

## ***THE DEATH OF DEMOCRACY?***

**“Take Back our Country” Rally, Sponsored by the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition [NOAC], April 25, 2003 - Cleveland  
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Is democracy dead?

Some think so. Others say it's merely on life support. Still others assert that something can't be pronounced dead which has never really lived.

We gather here in front of US Senator Mike DeWine's office to bury this flag and in doing so make the claim that our sovereignty, our ability to govern ourselves politically and economically, is being buried as well.

Did we the people vote to invade Iraq? If anything, public opinion prior to the invasion was rock solid against a unilateral preemptive attack.

Did the public ever give permission to send our children, relatives, friends and neighbors as soldiers to Iraq?

Did you or I ever cast a ballot for or against having our civil rights slashed following 9/11? Or \$80 billion US tax dollars spent on the war? Or the Bechtel corporation receiving \$34.6 million in contracts after being one of a handful of companies invited to bid on the reconstruction of Iraq? Or on the ongoing occupation of Iraq? Or veterans benefit cuts?

If democracy is not expired or at least in intensive care, then what do we call a system of government where a person who receives fewer votes than his opponent wins and is officially handed the Presidency by a Supreme Court of nine elites appointed for life?

If democracy is alive and well, then how can a majority of the PUBLIC, which must have honest and complete information about their government, receive most of their information from PRIVATE corporate, special-interest, media outlets?

If democracy is flourishing, how did multinational oil, and financial corporations get their way in waging a war for oil in Iraq?

If democracy is robust, then how can business corporations have in many respects greater access, power and so-called corporate person "rights" than human persons?

And one more question: Since when did the US administration acquire such a glut of democracy that it can go exporting it to Iraq?

We are gathered here in the shadows of the building where US Senator Mike DeWine has his office. Does this strike anyone as odd? A PUBLIC official who is supposed to represent we the people who has his supposedly PUBLIC office in a PRIVATE office building. And a major national banking corporation building with incredible centralized wealth and power at that! This doesn't seem to square with where a public official should be located.

Between 1997-2002, Senator Mike DeWine raised \$7.5 million in campaign donations/investments. Of this total, 93.3% came from business, 1% from labor. Senator George

Voinovich over the same period raised \$8.8 million. Of this total, you guessed it, 93% came from business and 1% from labor.

The #1 corporate sector where Mike DeWine's received the most contributions/investments was Financial, Insurance and Real Estate. It's not too surprising I guess that Mike DeWine has his office in a bank building but won't meet directly with people like us.

Last year, Mike DeWine and George Voinovich WILLINGLY, GLADLY, SUPPORTIVELY, ENTHUSIASTICALLY handed over their right to declare war to the unelected President of the United States. They were not threatened. They were not bribed. They were not cajoled. They gave up their constitutional right without a fight, without a gun, knife, missile or weapon of mass destruction pointed at them. Do they even have the right to give up their right?

Kings unilaterally declare wars. So do dictators. Congress is supposed to check concentrated power. This was blatantly undemocratic.

So how do we invigorate democracy? Bring it back to life? Resurrect it? Or create it meaningfully for the first time?

Democracy is more than simply the right to protest and DISSENT. It's the right to DECIDE, to govern ourselves. . Democracy is more than simply the right to speak out with a MEGAPHONE on a street corner. It's the right to equal access to a MICROPHONE over the public airwaves.

Here are seven suggestions:

First, we must do democracy in our own circles, groups, campaigns, churches, neighborhoods, coalitions. Involve people meaningfully in every stage of the decision-making process. Be genuinely inclusive. Listen. Search for solutions that take into account the greatest number of people possible. We must be the change we wish to see in the world. This is true movement building.

Second, we have to create our own media, NOAC now has over 900 email addresses. I would like to see 10,000 email addresses. Hey why not! We now have a website – [www.NOACinfo.org](http://www.NOACinfo.org) On the site is an address to send new email addresses. I ask each and every person here to recruit just 2 new persons for the NOAC email list. Have them go to the website or go yourself.

Third, we need to reassert control over the electronic media. We control the airwaves. The airwaves are the commons. Radio and TV stations that distort, distract or ignore us should be held accountable. Every station has to have their license renewed so many years. The FCC looks over their public file. We need to make sure that if and when local TV and radio stations are unfair, we send them a letter and ask that it be put into their FCC file... then cc the FCC. We can also challenge the license renewal policy... and challenge the media corporations themselves.

Fourth, we must hold public officials accountable for their pro-war positions. They work for us. Go after them. Write. Call. Vote. Bird dog. Act.

Fifth, we should make Senators. Make DeWine and Voinovich accountable for their actions. At state and local levels, there's a legal means people can use to force public officials to do their job – it's called a writ of mandamus. I don't know whether there's an equivalent legal tool at the federal level. Legal action should be explored. So should other actions.

Sixth, we can. expose undemocratic features of our own government and government policies. The US Consitution contains numerous undemocratic features related to the Supreme Court, the Electoral College, lack of voting rights for residents in the District of Columbia, lack of application of the Bill of Rights to people on corporate property (like malls, post offices, work places), and others. And we need to expose undemocratic features of US foreign policies – including how the US presence in Iraq is nothing short of an undemocratic occupation, how the US-controlled IMF and World Bank force nations to pervert their economies and societies, and how US-influenced international trade deals are not about trade at all but about corporate governance.

Finally, we need to abolish corporate personhood. Corporations shouldn't be involved in the political process – buying, renting, leasing, retaining elected officials. Period. A number of communities have already passed resolutions, one an actual ordinance, saying that corporations should not be treated as people. We may want to explore that here.

Some of these ideas can be done immediately, others are obviously long term. As we leave here today, may we work at all levels, both short and long-term, to REassert, if not ASSERT for the very first time, democracy in our community and country.

Thanks.