

**PREPARED REMARKS AT US LABOR AGAINST THE WAR [USLAW]
NATIONAL CONFERENCE, DECEMBER 2, 2006, CLEVELAND OHIO**

Greg Coleridge

Thank you for the invitation to speak before this inspiring and important gathering. My role today is to wrap up ... like a Holiday package... what has gone on at this conference.

I do so wearing not just one, but several, hats: representing the Northeast Ohio Anti-war Coalition, Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy, and as a student of social movements.

I want to reflect and amplify on one single point that I've heard repeatedly in different ways during the assembly, rally, march, speeches, and workshops – the one and only group that will lead the education and organization toward ending the war and occupation in Iraq will be us – the grassroots, workers, activists, students, people of faith, those concerned with human rights and civil liberties, women, people of color, neighborhood residents.

The ultimate challenges, hurdles, impediments, obstacles, and barriers we face concerning Iraq aren't from Bush, Cheney, or Condi; or from the CIA, FBI, NSA, Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines; or from the Republicans, Democrats, think tanks, corporate media, Halliburton, or oil corporations. It's us

us, not US.
democrats not Democrats.

Most politicians, major media mouthpieces, religious leaders, business corporate CEO's, diplomats, military leaders, think tankers have not, aren't and will not lead. It must be *We the People*. Us.

Truth is my friends, brothers and sisters; it's always been us. *We the People* have led, created and maintained whatever degree of humane social change and democracy we have or have ever had in this country.

It was us (actually our forbears) who provided the inspiration for the revolutionary document, the *US Declaration of Independence*, which says that there are certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. "That to secure these rights, Governments ... deriv[e] their just powers from the consent of the governed... That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government." In fact, it's not the right but the duty of people.

It was many of us (again our forbears), who took to heart these revolutionary principles and both fought, both nonviolently and violently, in the revolution against the British King, the King's armies and the King's crown corporations – the most powerful nation on earth at the time. It was working people after all, including indentured servants, as well as slaves, who comprised the vast majority of Revolutionary America and were the major victims of the Crown's economic, political and military occupation.

It was us, outraged by the lack of rights and remuneration after the revolution from the new American rulers who had replaced the old British rulers, who forced a Bill of Rights to be included into the new Constitution, a document originally conceived by men of property, the minutes of which were kept secret for over 50 years.

It was us, workers in fact; who in the 1830's felt democracy could only be achieved by a 10-hour workday and public education – so those became the goals of the early labor movement.

Workers felt that to create and maintain a democracy, they needed to be educated, and to be educated they needed time to go to school.

It was us, again worker, who called the 13th Amendment, the “Labor” Amendment -- since its call for abolishing slavery certainly must also apply to abolishing involuntary servitude on the job. That denial of freedom of speech, assembly and organization on the job or the right to strike and boycott, were the equivalent to involuntary servitude

It was us, workers yet again, who formed the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. The Knights called for the creation of “cooperative institutions such as will tend to supersede the wage system, by the introduction of [a] co-operative industrial system.” They called for the creation of producer, consumer and distributive cooperatives” ... as well as exercising power through the ballot and the boycott.

It was us who called for the creation of political parties which bypassed the major business-driven political parties, parties like those here in this state -- the Ohio People’s Party and Ohio Labor Party. During the 1890’s Ohio Mine Worker President John McBride in 1894 in calling for an alliance between these 2 parties said:

“All honest, ardent advocates of labor’s cause believe that corporate power, when aided and abetted by the judicial, executive and military arm of the state and national governments can and will override the rights of our people and oppress wage workers, regardless of the efforts of organized labor, as now constituted and directed, to prevent it...By entering into politics, we can free ourselves from the chain of slavery.”

It was us who created popular movements for the right of women to vote, labor to organize, and civil rights; to end slavery, child labor, above ground nuclear testing and the Vietnam war; to create social security, environmental protections and consumer protections; and to demand prisoner rights, gay-lesbian rights, and immigrant rights.

Moving ahead to more recent times...

It was us who came together -- working people in coalition with peace people, community members, students, people of faith, and others to oppose the US attack on Iraq beginning in the fall of 2002. We opposed the war on many grounds, for many reasons. We marched, rallied, held teach-ins, met with legislators. We opposed the war buildup, said that an attack would create a quagmire and incredible backlash. We said that there was no evidence of WMDs, a Saddam-Osama link and an imminent threat to the US. We opposed Congress willfully giving up their Constitutional power to go to war to the President.

It was us who in February 2003 took part in historic global demonstrations against the impending invasion of Iraq. In reaction, New York Times writer Patrick Tyler wrote in a February 17th article that: “the huge anti-war demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.”

It was us who stated immediately that the reasons Bush, Powell and Co said we’ve going to war were all lies and had no credibility. To liberate the people of Iraq. To unleash democracy for the very first time. To let Iraqis determine their own future without outside interference. To be allies on the side of liberty and freedom.

It was us who early on fundamentally criticized the legitimacy of Coalition Provisional Authority, led by Paul Bremer; the Iraqi elections and the working up of a Constitution – all done in the giant shadow of foreign occupation and influence. How democratic is any system of government when foreign occupiers define and control the government and economy?

It was us (European grassroots) who pressured their governments not to send troops or funds for the war and later to bring their troops home. In a number of instances, it has happened.

It was us (a majority of grassroots Iraqis) who oppose the US occupation. Many of us heard this sentiment first hand a couple of years ago when USLAW sponsored a delegation of Iraqi labor leaders who told us that the US military presence legitimizes the extremists and delegitimizes moderates like themselves.

It was us, we the people, who voted in the mid-term elections for anti-war candidates. The message of the elections was crystal clear. No more stay the course. No more wait and see. End the war NOW. No more promises. Time to deliver.

It is us who increasingly are critical of elite plans for Iraq, including the Baker Plan and Pentagon Review, which include 3 options -- dubbed "Go Big, Go Long, and Go Home." Who's asking the people in this country? My sense is the public has it's own 3 options for getting out of Iraq -- "by land, by sea and by air!"

It is us (you in particular) and other USLAW activists who will bring an end to the war through your agreed-to decisions this weekend

- Through your own internal education, organizing, administration, and fundraising work with union leadership and rank and file.
- Through organizing an Iraqi study tour
- Through specific labor-led lobby delegations
- Through collecting signatures
- Through exploring putting a human face on the war by organizing a delegation of US union leaders to visit there.

It is us (USLAW in coalition with others) who will bring an end to the war by

- Organizing educational forums
- Organizing mass actions, including the January 27 DC march, 4th anniversary actions and any action in support of ending Iraq funding.
- Political lobbying in coalition
- Make connections between other issues that address impending wars, occupations and efforts to widen and deepen empire.

Yet, I believe there must be more to what we think, who we are, what we do. I'm tired... tired of opposing one war at a time and not examining more fundamental questions.

We can't simply oppose bringing the troops home without also opposing the US "permanent" military bases, advisors and corporations. After all, corporate globalization and militarization go hand-in hand.

We can't simply work for peace and ignore justice. "No Justice. No Peace," as the signs says. Without justice, all we have is just order.

Lastly, I want to plant a seed... and hope somewhere over time it grows... about what else we must address.

Democracy. Self-governance. Self-determination.

We can't simply talk about the war without also talking about why us have never had a real voice in the decisions on the war. Did we directly vote via a national referendum on going to war? Sending troops? Spending billions? Can we vote directly now on ending the war? On cutting spending?

We have a big problem in this country. It goes deeper than the vast array of serious issues many of us work tirelessly to remedy. At root it's not a political, economic, social or even ecological

problem. It is a problem of belief – namely a belief that since our break with the King, *We the People* have had the power, *or once had the power*, to shape our own lives and that of our communities and country. Yet it was not *We the People* the Constitution put in charge, nor were the people’s protections or rights its *central* purpose. Governing power would not rest with the propertyless or with Native Americans, African Americans or women. That power has *never* rested with those lacking wealth or an elevated association with the corporate form.

The Constitutional foundation of this country was fixed against self-governance from the start, despite our being taught, for as long as this nation is old, that the United States is the most democratic land on the planet and the U.S.

We must change the ground rules governing this nation. People in revolutionary movements do this all the time. Look at the current crisis in Oaxaca, Mexico. What started out as a popular demand for increased teacher wages evolved to issues of basic self-governance. Other nonviolent revolutionary movements in the former Soviet bloc and elsewhere have evolved due to expanding their analysis from single problems and demands to more fundamental ones --- including the right to basic democracy.

I’m not suggesting that we stop working on ending the war. You shouldn’t. I’m not going to. But we need to contextual it. We have to do more than just make conditions a little less bad on single issues.

We need to work ultimately not toward creating an anti Iraq war movement or even a peace movement. We need to create a democracy movement where we have a real voice in the decisions affecting our lives.

One more point. Right now, when we each work on our own single issues, we see problems through that prism (i.e. not enough health care, too many toxics in the air, the war) and remain divided. Our solutions, therefore, are specific to these problems (i.e. more health care, fewer toxics, end the war) and, thus, are fragmented. We never come together.

However, if we correctly identify our individual problems and concerns from the start as “not enough democracy,” then our solution is “more democracy.” This has the potential to unite across issues and constituencies.

Don’t stop what you’re doing. We can’t. But as we work toward building a movement to end the war, let us do so in ways that build a movement toward real democracy.