



Agitate

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ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS THE REJECTION OF NATIONALISM, A RETHINKING OF CAPITALISM AND RECOGNITION FOR THE DIGNITY OF HUMANITY!

Is that too much to ask?

Christmas is an interesting time when it comes to radical idealism. After all, at what other time can people, with straight faces, talk about peace on Earth and good will to man? There's something special about this time of year, as if it is OK, just this once, to revel in fancies such as world peace and human unity. Only during Christmas can we accept...civilized ideas about our relationships with everyone in the world. Christmas cards are adorned with figures of children representing all of the different cultures holding hands around a picture of the world. Christmas is the magical season when the "impossible" ideals of a peaceful world can be discussed without a snicker.

But then there's the rest of the year when ideas like world peace and a community of men and women respecting each other's dignity is considered nothing more than naïve. Surely such a goal is impossible. Don't you know that warfare and hatred have always existed and, therefore, they will always exist? It's just not realistic to believe in peace and brotherhood and universal freedom. Such talk is radical claptrap—foolishness. It's alright to revel in fancy during Christmas, but to drag such drivel into the rest of the year is folly. And surely, to act on such ideals is a colossal waste of time and energy.

But ideals of peace and tolerance and recognition for humanity are not fools' errands. If these ideals ring true during the Yule time why are they not equally true the rest of the year? People, common people like you and me, want peace, freedom and dignity. We want to live our lives without conflict and strive to make every day a little better than the day before. We all want what is best for our children. Is there a common man or woman in the world who does not feel that peace is better than war? That freedom is better than oppression? Why is it only on Christmas that these paradigms can prosper, but after New Years they must be packed away with the rest of the ornaments?

Paradigms of peace are powerful. Much more powerful than propaganda for war. On Christmas 1914, British and German soldiers along the western front spontaneously negotiated a truce from the trenches. In the spirit of Christmas these bitter enemies put down their rifles and packed away their animosities. German soldiers decorated trees with candles and sang Silent Night. British soldiers responded

with English carols. Soon British and German soldiers exchanged gifts in the battered no man's land between the festering trenches. They smoked together, told jokes, poked fun at each other and laughed together. They shared stories of their lives, their families. Soldiers, who only hours before were competing in the horrors of warfare, were instead competing in a friendly game of soccer. And of course, they all got together and commiserated their fallen comrades, exchanging prayers.

For a few brief days the war came to an end and those who were once bitter enemies, convinced of the inhumanity of the other, recognized that the propaganda was not true. They were all human beings. They all had the same hopes and aspirations, loves and sorrows. For these soldiers the war stopped—at least for Christmas. Once Christmas was over the battle raged anew. This brief moment, a Christmas miracle, became known as The Christmas Truce. It is an iconic story of the power of Christmas.

But it's not just the power of Christmas. Christmas was just the premise. The story of the Christmas Truce represents the power of peace and humanity. Human beings are not naturally warlike. It takes a great deal of power and energy to convince human beings to do battle with other human beings. It only takes one simple premise to convince them to respect each other.

After the Christmas Truce, the power elite, the generals who were, of course, not living in trenches but rather in fancy chateaux, were nonplussed by the audacity of common soldiers arbitrarily deciding that the war was on hold. Some tried to rally the soldiers to fight through Christmas, tried to end the de facto truce, but they failed. So they resolved never to allow such an interruption of their martial aims again. Henceforth generals on both sides ordered round the clock bombardments on Christmas to ensure that neither side would have the opportunity to enjoy a few days of peace. They rotated soldiers from one section to another so they could not "get to know" the enemy or become too comfortable with their surroundings. The power elite had to kill the Christmas spirit—the spirit of peace.

Thus, revealed in the story of the Christmas Truce, is the fact that war and intolerance are tools of power, not imperatives of human nature. If anything, human nature is peaceful and respectful. Elite power must find ways to counteract the natural human instinct to avoid war and human adversity to killing other human beings.

One such tool is Nationalism. Nationalism is a paradigm developed by elite interests to convince others of the primacy of their nation, and therefore their national "interests." It's amazing, however, just how much "national interests" happen to coincide with elite "capital interests" or "power interests." National interest is very rarely applicable to the "common interest."

The nationalist paradigm has three components. First is the knowledge that one's nation is superior to all other nations. One's nation is inherently good, therefore everything done by the nation is good. This is demonstrated by the notion, "my nation, right or wrong." The nationalist believes that his is one nation "under god," all other nations are not so divinely inspired. When his nation goes to war the nationalist knows it is in the name of justice and freedom and he should stand behind his country. When his nation commits acts of barbarism, like war crimes and torture, then the righteous ends must justify the malignant means.

Secondly, the nationalist knows that all other nations are inferior to his own. The interests of one's nation come before the interests of other nations or even the interests or needs of the world. His nation is the cradle of civilization in a world of barbarians. Poverty that exists in other countries exists because those cultures are just not able to be rich and take care of their own.

Thirdly, the nationalist knows that other nations are a threat. All countries want to take what his country has. They want the naturally superior stuff, wealth and power of his nation. "Those people" hate us for our superiority, our freedom and our prosperity. And those inferior nations will stop at nothing to take or destroy what we have. They will try military force, weapons of mass destruction or terrorism. Or they may immigrate into our country in droves in a de facto "invasion." The nationalist believes that we must protect what we have by building a better military, by securing our borders, by pre-emptive warfare.

In essence, the nationalist is ethnocentric, racist, xenophobic...
...and wrong!

Nationalism divides the people of the world. It is this division that serves the interests of the elite. By dividing the world into guarded ethnic enclaves it becomes easier to control the behaviors of people. By ensuring that the common man never recognizes the humanity of his neighbor it becomes easier to ensure that these neighbors never recognize their common interests, that they never unify to demand change.

It makes it easier to exploit these populations, to separate the laborers from the consumers from the profiteers. Our system of capitalism cannot exist without nationalist paradigms. And nationalism must be maintained through the perpetuation of war and fear.

And this has never been more true than it is today. Capitalism has expanded beyond the national, become transnational, or global. As a global enterprise elite capitalists thrive. But the very technological infrastructure that must be in place to maintain global capitalism can also be used to create a global humanism. Ironically, the very infrastructure on which global capitalism rides is the same infrastructure that could destroy nationalism, the fuel of capitalism.

So the power elite must walk a very tenuous high wire between global markets and global culture, between transnational corporations and transnational communication. As dangerous as was peace in the trenches of France during World War I for the power elite, the prospect of a global peace movement is devastating.

And it's just around the corner. On February 15, 2003 tens of millions of protestors all around the world coordinated a two day protest against a war that had not yet begun. For the first time in history people from dozens of different cultures joined in a single voice to say no to war. Granted, the United States elite demanded war and got it through lies and manipulation. The global peace movement, however, demonstrated that it was a force to be reckoned with. Patrick Tyler of the New York Times called the power

of global public opinion the "second superpower." (New York Times, 2/17/2003)

People all over the world are realizing that war and oppression and intolerance are paper tigers propped precariously with lies in the service of the powerful and greedy. Now that people can communicate across the globe like embattled soldiers once communicated across the trenches in war battered France, we can share in each other's humanity, dignity, hopes and dreams. We can celebrate each other's victories and commiserate in each other's losses. We the "people," the people of the world, can share our cultures, experience the beauty in other cultures and recognize the values that we all hold dear.

The time of the closed minded, the bigoted, the racist, the xenophobic is at an end. We are entering an era of insight and sharing and tolerance...an era of global humanity. The cynics and the Machiavellis of the past are still holding the reigns of power, but the tethers are frayed and the yolk rotted. We don't believe their lies, we don't accept their direction. So what direction do we take?

We follow the meandering path of the daydreamers and starry eyed idealists who believe that a peaceful world is possible. We look to the struggles of the past to help us construct a fruitful future. The common man and woman can create a better world, a peaceful world, a clean world, a world of justice, mercy and benevolence.

But first we must cast aside the naysayers, the cynics and those who profit from human suffering. We do this by saying no to the poisonous paradigms they offer. What's more, we can speak in one voice and demand that our humanity be recognized. We can speak in one voice and illuminate a paradigm of global humanity. We can say no to destruction and weave an elaborate tapestry of cultural creation.

And we can do this three hundred and sixty five days a year. We are no longer relegated to talking about the ideals of peace and a brotherhood of man during Christmas only to hide behind cowardly "realism" the rest of the year. Peace on earth and goodwill to man are "realistic" when all is said and done. It is realistic if we abandon our unthinking loyalty to nationalism and capitalism and recognize our shared humanity in a global culture

If you're interested in changing the paradigm then sign on with a brand new organization started by the Andoscia Sociology Project called Change the Paradigm. Become a voice for change at www.changetheparadigm.org

Take Action!

Are you a dreamer? Do you think a better, peaceful world is possible? If so, there are millions like you. The trick is to network with them. Listed are just a few sites where such networking can take place:

- www.greatdreams.com
- www.unitedforpeace.org
- pax.protest.net
- www.worldpeacecampaign.co.uk
- nonviolence.org

