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SOME COMMENTS ON MILITARISM AND MISEDUCATION

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In the words of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, militarism is "the tendency to regard military efficiency as the paramount interest of the state." Whether or not the United States of America is a militaristic country is a topic I'll address shortly, but first allow me to give a more robust, working definition of the term. Militarism includes the boundless accumulation of excessive stock piles of weaponry and military technology; a bellicose policy in world and domestic affairs; and the transmission of the military mind set to the general public. As for Oxford's definition, it goes without question that military matters are indeed of paramount importance in our government's rationale. Truly, more than any other area, defense spending has been a unifying factor for America's two dominant political parties throughout the last century. The military is this country's sacred cow, and has been coddled by Democrats and Republicans alike, with only voices on the fringe of the political spectrum ever questioning its entitlement.

The federal budget is divided into two categories: mandatory and discretionary spending. Mandatory spending consists of funds for programs which have been mandated by existing law and which Congress is not supposed to touch. Discretionary spending is that money which Congress has the power and flexibility to dole out annually to those agencies and causes it deems worthy. Consistently, military matters take precedence over discretionary spending on public programs. Weapons contracts are passed promptly, while federal monies for public domain programs, like Head Start and the National Endowment for the Arts, are left to battle it out for the remaining discretionary dollars. Annual current military expenditures in the United States hover around three hundred billion dollars, not including veterans benefits or the yearly interest on the national debt attributed to past military bloat. Military-associated debt falls somewhere between fifty and eighty percent, depending on the source, of the 350 billion odd tax dollars spent annually on debt repayment.

Considering only current discretionary military funding, we outspend the combined military budgets of the next twelve highest spending nations in the world, many of whom are our military allies. The US military budget is five times larger than that of present-day Russia, the world's next-largest defense spender. We are still spending 83% of Cold War defense averages, despite the fact that we and our allies control 63% of the world military expenditures.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, credible threats to national defense are comparatively minute. The Defense Secretary under Papa Bush, Dick Cheney, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1992 that military threats to the US are "so remote that they are difficult to discern." For a while there was talk of cutting the military budget and the prospects of a "peace dividend" in the hundred billion dollar range. However, the "military-industrial complex," so aptly named by President Eisenhower, found a decline in their power and profits unacceptable. Soon military threats were manufactured, in the personae of rogue nations and, more recently, so called "states of concern": namely Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Libya, Syria, and long-time nemesis Cuba. Those countries, the biggest threats to the world's

only superpower, spend together on war preparations one twentieth as much as the US does.

Clearly, the exorbitant amounts the US spends are not for legitimate defense purposes. That is, unless we decide that legitimacy is defined by a Spartan devotion to war and a sort of paranoid hypochondria. In fact, much of the defense spending our government now undertakes is done not out of verifiable defense concerns but to line the pockets of defense contractors, and to insure world domination by and the profitability of business interests outside the military sphere.

The current missile defense program, or Star Wars, is a fine example of both motives.

Despite failing test after test as a defensive weapon and criticism by a number of Nobel laureates and the scientific community as an unworkable project, plans are still being made to proceed with the boondoggle. The so-called National Missile Defense program may never protect the United States from nuclear attack. But it will generate huge profits, as military contractors are given full access to taxpayer dollars. The NMD program will most likely spur an arms race by other nations. This build-up by other nations to counter NMD will conveniently help justify larger military expenditures by American militarists.

However, the main purpose of NMD is to fully militarize space, so that the United States will be in a position to knock any nation's satellites out of commission, completely dominate near earth space, and deploy satellite weapons capable of striking targets on earth as well.

If the United States were interested in promoting peace and actual defense, military spending could be dramatically curtailed. Lawrence Korb, Reagan's Assistant Secretary of Defense, pinpointed 62 billion dollars in defense cuts (largely corporate welfare and handouts) that could be made immediately without jeopardizing national security. Robert McNamara, a former Secretary of Defense, is calling for a reduction of the military budget by a hundred billion. Many others have joined in demanding that military spending be brought down to a reasonable level. However, every year Congress grants billions more for military spending than even the Pentagon asks for.

That these billions of dollars are wasted only adds to the injustice of our federal priorities. However, the general precept of spending monies on bombs rather than for affordable housing or books for public schools is one that should cause a reevaluation of our society. A deteriorating social infrastructure cries out for help, but is thrown only scraps. Proven programs such as Head Start, Health outreach, subsidized housing, Aid to Families with Dependant Children, school lunch, and Women, Infants and Children Nutrition programs go underfunded or in some cases are cut. The poverty rate in the US is twice that of other industrial societies. The child poverty rate, one out of every five kids, is three to five times that of Western Europe. Nearly fifty million people in the US have no access to health care.

More devastatingly, on a world scale sixty million people starve to death a year according to the United Nations. UNICEF estimates that universal access to basic social services (sanitation, clean drinking water, basic nutritional needs, healthcare, and significant education) could be achieved with ten percent of the annual US military budget. That the cash goes to Boeing and Lockheed-Martin instead is a sobering, damning reality. We worship the god of War. A more accurate understanding of Bush's slogan would be, "leave no defense contractor behind." Millions of children are not only being left behind, they are being buried, because of a crazy militarized planet pretty much owned and operated by the greatest military power the world has ever seen.

While opportunities for reorganization of the military budget abound, I will now turn to the military connection with one area of neglected social spending: America's public education. Federal monies

devoted to education seem pitifully small when compared with public education needs and the military budget. Discretionary military funds are nine times greater than the education budget. According to a 1999 study done by the federal government's General Accounting Office, one out of every three school buildings in the country need extensive repair and replacement, at a total cost of 112 billion dollars. That's only for actual physical repairs to deteriorating school buildings and infrastructure. Additional sums are needed to bring American education up to par with other industrialized nations. However, since 1980 education spending for elementary, secondary, adult, and higher education has actually been cut by a third in terms of its share of total budget monies. As a consequence, the high school graduation rate in America is one of the worst among industrialized countries, and time and time again our school system ranks in the middle and lower range.

Money is not always the answer, as the heedless wastefulness of the Osprey helicopter and missile defense system have shown. However, while money cannot solve some problems, the youth of this country are far from hopeless causes. Low matriculation rates correspond to areas of increased poverty. Given the quality of facilities and education in some impoverished areas, it is not hard to see how school becomes an undesirable and even unhealthy place to be. Schools lack books, full-time teachers, classroom resources, working facilities--all things which money can supply, if only it were made available. The drive to learn must come from the student, but that drive can be fostered or broken by the conditions of a student's life. A life of dreary conditions and little opportunity leaves a defeated spirit. More than a few social commentators have noted that some public schools seem to be preparing America's youth, particularly black youth, for life in prisons. They are also preparing youth for military service.

In comes the Pentagon, with the one form of education subsidy that has grown exponentially over this last decade: JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps), the high school version of the college recruiting program, brought straight into thousands of public schools throughout America. It targets low income areas in particular, where the military knows it will have more success pitching its "I get eight years of your life" contract with those youth who have fewer opportunities. In some 3,000 public high schools, military advertising has become a mainstay of school life and one of the most prevalent intrusions of advertising into the school setting. Just as soft drink companies now contract with different schools to be the sole supplier for the student body, the branches of the military divide up the education landscape amongst themselves.

No one outside of JROTC seriously believes that the military is in the schools to help students better themselves or to save troubled kids, as its hucksters have claimed. Many students who enroll in the JROTC program recognize its disingenuous purpose as well (they're often the ones who drop out of the program). However, stalwart JROTC supporters, including some JROTC cadets, refuse to admit that the program is simply a low cost recruiting tool.

Adults who deny JROTC's recruiting nature generally tend to fall into one (or both) of two categories: either parents of JROTC students, who are unaware or don't like to think that they allow their kids to be subjected to a form of brainwashing; or school officials, who hesitate to admit the extent to which they have already allowed advertisement to be substituted for education.

But the evidence that the JROTC program is a tax-funded sales pitch is overwhelming. In a statement made early in 2000 by then Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, the Secretary asserted that JROTC is "one of the best recruiting devices that we could have." No matter how much we would like JROTC to be something else, when the man who pulls the military's strings (exceeded in authority only by the President) readily admits that JROTC is a first rate recruiting tool, it is difficult to claim otherwise. Remarkably many JROTC instructors are able to make this assertion in calm defiance of such bothersome facts.

Mr. Cohen's statement was made to the House Armed Services Committee. It seems to think JROTC works so well it is currently petitioning Congress to funnel even more tax dollars to the JROTC program in order to create hundreds of more JROTC units (i.e. recruitment outposts) in public schools across America. JROTC has already drastically expanded by over twelve hundred new programs since 1992. Most Americans are not keen to join the military, and JROTC plays an integral part in the Pentagon's desperate efforts to lure youth into dangerous and undesirable military jobs.

Despite spending record amounts per enlistee and over \$1.8 billion on recruiting in 1999, the military, for yet another year, fell short of its recruiting goals by thousands of soldiers. Perhaps they lost the market to the prison industry, the other prime dead end opportunity presented to the poor and people of color. In fact, enlistment rates have continually been so low that the military is calling on JROTC to step up its recruiting functions. In a recent order to all Army JROTC instructors, one that destroys any argument that JROTC is not a recruiting tool, the instructors were commanded to do more to "facilitate recruiter access to cadets in the JROTC program and the entire student body." The military is calling on JROTC because it knows the program can deliver, and for that reason the Defense Department and members of Congress want to expand the JROTC presence in public high schools. This planned expansion, which will bring the annual JROTC budget well over the 400 million mark, is being pushed at the same time that traditional military recruiters (the kind that don't teach JROTC) recently won a legal challenge to a law allowing schools to deny recruiters access to the campus grounds. Now schools that seek to prohibit Pentagon access will face punitive action for resisting military recruitment.

Bob Goldich, a specialist in national defense issues for the Congressional Research Service, confirms the point that JROTC is a superlative recruiting device: "I have told a good many people that if you wanted to create a long-term recruiting mechanism, give [a JROTC unit to] every high school in the country that wants one."

The attraction of the program lies in the results it obtains. According to the Department of Defense, those who take JROTC and graduate from high school are five times more likely to join the military than those who don't take the class. Such numbers provide compelling evidence, suggesting that JROTC is indeed a top-notch marketing tool. In addition, the cost sharing aspects of JROTC allow the Pentagon to saddle local school districts with more than half the costs for funding the program, thus saving the military a couple hundred million dollars. The program is effective, cheap, and, as Maryland JROTC instructor, Maj. Geoff Liddle, puts it, "this [JROTC] is more productive clearly because you have a multi-year opportunity to influence [the students]."

Given JROTC's recruiting and propaganda functions acknowledged by its own officials and instructors, it is not hard to imagine what the military has in mind when it describes "career and educational planning" as part of the class syllabus. Additionally, JROTC instructors are not held to the same teaching standards as other teachers. They are not required to have a teaching degree (and in fact many do not), which is mandatory for most other permanent teachers in school districts across the country. Their substandard training raises the question whether they are there to teach, or instead to play a role similar to the traditional military recruiter.

At an early age, as young as fourteen, hundreds of thousands of kids across the country are being militarized. An obedient, hierarchal, conformist mind set is being reinforced. A mini-militarized zone is being cultivated, with child soldiers decked out weekly in complete military uniforms, insignia, military rank, marching drills, and guns.

In fact, a new push is being made by the Pentagon. Instead of just an hour of access to our children's minds a day, the military wants a full school year. The first two all-JROTC public high schools have

been created, one already up and running in Chicago and one just founded in Oakland, despite vociferous public protest against its inception from the Oakland community. In these schools, all students are JROTC cadets and all staff is military personnel. Once again, public funds go to funding advertising in what's supposed to be a school.

However, JROTC supporters claim that JROTC is not there to beguile students. Instead, they assert that it exists to provide kids with an opportunity to learn more about the military as a possible career. Yet, this seemingly benign function is revealed as something more sinister when one notices the bias with which JROTC texts are saturated. Certainly most educators would agree that if a student is interested in military service, then information about that career choice should be made available. However, most teachers would also agree that this information should not be presented in such a way that fundamental facts, which would heavily influence a student's decision to enlist, are left out of what is taught. JROTC, however, does just that, and here is where the central objections to program reside. By bringing a sales mentality into the classroom and misrepresenting our military's past and present, JROTC does not provide students with the full picture of what the military is like. It conveniently chooses not to mention many of the nastier aspects of being in the armed forces. Discussion of war crimes and civilian massacres committed by our military and the Pentagon's promotion of torture is nonexistent in JROTC texts. The past and present problems with racism, sexism, and homophobia find little criticism in JROTC books, and the government's mistreatment of veterans goes unmentioned.

This deception is an inherent part of our military's character. Instead of devoting time and money to improving our schools, the military has spent increasingly larger sums on expensive, misleading ad campaigns and glossy, ingratiating commercials. Military advertising in many ways resembles an unscrupulous sales pitch. After all, recruitment is but a more aggressive form of advertising, where the salesman is not just after one's money but, in the case of the military, in pursuit of the possession of years and years of one's life. Our modern military bears some resemblance to the modern corporation, since both have a product to sell. While the GAP, for example, may be selling a sweater, the Defense Department sells a false image that the military is a heroic, infallible organization that is, and has always been concerned only with defending democracy, liberty and justice. For both the GAP and the military, the target audience is the same: the coveted teen demographic over whom advertisers drool. While the GAP tries to make its clothing look sleek, fashionable, and cutting-edge, the military does the same thing with its commodity, doing everything possible to make joining the service seem like the most alluring decision in the world. Such tactics stand out in JROTC texts. Just as the GAP doesn't make ads depicting their brutal use of sweatshop laborers, the military is not going to spend money mentioning its oppression of peoples abroad.

I'd like to pause for a moment to read an often-quoted statement by Major General Smedley Butler of the US Marine Corps in a speech delivered in 1933. While I have no exact citation, I believe the quotation to be accurately attributed to him. You will never find these words in a JROTC textbook.

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 and the expense of the masses. I believe in adequate defense at the coastline and nothing else. If a nation comes over here to fight, then we'll fight. The trouble with America is that when the dollar only earns 6 percent over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100 percent. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow the flag.

I wouldn't go to war again as I have done to protect some lousy investment of the bankers. There are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes and the other is the Bill of Rights. War for any other reason is simply a racket.

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 (where have I heard that name before?). 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.

Smedley Butler's remarks are dated in terms of the individual actors. However the roles of finance capital and oil interests and the drive to superexploit foreign workers are comparable to the situation today. The GAP in 2001 pays workers 12 cents to make a shirt they sell for twenty dollars. The Reagan administration and Ollie North made certain Central America was safe for the GAP. Things haven't changed much, except that more Americans than ever before may be cultivating a more spacious gap between their ears, since they believe the militaristic propaganda funneled to them through means inconceivable in Smedley's era. Of course, as educators we ought to be doing something to counter these distortions, myths, and lies.

A chapter or two of basic facts, such as those enunciated by General Butler, would be necessary to balance the fairy tales in JROTC texts, as well as in most political science and history courses not run by the Pentagon. Educators may ask themselves if their profession has or is becoming a "racket" serving, in Butler's words, "Super-Nationalistic-Capitalism". If so, then what excuse can they make? Will educators be forced to recognize that their mental faculties, despite the nature of their profession, likewise remain "in suspended animation"?

What are some of the facts that conveniently disappear from JROTC texts and the halls of higher education as well? Documented by the US government, from 1798-1895 our military intervened in the affairs of other nations 103 times to put down popular revolts that threatened American economic interests. In the following 106 years the numbers have multiplied and documentation has grown more abundant. Our nation is most certainly a militaristic one. But its militarism is a vehicle for a culture that makes economic gain, exploitation, and subjugation the paramount interest of the state. It is the muscle

that imposes the economic stranglehold.

I do not ask that JROTC texts advance such a view, since it is only an interpretation, although one based on facts. What I do demand is that they present existing documentation of US-funded genocide in the recent and distant past. That they present the stories of 2-3 million Indochinese firebombed and engulfed by US napalm, or the four hundred Iraqi civilians incinerated in a bomb shelter one February evening by smart-bombs, or the Nicaraguan farmers executed with US weapons and by US-trained, aided, and financed Contras. They need make no moral commentaries or suggest right or wrong, since the evidence speaks for itself.

It must be understood that JROTC exists to recruit, not to teach. However, realization of the deceptive, opportunistic nature of the program should not excuse JROTC from meeting fundamental academic standards. While we may not expect the military to be truthful voluntarily, we have a right to demand that our school boards require that truth and provide a balanced, honest, unbiased, and objective education in every subject taught in school. Dangerous in all cases, the distortion of truth should particularly be guarded against in the public school, where education should be inviolate and truth should not be sacrificed. As in all things, there is both good and bad in our military, but JROTC repeatedly censors the negative, and therefore hides the full picture from students.

To believe that JROTC represents the military's altruistic attempts to help the youth of America is extremely naive. As former Secretary of Defense Cheney put it, "the military is not a social welfare agency, it's not a jobs program." By the same logic, neither is the military a decent teacher nor a valid educational provider. JROTC was designed to recruit students into the military, not to enhance their minds or improve their character. This conclusion is evident from the unfalteringly biased and militaristic viewpoint the JROTC curriculum espouses. Written by the military, it provides students with a superficial understanding of our armed forces. Such is the travesty that results when advertisements are substituted for education and militarism invades our budgets, our minds, and our schools.

If educators allow the military to utilize educational institutions as organs of military indoctrination, the educational mission of a democratic society is thereby abandoned. If educators remain silent and quiescent about the economic interests that define the military mission, and allow the military to miseducate students into believing myths that obscure this mission and its foundation in the drive for profits, then they turn their backs on the truth and are partners in that militarized indoctrination process themselves.

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