

Got Peace?

If you read the Salt Lake Tribune the Sunday before Bush's scheduled visit to Salt Lake City, you might have read an opinion piece by The Sutherland Institute's Paul Mero, countering Mayor Rocky Anderson's opinion piece on his moral duty to speak out against the Bush Administration. In it, Mero suggests that there is a time for peace and a time for war, imitating that bit from Ecclesiastes – you know the one: a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance. . .

I also read in the Tribune's August 31st account of the pro-Bush rally one of sign slogans that just floored me: "Give War a Chance."

Give **War** a Chance? Don't we already give war a chance every generation or so?

I miss the good ol' days when hawks claimed that war was a "necessary evil". It showed that at least part of their consciousness was aware of that evil.

Both of these sentiments seem to suggest that war is at least equal in value to peace, and many on the right truly seem to believe that. But do those of us on the left *really* believe in peace and nonviolence?

I participated on the planning committee for the August 30th anti-Bush rally, and this experience was just one of the latest that illustrates to me how those of us who claim to want peace can be emotionally violent to each other.

The first few planning meetings were tense and stressful. It was obvious that there were different views and that there weren't too many interested in compromise. A few of the activists present had outwardly hostile attitudes, and some were downright rude to those who didn't agree with them. Many people new to political organizing who came to the meetings had to either weather the hostilities by the experienced activists, or left the planning process altogether. In the end, the rally was a really good thing and mostly successful. I have to wonder, though, what it could have been with the many new voices and ideas that were silenced.

Most of those that continued in the planning process didn't seem to acknowledge those who had left it, or seem to think of it as a loss to the group. If our goal is to make a better world we can't afford to chase away those who would be our allies. Those who tried to join in the process for the first time only to get frustrated or burned are less likely to try activism again. And we need more people to be active and interested in changing things, not less. We simply can't afford to write them off. In the long term, we as a group may have done more harm than good.

Working on the August 30th event and observing the process of those involved has convinced me to examine and rethink my own political ideology. One of the thoughts I've had is that I need to combine some aspects of the spiritual work I did in my 20s with the activist work that I've done in my 30s. This has led me to a couple of books on the subject.

Michael N. Nagler writes about our struggle with our inner violence in his book, "The Search For A Nonviolent Future". In it he describes an essential aspect to practicing nonviolence:

Nonviolence begins in inner struggle – specifically the inner struggle to keep anger, fear, and greed from having sway over us.

Nagler suggests in the book that “violence is violence” and that “anything we do to reduce violence anywhere will do something toward reducing violence everywhere.” We need to be working on nonviolence on at least three levels – thought, speech and action.

This inner work of nonviolence seems to be the most important thing we can do in our work toward peace. While we shouldn't give up rallies, teach-ins and other political actions -- which can be good political strategy, awareness building, or even therapeutic -- we are not doing much to create peace itself until we've dealt with our own anger, greed, and fear.