

***Special Report***

**The St. Patrick's Four to be tied again: Will the First Amendment survive?**

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"If you fall on the side that is pro-George, and pro-war, you get your ass over to Iraq, and take the place of somebody who wants to come home. And if you fall on the side that is against this war and against George Bush, stand up and speak out." —Cindy Sheehan, mother of Casey Sheehan, who was killed in Iraq.

September 18, 2005—Tomorrow, the rights of all peace activists go on trial. Representing us are four Catholic anti-war activists who have already stood trial for their stand against the invasion of Iraq. Now, more than two years later, cleared of the original charge of criminal mischief, they are being charged with conspiracy and will be tried again.

**THE ACCUSED:** Four Catholic Workers from Ithaca, New York. Daniel Burns works in the film industry and traveled to Iraq in 2003 to promote peace and reconciliation. Clare Grady has worked for 17 years as a kitchen coordinator at Loaves and Fishes Community Kitchen, a ministry that feeds the hungry. Peter De Mott is a former marine who served in Vietnam, then joined the army and took a NATO post as a linguist. Peter too has traveled to Iraq as part of a Christian Peacemaker Team. Teresa Grady is a dance instructor and founder of the Ithaca Catholic Worker community with a long history of working with the homeless.

**THE CRIME:** On March 17, 2003, Dan, Clare, Peter, and Teresa entered a military recruiting center in Lansing, New York, and poured a half-cup of their own blood around the vestibule. No one was prevented from entering or leaving the recruiting center as they then knelt and read the following statement:

"Our apologies, dear friends, for the fracture of good order. As our nation prepares to escalate the war on the people of Iraq by sending hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers to invade, we pour our blood on the walls of this military recruiting center. We mark this recruiting office with our own blood to remind ourselves and others of the cost in human life of our government's war making.

"Killing is wrong. Preparations for killing are wrong. The work done by the Pentagon with the connivance of this military recruiting station ends with the shedding of blood, and God tells us to turn away from it. Blood is the symbol of life. All life is holy. All people are created in the image and likeness of God. All people are family, and everyone is loved by God.

"Dr. Martin Luther King reminds us that ' . . . we are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls *enemy*, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers [and sisters].'

"We come here today with pictures of Iraqi people— mothers, children, those who have been the victims of U.S. bombardment and sanctions for the past 12 years. We also come here with love in our hearts for the U.S. service people, also victims of war making.

"We find hope in these dark times when sisters and brothers around the world resist the spirit of hatred and violence, lift up prayers for peace—together with works for peace.

"The St. Patrick's Four"

The following month the four were tried for criminal mischief. Nine of the twelve jurors voted to acquit them, and after 20 hours of deliberation, the judge declared a mistrial. At such declaration the crowded courtroom gave the Four a standing ovation. The district attorney said that he would not re-prosecute them, expecting that another jury would yield the same verdict.

A year later, however, the U.S. government decided to retry the four peace activists, this time on the more serious charges of conspiracy. Technically, they are charged with conspiracy to impede "by force, intimidation and threat" an officer of the United States and three lesser charges. The trial begins tomorrow, and if the four are convicted, the penalty could be up to six years in prison and \$250,000 in fines.

This will be the first federal conspiracy trial arising out of civil resistance to the invasion of Iraq. It will also be the first federal conspiracy trial of anti-war protesters since Vietnam.

When Dan, Clare, Peter, and Teresa cut themselves and drew their own blood to make a powerful statement about the feared invasion they were not alone. A month earlier, throughout the world, primarily in Europe but including such remote places as Antarctica, people appeared by the millions to demand that no such war be started. The U.N. Security Council had not sanctioned it, so that aside from the immorality of attacking a sovereign country without the means to defend itself, the invasion was illegal both through lack of U.N. approval and through the breaking of the Nuremberg Principles, ratified by the U.S. in 1950.

Since that day, much has happened. The people of the world, even in those countries where leaders side with George Bush, such as Britain and Italy, remain staunchly against the invasion and occupation.

From recent personal experience I saw the popular response of people that Bush considers "allies." In May, in Italy, I noticed anti-Bush graffiti on the walls of the narrow streets of Rome and Florence, some of it strongly worded. While we were there, there was one demonstration against the so-called war. An artist near the Uffizi got into a heated conversation with me, though we were both on the same side.

"At first," he said, "we just thought the people of your country didn't know better. Bush wasn't that well known. But then, he broke all the rules. He ignored the world and started a criminal war. We thought he was through, but then he was re-elected. WHY?"

I couldn't answer, still can't. I also couldn't find an Italian who supported the so-called war against Iraq.

The great blind nationalism that props up support for what Bush did and does is eroding now, according to all the polls. The initial reason for attacking Iraq, to rid the country of its weapons of mass destruction, was rendered null when it was discovered that Iraq had no WMD. Further, there have been strong indications that the planning of the war began long before the attack on the New York Trade Center on 9-11, so that many now think that weapons of mass destruction were never an issue, only a call to raise fears and consequent war support. The "evidence," it began to appear, was created to support the neocon desire to conquer Iraq, whether for its oil or for a better foothold in the Middle East or for the economic boon to a few who profit at exponential rates from war.

The erosion of support for the so-called "war" (I do not refer to the invasion/occupation as a war, as Iraq had no real means of defending itself) seems to be based primarily on costs—monetary and human lives. Over a \$194 billion has been spent, an amount that could have fully funded global anti-hunger efforts for eight years, or could have provided four-year scholarships at public universities for almost 10 million students.

Worse for many is the cost in human lives. Approximately 1,900 U.S. soldiers have been lost in Iraq. Another 94 British and a total of 94 more from other countries who have sent token support. The numbers of [Iraqi deaths](#), mostly civilians, soars, estimated to be as high as 35,000 by some counts and closer to 100,000 by other independent studies.

This was the "war" that the St. Patrick's Four spilled their own blood to try to stop. And now, with the war machine down in the polls and the civil war in Iraq growing more violent and claiming more lives each day, it appears that breaking the Nuremberg Principles is something that will haunt the United States for years, as we fight to regain a measure of world respect. Many people from many countries have voted George Bush the greatest terrorist threat on earth.

None of these points, none of the evidence that the war was based on mistakes and lies, is allowed as part of the defense of the St. Patrick's Four. Not in the coming trial. Further, the Four are under a gag order, unable to discuss their reasons for demonstrating their objections as they did.

To counter the gag order, a large support group for the Four has been set up in Binghamton, New York, where the trial will be held. I spoke with William Meyer of the group Saturday, and he hesitantly mentioned the number 200 for the number of people expected. A moment later, he added, "A thousand is possible."

For such numbers, Citizens Tribunals are set up as seminars on what is happening in Iraq, the facts that the Four are not allowed to mention. These meetings and speeches will continue throughout at least the early days of the trial, certainly throughout jury selection. Among the moderators are James Petras, author and editor of over 60 books, including the acclaimed *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century*. Ray McGovern, former CIA analyst, and Ann Wright, who resigned from the U.S. Foreign Service on March 19, 2003, to protest the invasion of Iraq, will be involved in the tribunals.

It is in this way, this control over us when we don't conform to the neocon notion of "patriotism," that all of us who fight media manipulation of news and the ongoing fighting itself are in danger. If four ordinary parents are not allowed to make a somewhat graphic display of their objections to the war, then how can we assume that to write of the blundering mistakes and deceit of George Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld is not an invitation for a knock on the door, an arrest, a trial?

My empirical bent does not allow me to be lax with conspiracy theories. I'm not cut that way, nor are most of the writers I know. But if Clare Grady, who has spent most of her adulthood working to feed the hungry is not allowed to cut herself and mark a spot with her own blood, how can a writer who regularly accuses George Bush of being a liar feel secure about his or her ongoing freedom. What about the very act of attending a march, such as the one approaching on September 24, the walking and chanting and carrying a sign that says, "Bush lies" or "No more blood for oil"?

How safe is dissent? As much as we care about four brave individuals who did what they could to stop the invasion in 2003, we must go beyond them and consider the thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, who wear anti-war or anti-Bush tee-shirts, who attend rallies, who write letters to the editor. Dare they keep their bumper stickers?

The fact that these four pacifists are being tried again, even after the war has been shown to most people's satisfaction to have been a mistake, and worse, that they are not allowed to express their feelings or use the illegality of the war in their defense throws open doors and windows that even the most cynical weren't truly expecting two years ago.

Whether our constitutional right to freedom of speech will live or not is the point. What happens in Binghamton, New York, in the coming week or weeks will probably be a barometer. If Daniel, Clare, Peter and Teresa are found to be guilty of conspiracy, then all those who vocally support them are guilty.

And if we are, then our darkest fears grown out of the USA PATRIOT Act have grown as real as a match being held out, turning our constitution into flames and ashes.

Further details about the accused and about the case are in a detailed and abundant at the [St. Patrick's Four](#) website.

Along with other information available through the website is a letter that people may sign, showing support for the Four. There is also contact information for those who want to actively expose this event and show their objections not only to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, but to the re-trying of four people who attempted with their own blood to do their part in stopping the invasion of a sovereign country.

Please go to the website. Please sign the letter. And if you're near Binghamton, New York, consider attending the trial and lending your support.

For all of us who speak out, this is about *us*.

*Leigh Saavedra has written poetry, fiction, and political essays for several years under the name Lisa Walsh Thomas. Her second book, "The Girl with Yellow Flowers in her Hair," is a collection of dissident articles, available through [www.whatididinthear.com/](http://www.whatididinthear.com/).*

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