

The state of the peace movement today

Mary Ann McGivern | Oct. 11, 2013 NCR Today

I read with interest both [Patrick O'Neill's](#) [1] and [Tom Cordaro's](#) [2] analyses of the decline and perhaps the rise of the Catholic peace movement. They are both right that bishops and people of color are absent. But the basic question implies that if we all get out in the streets one more time, we'll stop the military-industrial complex.

Movements like peace, civil rights and Occupy Wall Street all benefited from identifiable obstacles that the power of the people can overcome. War, Jim Crow laws and corporate chicanery called out for public resistance. However, it has turned out to be more difficult to jail Wall Street bankers than we anticipated. It is far more difficult to unravel racial profiling and release black men from prison than it was to abolish voter so-called literacy tests and desegregate schools -- and we still can't guarantee voting rights and integrated schools.

The peace movement also faces deep structural obstacles. We -- Catholic, Jew, Quaker or none -- can't get rid of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter despite bad reviews and billions of dollars wasted. Weapons manufacture is deeply embedded in the military-industrial complex. Right-sizing the military budget requires a deep conversion of the heart, a recognition that our hearts are located in the objects we spend money on.

Similarly, the use of arms to buttress and seal diplomatic offers has been largely invisible, and the use of covert arms to fell governments has been just that: covert.

Mass movement politics depends on events that mobilize the masses. It turns out that spending half our discretionary budget on the military isn't enough to get people out in the streets any more than a million black men incarcerated has mobilized a civil rights campaign or the failure to cut CEO salaries and try some bankers in federal court has united the 99 percent.

That's not to say hard work is not continuing to diminish the role of the 1 percent, gain minority rights and build a peace economy. It is hard work, hampered by poverty, by those invisible structures that support war and injustice, and by a prevailing attitude that you can't fight city hall.

The work continues when Michelle Alexander writes [The New Jim Crow](#) [3]; the War Resisters League and the Friends Committee for National Legislation publish charts showing the enormity of military spending; and shareholders submit resolutions calling for corporate transparency.

And we all vote, register voters, march in each other's demonstrations, join fast food workers' rallies, talk to our families, etc., etc., etc.

Where's the "Catholic" in all this? I suspect some of the bishops' complaint against the sisters is exactly that we haven't been "Catholic" enough, and besides, without habits we've been invisible to people we aren't harassing. It might help if bishops campaigned against the use of force by men the way they have campaigned against abortion, a women's issue. But the poor have paid a heavy price for the bishops' siding with the Republicans, and I think Catholics have paid a heavy price too.

A final note: The Catholic Worker is thriving. It's not "Catholic" and it's too white, but across the country, men and women in their 20s and 30s are feeding the hungry, protesting war and resisting taxes. Dorothy Day always called the Worker a school. Graduates are pouring out to challenge the system every year.

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