

Boston City Council
October 4, 2007

Veterans for Peace is a national organization founded in 1985, with chapters in most states. We, members of the Samantha Smith Chapter and the Smedley Butler Brigade, warmly thank you, Councilors, for holding this hearing.

I think there is little doubt about how veterans feel about democracy, freedom of speech, and peace.

General Eisenhower said,

“I hate war, as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity.”

We may have forgotten, but history records that Eisenhower spoke for his World War II generation, which included 5 of my uncles. It was the survivors who had such high hopes for the United Nations as a means ***“to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”*** (U.N. Charter)

I believe the issue before City Council is not complex. It is whether or not to uphold the Constitution of the United States during commemorative events in the City of Boston.

As we all know, the Bill of Rights established free speech as the foundation of democratic government. Along with the inalienable right to speak, is the right to be heard in public assembly. And that right to speak and be heard inevitably includes the right to be seen and for statements on banners and placards to be read.

Now this Hearing is being held because there is a tension. In recent years there have been successful efforts to prevent Veterans for Peace from being seen or heard. Dark powers want to use every public assembly for the projection of militarism and war. And Veterans for Peace knows that is a lie, that is a distortion of reality, that is a bold affront to our collective experience. We remember “the bright shining lie” of Viet Nam. And we can see and smell that destroying untruth again in Iraq and Afghanistan. We know that war is terrorism, and a “war on terrorism” is an absurd self-contradiction and another false pretext for aggression.

And so free speech and public assembly ought not be mocked and abridged in Boston, all the more so when the nation is in the deepest moral crisis of all its perilous history.

Yes, there is a tension. One of the most respected veterans of Massachusetts, Howard Zinn, put his finger on it in a Veterans Day essay published by The Boston Globe:

“Veterans Day, instead of an occasion for denouncing war, has been an occasion for bringing out the flags, the uniforms, the martial music, and the patriotic speeches reeking with hypocrisy.” *** “I do not want the recognition of my service to be used as a glorification of war. National leaders want us to forget Viet Nam and forget that our leaders cannot be trusted, forget that modern war is inevitably a war against civilians and particularly children, forget that veterans died and were crippled and suffered for no good reason other than the power and the profit of the few, and forget that only a determined citizenry can stop the government when it embarks on mass murder.” (Boston Globe, November 11, 2001)

Be assured, Veterans for Peace will never fall in meekly behind any parade that is nothing more than ***“a glorification of war.”*** We will never be co-opted by the lies and propaganda and hypocrisy of the Pied Pipers of Patriotism who are once again leading the nation on a path of self -destruction.

Our nation has other voices and other leaders than just the blind leading the blind. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the nation to come home from war and militarism, rightly calling war ***“the most colossal of all evils.”*** He said our choice was between ***“non-violence or non-existence”***, either a renunciation of war or a descending spiral of violence leading towards nuclear catastrophe. Dr. King echoed the prophetic warning of General Omar Bradley, who said

“Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We’ve unlocked the secrets of the atom but not the lessons of the Sermon on the Mount. We know more about war than we do about peace. We know more about killing than we do about living.”

Veterans for Peace is committed to the U.S. Constitution and to the abolition of war, the only path away from continued nuclear proliferation leading to certain tragedy.

We are well served to remember that every veteran has taken a solemn oath ***“to support and defend the Constitution of the United States.”**** It is self-evident that a Constitution founded on self-government prohibits wars of aggression.

We call on every veteran present today to renew their commitment to defend the U.S. Constitution, stand up for the Bill of Rights, and oppose wars of aggression. The birthplace of liberty is perhaps a place of destiny to rededicate ourselves to live together as brothers and sisters rather than continuing to kill and die for ***“the power and profit of the few.”***

With gratitude for your attention.

Respectfully submitted,

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Commission resigned in opposition to the invasion of Viet Nam, March 1965

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**“I, _____(name)_____, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.”*