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Subject: Your Longest Night Speech

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To: GrannyD@monad.net

Speech

Hi Doris,

It would be great to have this speech on your CD. DO you know if there is a recording of it anywhere? If not, we should consider this one as worthy of recording.

Thanks,

John-Michael

America's Longest Night

Statement given at a Veterans for Peace Solstice Concert, Gainesville, Florida, December 22, 2003 by Doris "Granny D" Haddock

Greetings to you all, Brave Veterans for Peace and Friends!

We now come to the longest night of the year. In ancient times people worried that the sun would just keep falling further on the horizon until the world turned to one long, cold night.

But we have come to understand that there is a rhythm to life, and that the dark is followed by the light, and the sun halts its retreat and begins its way back to us. And so it is in the history of our nation, for there is some natural gravitational pull that provides for a return of human warmth after the frightening chill of dark times.

America, politically, is in one of the darkest nights of its history. There is a way forward, and the forces of nature are with us.

Although many of us hesitated to think it as such, America suffered something very much like a coup three and a half years ago. A radical faction took over the institutions of government after sending thugs to physically stop a vote that was not going their way. That sounds harsh to say, but history now shows it to be the simple truth, and every day's news plays out the brutal changes sought by this usurping faction. If American values are for the growth of the middle class, the equality of the races, the projection of peace and justice in the world, and for the preservation and advance of our own rights and freedoms, then this coup is so radically against the values of the nation that it may be called a kind of treason. But it is different in that it is a legal treason, just as the large campaign donations from business interests are legal bribery. This complication has put many to sleep, but also it has caused many others to awaken from long political sleeps.

In the years since the 2000 election, this coup, which was launched on behalf of a wealthy elite, has destroyed or damaged our ability to care for each other now and for decades to come, has redefined American policy abroad in a unilateral new and bloody garment, has ruthlessly ravaged the environment, and has coldly undermined the personal liberties and rights formerly granted to all Americans through our Bill of Rights. It is indeed an overthrow of some sort, though it is sophisticated and the old institutions remain functioning and appear to be little changed--though they are propped-up corpses. The same wealthy elite who yet engineer this American nightmare, thanks to corporate

deregulation they paid for with awesome bribes legalized as campaign contributions, own our largest news organizations, which they have silenced on all but issues of films and celebrities and celebrity crimes and foreign danger and the bright young heroes and martyrs of America's New Imperial Army. The corporate radio stations, and much of the cable spectrum, is filled with the mind-poisoning lies of this big lie machine.

If brave courts and a bare handful of elected Members of Congress who are not corporate whores nip at the heels of this coup, they do not long deflect the cruel trajectory of this overthrow. We worry now for our very elections. We know we cannot endure another four years of it--and yet we will have to do just that, if a fair election decides in that direction.

Those of us who are awake to the villainy, who wonder why the few good newspapers do not call it the treason it is, who despair sometimes at the comatose intoxication of our neighbors, have to now work an important miracle for our nation and its future.

And on this solstice night let us know that the cycles of nature do favor our work and they doom our greedy and hatemongering enemies.

Our strength rises from the gentle and fair aspect of the American character, which is indeed mighty. There are other aspects of our character, as our violent history shows. But at heart, Americans have an idea of America as a good and fair and caring place. It is the America they cherish.

We who are awake must become circles of influence in our families, neighborhoods and workplaces, so that the next election will be the counter-coup. Republicans, Democrats, Greens and Independents must unite to elect people who will destroy the goose-stepping advance of this un-American invasion that now is destroying our moderate and rational nation. Our enemies are not Republicans or their party, which has been hijacked away from its values of moderation, fiscal conservatism, American jobs, American family businesses, and individual rights and privacies. Good Republicans must be tough against this takeover, and Democrats must help them by offering useful candidates for this moment of historic intervention and correction. These candidates must be able to not only offer a strong and wide bridge, but--and here is the trick--they must be able to inspire the half of the citizenry who do not vote, for their services are needed if we are to come into November with overwhelming strength, so that no villainy by election officials or voting machine makers can have enough effect.

After the ~~November~~ ^{next} election, if it is a fair election, we must live with the result. All our energies are required now, in these months before the election, if we believe in democracy as we say we do.

And democracy is indeed what it is about. Democracy is the welling-up of power from the hearts and minds of free and equal citizens. It is a conceptual framework that the radical right abhors. It is why they insist upon the strict hierarchy of a creationist view, where orders are all given from yet higher above and there is no creativity or power below--only servants, only slaves, who need no rights or protections or health care or overtime, nor life itself. It is a power-mad mindset that invades every aspect of their thinking. It is a neurotic --and in some cases psychotic-- illness that now threatens the peace and health of the world.

Many of our neighbors are mentally disposed to look to political, cultural or religious leaders for the formation of their own opinions,

4
8

and they do not see what is in front of them or how their own lives are being destroyed. While these many are authority-friendly, others of us are not that at all. We the authority-averse have had our smoke alarms blaring in our heads for three and a half years now, and we offer our services to those who have fallen asleep in the smoke and who need waking or dragging from the building.

When America has good, decent and creative leaders again, those neighbors of ours who only take their cues from leaders will be singing friendlier tunes again. But for now, we have a massive rescue effort ahead of us, and we had better know what this struggle is all about.

It is a culture war. Remarkably, it is not as much about issues as you might think. We met a fellow in a West Virginia coffee shop who thinks Bush may not be able to win, so he is thinking about moving his support to Kerry. "He's a vet and he seems like a person of moral strength, like Bush," he said. White fraternity boys at Ole Miss in Oxford, Mississippi watched a Dem debate and came out impressed with Dean, according to a TV pundit. Why? "He seemed like the strongest guy," was the group agreement. And of course Arnie won in California. An African-American college student in Philadelphia said he would support Arnie for President if he could. Why? "You know, man, the Terminator!" he said--as if that said it all.

The common thread in these examples is this: it isn't about issues; In a dumbed-down political environment, it's about the personal strength or, more truly, the perception of personal strength. It is to be a battle of comic book heroes, and issues are not important, except as weapons of character assassination.

So when one democrat criticizes the issue position of another democrat, it doesn't do much damage except to the accuser, who looks weak to be making criticisms about things that no one really cares about. A culture of fear has been shaped, and the voters demand a strong leader to lead them through it. Issues are only important to the political junkies like us.

A culture war cannot be won if it is fought like a regular political campaign. It is about the creation of images and the framing of futures and the posterization of complex candidates into comic book colors. It is more like professional sports promotion. Until all the candidates understand this -Bush and Rove certainly do--they won't stand much of a chance. If Dean has a head start, it is because he does get it. If you want another candidate to beat him and Bush, you had better send him or her to comic book school.

And while the campaigns do all that, we the people have to use the issues to get to our friends, family members, coworkers and neighbors, and open their eyes to where their self-interest resides in this battle of dumbed-down warriors. They will not get this information from the campaigns.

As I say when I rap it to students, "It's not just a game for your Matrix mind: It's a culture war--you're on the front line." And so we are this war's foot soldiers, and foot soldiers are all about shoe leather, not email.

The Democratic Party seems not yet up to this challenge of fighting and winning a culture war. The moderate wing of the Republican Party, as we know, is in chains. That leaves you and me and the temporary institutions of the counter coup that we may devise.

It will require discipline if we are to succeed--not the strong suit of

we the authority averse. But we will do it.

The MeetUps of the candidate campaigns, the email-based progressive organizations, and the local groups that have formed around peace and Bill of Rights issues must coordinate their efforts in prosecuting a simple and well-understood strategy.

In terms of logistics, I hope the Dean people, who are so very good at websites and email, can use their talent to turn "Dean Space," as they call the environment where hundreds of local Dean websites communicate, into "Team Space," where the volunteers of all the campaigns can coordinate voter registration and issue education work.

I hope MoveOn and the other e-orgs will be the communications committee for such an effort.

And we must remember that much of what is done on the web and through email is preaching to our choir. Victory is to be had in shoe leather, not in emails. The email lists, of course, can raise the money to finance the shoe leather, and finance advertising.

Ads, however, will be ineffective unless we realize that those many people who only believe authority figures need to hear from cultural authority figures if they are to change their minds. Millions of dollars have already been wasted for lack of that understanding.

For myself, I hope to recruit as many people as possible for shoe leather work. We are standing in front of stores, getting into local newspaper and television stories, and visiting music clubs on campuses to recruit volunteers (I have learned to rap, as one can convey a lot of message in a short time, and they do pay attention and get emotionally involved). I hope to use these volunteers to get to many others--specifically, to help tens of thousands of working women to set up voter registration offices on their desks and to become circles of influence within their workplaces, so that everyone will be registered, well-informed about issues, candidates and voting procedures, and so that they will indeed vote on election day.

Let us take courage on this dark night. Let us know that we have the wisdom and the courage and the aggressive love to do this, to manage this counter coup, to save our country. It isn't enough to know what we don't want, by the way. We must hold in our imaginations an America and a world where people are decent to one another, where they live in harmony with the earth that sustains them, and where the potential of each person is respected and developed in freedom. It is not an authoritarian world. It is not a world of harshly divided good and evil. It is a world of reasonable people, living with manners, forgiveness, and joy. If we are to be an underground of rebels who struggle for the cause of love, then that, too, is a joy, and we have already won. But we struggle also for the lives of others, and for a future of the world's children and their children, and this struggle is just beginning.

So take your part. Sign up for duty if you have not already done so. Work for a candidate, work for a party. If you can spare the time, work with me by signing up at GrannyD.com. We know that dark times go away. But here is a hard fact: they only go away because brave people make them do so. Let us do so.

Thank you.

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