

We gather here today for a different kind of Memorial Day remembrance. We gather for a Memorial Day of Peace. Other gatherings today stress militarism, but we stress peace. We gather today to mourn and remember those killed in wars, particularly the current wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. And we remember not just the 4,000 plus Americans but the estimated *one million* Iraqis killed.

But in a little while we also will remember the victims of war who die later. The veterans who return with Post Traumatic Stress who end their own lives because they have been destroyed by the effects of war and what they have seen. The Iraqis who die of disease because war has destroyed their sources of clean water. The Vietnamese who died from the effects of Agent Orange years later. The Iraqis who will die in the future as a result of the radioactive depleted uranium weapons that have polluted their country.

The Memorial Day events elsewhere today never remember the people in foreign lands killed and maimed by American military adventures. They never remember the millions of yellow faces in Vietnam killed, or the million brown faces of Iraq. They never remember the women and children killed, soullessly described as “collateral damage.” *Their* remembrances are only about American soldiers. *Ours* are about *all* those victimized by war.

All you hear about in the corporate media is the so-called global war on terror. Well, to stop terrorism you need to stop oppressing and terrorizing people around the world, which is exactly what the U.S. and its client states do. Today we say that we want no more deaths due to wars for resources like oil in the Middle East. Today we say that we want no more deaths for American Empire. Today we say that this has to stop.

Today we will mourn and remember our lost brothers and sisters. We will mourn and remember them, but we also say very strongly that we don't want any more of them to die. Veterans For Peace has as part of its mission statement that we want to increase public awareness of the costs of war, and that we want to abolish war as an instrument of national policy. We stand by these goals today.

Major General Smedley D. Butler was the most decorated Marine in history. Our chapter of Veterans For Peace is named in his honor, and he said it best in 1933, and his words are still just as applicable today. He said, and I quote:

“War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses. . . .

There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its “finger men” to point out enemies, its “muscle men” to destroy enemies, its “brain men” to plan war preparations, and a “Big Boss” Super-Nationalistic-Capitalism.

It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent thirty- three years and four months in active military service as a member of this country's most agile military force, the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high class muscle- man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.

I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all the members of the military profession, I never had a thought of my own until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of higher-ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service.

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

During those years, I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints. The best *he* could do was to operate his racket in three districts. *I* operated on three continents. . . .” End quote

And so I say to you now — sow justice, reap peace. Peace, brothers and sisters.