Opportunities and challenges after Trump coup fail

By Jeff Paterson. December 12, 2020

Throughout his term, Trump has represented a significant threat to our movement for international peace and an end to illegal, unnecessary, imperialist wars. Trump escalated bombing in Afghanistan and Yemen, causing a record number of civilian casualties and endangering US troops.

Throughout the Fall, Courage to Resist networked with allies and prepared to take action in case Trump carried through with his promises of a post-election coup. At the end of the day, only a people-powered nonviolent movement of millions taking to the streets would have guaranteed that the “will of the voters” as reflected in the ballot box would be honored.

On the other side, we would face ultra-violent domestic terrorists, such as the “Proud Boys” and other white supremacists backed by border patrol agents and prison guards on loan to the president. What side the US military would take in such a confrontation would likely have been decisive.

Luckily, the vote tallies weren’t close enough to overcome the ineptitude of Trump’s power grab.

Looking ahead to a Biden administration, we know we have plenty of work to do. For the past several decades, there has been a dangerous trend of US presidents, Democrats and Republicans alike, starting and escalating unnecessary conflicts. In the months and years ahead, we ask for your help to ensure that Biden delivers on his promises to end existing conflicts and to avoid new ones.

Resister Stephanie Atkinson: “How did our oil get under their land?”

By Courage to Resist. December 12, 2020

Stephanie Atkinson was in the Army Reserves when her unit was activated for the Persian Gulf War in late 1990. Stephanie went AWOL and refused her orders to deploy, making her one of over 100 service members who publicly spoke out against that conflict 30 years ago.

Here are excerpts from our recent podcast with Stephanie.

Our unit is going to Honduras [early 1990] and we’re going to be part of making an airstrip, supporting the efforts for an airstrip. By this time Iran-Contra has already hit and I’m becoming aware what it means to be involved in Central America, countries that are adjacent to these other ones. And it’s just like, “I don’t know the details of everything that’s going on here, but I do have enough wherewithal to know that I don’t want to be involved in anything in a Central American country.” Prior to that, had been Noriega and the invasion in Panama. It’s like, “Oh man.” Because I missed that Honduras trip, I got assigned to another unit and they were up in Wisconsin and it was late summer. I was thinking, “God, I’m almost done with this. What am I doing with my life now?”

Stephanie’s discharge was frozen in the lead up to the Gulf War.

Well, whatever I want, or whatever I think, or this feeling of being detached, or not wanting to play anymore, it’s totally irrelevant. What am I going to do? At first I was like, “I guess I’m going to have to go.” I didn’t know really what else to do. I would talk to people and they’d be like, “Oh, you should say you’re gay.” This was before Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.

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Legacy giving

As you are making out your will, please consider a bequest to “Courage to Resist / Veterans For Peace.” For more information about bequest language in your estate plans, please give us a call at 510-488-3559.

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**Mike Hastie**

Army medic and Vietnam War veteran Mike Hastie gained recent notoriety when a video of him being pepper sprayed by police at a Portland, Oregon, “Black Lives Matter” protest went viral on social media. Mike has been a long-time anti-war activist and photographer.

“You know, and you just continue to put more and more of the puzzle pieces together, and then you realize that you’ve got to bear witness. You’ve got to tell the truth about the entire war being a total, complete lie.”

“We all had our M16s, and I think after a while, the officers began to be a little suspicious as to whether those weapons might be turned on them. So, things were pretty intense about that, because people started to see through the war and started to see through the lie of the war, especially the black soldiers. I think the black soldiers really educated me about racism and those kind of things.”

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**Mike Wittels**

Mike Wittels' refusal to obey orders to train for Vietnam cost him a court-martial and months in the stockade. Mike was eventually discharged from the Army as a conscientious objector. He went on to be a highly revered draft counselor, author, artist, and sculptor.

“Men, this is your M1. It can blow a hole the size of a grapefruit in your enemy." I'm looking at the guy in front of me, and he's breathing, and I thought, 'Why would I want to blow a hole the size of a grapefruit into someone, just because somebody said, 'Hey, that's your enemy'?”

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**S. Brian Willson**

As a US Air Force officer in Vietnam, S. Brian Willson observed the needless bombing of numerous civilian villages, causing him to become vocal about his opposition to the war. Brian went on to be an anti-war author and activist. The price for his dedication to activism was high, eventually costing him the use of his legs when a munitions train failed to stop for him and other members of a Veterans Peace Action Team at the Concord, California Naval Weapons Station.

“I’d probably seen somewhere between 700 to 900 dead Vietnamese, most of whom were children or very young people. I was both shocked and sickened, and I thought, ‘Maybe these are mistakes. Or maybe I just don’t understand the intelligence enough.’ I already was beginning to think that these people are just Vietnamese people just trying to live their lives, and I didn’t quite know why we were there... yet. I mean, I needed to intellectually understand it. Emotionally, I was distraught.”

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**The Boys Who Said NO!** is the first documentary film to profile the young men and women who actively opposed the military draft in order to end the Vietnam War. The film shows how their personal and collective acts of nonviolent resistance, risking arrest and imprisonment for up to 5 years, were a critical part of the antiwar movement, intensifying opposition to the war and eventually forcing an end to both conscription and the war. The film premiered at online film festivals in October. Check online for upcoming screenings at boyswhosaidno.com

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**Our friend Kevin Zeese died unexpectedly of a heart attack on Sept. 6, 2020.** We worked most closely with Kevin as he helped lead the Steering Committee of the seven-year-long successful campaign to defend and free Iraq War whistleblower Chelsea Manning. “Kevin was instrumental in keeping the campaign moving forward during the periods when it was the most challenging, especially the years leading up to her trial, and afterward, when it looked like she'd spend decades in prison. Kevin never wavered and contributed greatly to our eventual victory,” shared Jeff Paterson, on behalf of Courage to Resist.
Chris Lombardi’s new book “I Ain’t Marching Anymore: Dissenters, Deserters, and Objectors to America’s Wars”

By Courage to Resist. October 23, 2020

Chris Lombardi has been writing about war and peace for more than 20 years. Her work has appeared in the Nation, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the ABA Journal. She joined us recently to discuss her new book, “I Ain’t Marching Anymore: Dissenters, Deserters, and Objectors to America’s Wars,” published by The New Press.

“It’s not about a matter of being a coward. In fact, like all non-violent action, it takes a lot of rigor” to refuse to fight, explained Chris during our recent interview.

“Conscientious objectors, most people we talk to, they think Vietnam. They think about civilian conscientious objectors who weren’t in the military at all. They don’t realize that in the military there are those who serve unarmed medics, or secure discharge after they change their minds; they don’t realize how long back this stuffs been going on.”

“This country was started by dissent, right? It’s started by people disagreeing with government. At the time, it was England. But, interestingly enough, in the early years, the Continental Army really believed in a sort of democratic situation. They wanted to elect their officers. They looked at their contracts and went, ‘Wait a minute, I’m only here for three years. Don’t tell me I have to keep fighting.’”

Listen to and/or read our entire interview with Chris Lombardi at couragetoresist.org/podcasts

Resister Stephanie Atkinson continued

That sounded so immoral to me because I have a lot of friends that were gay and was really in the LGBTQ community of Carbondale [Illinois], and that didn’t seem honest to me. So that was out.

Someone else had suggested to me that I get pregnant. I thought that was like one of the worst ideas that I’d heard. Nothing anybody was proposing to me was the right answer. So it’s like, “Well, I’m just going to have to suck it up.”

I had got a hold of a paper, an alternative newspaper, and then I got this other one and it was talking about war resisters. I’m like, “What is…”. And that was the first time I heard of Jeff Paterson. There was that picture of him sitting on the tarmac and that little sort of Buddha lotus pose … with the thousand yard stare. And it’s like, “Wow, who’s this guy? What did he do?” When I read about his experience and then also another Marine, Erik Larsen, I was just like, “This thing that these guys are, I connect with this.” I didn’t know how to articulate it.

“I don’t know who these guys are, but I understand this, this thing, this feeling.” Then I decided, “Okay, I’m going to go to my unit. I’m going to take care of all my gear. … I’m going to be like, ‘Look, I’m not going to wherever we’re activating to. You can just take me to lock up now because I’m not going to do this.”

I thought, “I don’t know what’s going to happen.” I’m stumbling the whole way here. I don’t know if you see a pattern in this, but from the very moment where it’s like, “Yeah, I’ll join the army.” To, “Yeah, I’ll go AWOL.” It’s just this… I don’t want to say it’s uninformed, but it’s just I’m reacting. At no point during this time am I really taking control of my decision-making. This was the point in my life where I really had to make a decision. There wasn’t any more bumbling.

There’s something about me being the first female war resister, and there’s this word conscientious objector. To say conscientious objector I feel isn’t really appropriate to describe me. To be formally recognized as a conscientious objector you have to jump through all of these assorted hoops. It’s really a lot of hard work. It’s about proving the sincerity and conviction of your beliefs, presenting evidence, having witnesses, interviews with military chaplains, psychiatrists. I was already AWOL. Had I submitted a conscientious objector application it would have been denied anyway.

People found my actions personally offensive. Somehow, my not going to the Gulf War would affect their patriotism.

Stephanie started publicly speaking out against the Gulf War while AWOL at rallies and connected with other objectors.

It was really empowering. And to talk to people who had thought things out. I mean, there were different reasons, but it was really great that we were all on the same page. It’s a very personal thing that all of us are having, but we’re also having it together. So everybody’s reason about why they want to be a war resister or conscientious objector is different, but there’s also this connection of like, “This is not right.”

Listen to and/or read our entire interview with Stephanie Atkinson at couragetoresist.org/podcasts

Reality Winner

Whistleblower Reality Winner remains behind bars, about 42 months into a 63-month sentence for sharing a classified document with The Intercept that described the attempted hacking of US election systems. The Trump Administration used her case to make an example of what would happen to future whistleblowers.
Draft Registration on Track for 2021 Debate in Congress and Supreme Court

Edward Hasbrouck. October 8, 2020

The military draft is still on the back burner. But the issue – and specifically whether to (finally) end draft registration or try to expand it to young women as well as young men – is on track to be debated in Congress and quite possibly the Supreme Court in 2021.

Here’s what’s happened recently:

In an interview with an organization of military officers, Presidential candidate Joe Biden has announced that he supports expanding the Selective Service registration requirement to women.

The deadline for an appeal to the Supreme Court of the decision on the Constitutionality of requiring men but not women to register for the draft is January 11, 2021. The plaintiffs are still deciding whether to appeal, but there’s a good chance the Supreme Court would decide to hear the case, putting more pressure on Congress to consider the issue.

Hearings on possibly expanding draft registration to young women as well as young men have been announced in both the House and the Senate, but have been postponed indefinitely. I suspect that hearings won’t be held until 2021, but it’s not too soon to talk to members of Congress. It’s especially important to put pressure on Rep. Jackie Speier (D-San Mateo, CA), Chair of the Subcommittee on Military Personnel of the House Armed Services Committee, to hold full and fair House hearings that:

- Include anti-war and anti-draft witnesses;
- Consider H.R. 5492 or its successor bill in 2021 to end draft registration, not just bills to adopt the NCMNPS recommendations; and
- Include consideration of compliance, non-compliance, and enforcement plans and budgets – the Achilles heel of draft registration.

The National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service (NCMNPS) shut down on September 18th at the conclusion of its term as a temporary agency. [There] records have been transferred to the National Archives. I’m still pursuing my FOIA requests, now with the Archives. In the last two weeks, before it shut down, the NCMNPS finally provided partial (although still incomplete) responses to some of my FOIA requests, including many previously-undisclosed comments from the public. Most of the comments received from the public were never released by the NCMNPS or counted in its report to Congress.

It’s time for antiwar voices to be heard in that debate.

Edited for length. Visit resisters.info for more updates from Edward.

Chelsea Manning free and on Twitch

By Jeff Paterson. December 10, 2020

Former “WikiLeaks whistleblower” Chelsea Manning was finally released from jail in March 2020 after having been jailed for 12 of a maximum of 18 months for refusing to comply with grand juries targeting Julian Assange.

At the time, Chelsea explained why she was compelled to resist to the judge: “I object to this grand jury … as an effort to frighten journalists and publishers, who serve a crucial public good. I have had these values since I was a child, and I’ve had years of confinement to reflect on them. For much of that time, I depended for survival on my values, my decisions, and my conscience. I will not abandon them now.” It is possible that prosecutors could convene a third grand jury and again subpoena Chelsea. However, there is no current indication of that happening.

Upon her release from jail, Chelsea faced fines imposed by the judge totaling $256,000. Thankfully, our community helped raise that sum, plus an additional $60,000 for her living expenses within a few hours.

Today, Chelsea can be found on Twitter and live streaming her favorite video games on the Twitch platform at twitch.tv/xychelsea87