

Here. Now.

By William Rivers Pitt

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"So we come to it in the end, the great battle of our time, in which many things shall pass away. But at least there is no longer need for hiding. We will ride the straight way and the open road and with all our speed. The muster shall begin at once." - Theoden, Lord of the Mark

There's an old man who lives down the street from my house. I made a point to introduce myself to him roundabout last September, after he put a 'No War' sign up in his front yard. About a week before Bush showed up here for a GOP fundraiser, he put up a second sign describing the date, time and location of Bush's arrival. Under this information was a single word: 'Protest!' His hand was twisted with arthritis when I shook it, but he still used it to drive those signs into the ground.

Every couple of months, some friends and I make a trip to the Kinko's copy shop. We run off about 500 flyers, crafted that day, which outline a number of issues and facts the mainstream media doesn't bother with anymore. The flyers break down data on the PATRIOT Act, the push for war in Iraq, the unmentionable questions surrounding 9/11, and Bush connections to corporate crime. We take these and station ourselves in well-traveled parts of the city. We hand them out with a smile. We have never gone home with extras, and often people come back for two or three copies to share with friends. Through internet networking, they flyers we create wind up getting handed out on streetcorners all across the country. People leave them at bus stops, libraries, doctor's offices and in supermarkets.

Last week I went back in time for a while. It had been ten years since I'd heard The Grateful Dead live in concert, eight years since the band played a note. Walking down Canal Street towards the Fleet Center, The Other Ones, a band comprised of all the surviving Grateful Dead members, was in town for a show. I could almost see the old Boston Garden in the distance, through the crowds that hadn't changed a lick in almost 4,000 days. After the concert was over - spectacular, in case you were wondering - I made my way outside towards the train. I was waylaid by a young woman handing out flyers which argued against war in Iraq. Her brother worked the crowd, as well, along with several others. They had volunteered with a group called Peace Action.

There is an email making the rounds nowadays carrying an article by a right-wing radio personality named Chuck Baldwin. The article was originally sent out on an email list called 'The Republican,' and is entitled "Bush Government Out of Control." Mr. Baldwin laments the passage of the Homeland Security legislation and the establishment of the outrageously Orwellian 'Total Information Awareness' database. This database, run by convicted felon John Poindexter of Iran/Contra fame, will collect personal data on your purchases - including guns - along with school grades, websites visited, and trips taken. In one paragraph, Mr. Baldwin asks a powerful question: "Does that mean one must leave the Republican Party in order to fight for liberty? Maybe so."

Leaders never lead, unless the people lead them. Leaders, left to their own devices, will follow the call of the folks writing the checks. For too long in this country, the people

have abdicated their basic responsibility - to rule. In the absence of the people's leadership, our elected officials have begun listening to the corporations and the well-funded interest groups instead. The result is the mess we are in. This is without question a bi-partisan problem that affects both parties. Look no further than the fact that the vast majority of newly registered voters sign up as Independent.

Maybe it has gone too far to be fixed. Between the PATRIOT Act and this new Homeland Security Department, there is very little substance left to the founding documents and principles that once were the people's sword and shield. The media has become an adjunct mouthpiece for the corporations that own the outlets, and the politicians who receive the corporate donations and thus dutifully tow the line shout into this echo chamber and drown out all dissent. Those few elected officials who do stand against the nation we are devolving into see their voices disappear in the wake of parroted noise. Sometimes, those who speak out wind up dead.

So. If leaders no longer lead, and if the information font has become unutterably corrupted, what is left? Demonstrably, the instinct to go tharn in the road, hoping those onrushing headlights will swerve at the last moment, has become predominant among most Americans. *We have reached a point, however, where inaction is not only inadvisable, but worthy of the charge of treason.*

Do something.

You do not have to be rich or powerful or well-connected to erect a sign in your yard. You do not have to be a salesperson to hand out informational leaflets at a bus stop. You do not have to be young to volunteer with an organization. You do not have to be liberal to know that something is badly, badly out of joint.

Do something. Do anything.

At the end of the day, it does not matter what you do. A sign in your yard, a button in the lapel of your coat, an email sent around to friends, will have a small but salutary effect. It will make others in the country who feel isolated in their fear that something has gone terribly wrong understand that they are not alone. Big storms gather around small particles.

Think on this as you give thanks for what you've got. The moment is here, now, upon us all. Even the smallest effort can and will make a difference. On a large enough scale, it could change the face of the world. Be thankful for that, as well, and do something with it.

If you don't know what to do or where to go and want help with local contacts, email or call:

Not In My Name

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