

Why the Faculty Should Vote Against War with Iraq in The Current Context John Selker. January 9, 2003

I would first like to speak to the role of the American University in the development of a national conscience.

Why does the very name of a university, Kent State, speak of a turning point in the US conscience on the pursuit of an unjustified war? With the citizenry informed by an ever narrower set of sources, American universities have been thrust the responsibility of thoughtful discourse. Lamentably this burden is all too often dropped, transferring the development of intellectual context for political decisions from the doctors of philosophy and their students, to the spin-doctors who owe their allegiance to the invisible hand of the market place of power.

This academic responsibility to take stands in matters of international peace is recognized, institutionalized in over 500 university peace study programs and six scholarly journals (<http://www.georgetown.edu/departments/pjp/mission.html>) At OSU we have a loose-knit faculty organization, OSU Faculty for Peace and Justice, which attempts to grapple with these issues. Today they have brought you an urgent university matter reflecting our academic responsibility to take a stand as a faculty in fulfillment of our societal responsibility. Rest assured that we are not alone, with faculty pursuing similar ends around this country (for instance see University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign <http://www.uiuc.edu/providers/senate/rs0301.html>).

The symbolic importance of this resolution coming from a land grant university is material to today's consideration. OSU represents the intellectual heartland of the country and state. Our mission spans land, sea and space. We serve at the pleasure of the people, not trustees. When OSU speaks, it does so from a position of service to society, rather than blinkered service to academia, the intelligencia, or public opinion.

In our role we must consider the intellectual context of the current situation, most prominently the requirements of Good Leadership in the maintenance of a good world. As organizational development consultant and PhD Guy Cornelius observes,

"An organization's culture is just the manifestation of the values of its leaders. Indeed, it is the responsibility of leadership to establish the culture."

(<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?CultureIsTheManifestationOfLeadership>) If we are to live in a good world, we must have good leaders. The US is a world leader, hence our actions must be transparently morally good. The current lack of international support for this war indicates that we have not made this case. This is a folly for which the world will reap bleak harvests for generations.

The Prince by Machiavelli tells of the importance of respect in leadership

“when neither their [the prince’s subjects] property nor honor is touched, the majority of men live content, and he [the prince] has only to contend with the ambition of a few, whom he can curb with ease in many ways”

(<http://www.constitution.org/mac/prince19.htm>). The US can not afford to win battles of honor, but only just battles. While we cannot define justice with Machiavelli as our source, we can trust him well in the understanding of the consequences of failure to heed this advice: endless attacks on the leader (the US). Clearly there is a linkage between our election to unilaterally justify a war against a bad leader and others’ unilateral justification of war against the US as the international leader.

Hypocrisy is patently unjust, so we must accept as just when others to follow our example. If the US can unilaterally claim international authority in the commencement of aggression against another country without deferral to an independent international body, then we imply other leaders, of nations, bands, tribes and consortia, should be equally privileged.

The urgency and gravity of the current decision cannot be overstated. Tens of thousands of the most well armed troops in the history of the world, our troops, now stand on the threshold of Iraq. Our president has promulgated a new doctrine of first use of nuclear weapons, laying forth the prospect of unimaginable destruction as a possible outcome in the chaotic development of war. It appears that unchecked this war may begin within a month.

This leaves us too little time to explore this issue in debate to the degree to which we would prefer. At the same time I know that those who vote today have, like me, given deep thought to the current crisis, so this vote is in fact attended by rich and careful consideration by the senators. Upon the urgency of the situation, and in light of the consideration which has led to this moment, I implore this senate to consider this legislation today, hear the debate, and not depart before voting upon its adoption.

Consider carefully the content of this resolution from these perspectives:

Is the logic sound?

Are our standards of conduct requested of the national leadership reasonable?

Must we speak when our university’s mission and the world are unjustly put at risk?

I can only answer in the affirmative to each of these tests. Collectively we do not ask this nation to be passive, pacifist, or paralyzed from action. We only now ask that it operate within the bounds of sense, reason, and international law, with due diligence to fulfill the demands of good leadership.