movement and for daily newspapers and wire services. To support his Anti-War News Service or comment reach him at SherwoodRoss10@gmail.com

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