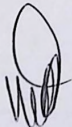
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**Pursuing Justice:**

Norman Mailer & Son: SPIRIT & POLITICS, 1967 & 2004

Norman Mailer & John Buffalo Mailer, 08/06/2004

*In 1967, I took part in the nonviolent siege of the Pentagon, about which Norman Mailer wrote a brilliant book, *The Armies of the Night*. While executive editor of *High Times* magazine, his son John Buffalo Mailer worked on an issue about protesting the Republican National Convention in New York. Whatever your politics, what they say in this dialogue about America will stir the steaming pot of your creative thought and spiritual search. — Shalom, AW*

John Buffalo Mailer: Let's start with Fahrenheit 9/11. I've seen it three times, and with each viewing I became more aware of Michael Moore's tricks. I would say about 50 percent of the film is indisputable, particularly the portion on Iraq, but in the first half he uses too many needless tricks.

Norman Mailer: I don't disagree. I saw it for the first time last night, and was upset through the first half. You don't make your case by showing George H.W. Bush and a Saudi sheikh shaking hands. On a photo op,

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important politicians will shake hands with the devil. Moore seems to think that if you get people laughing at the right wing, you will win through ridicule. He's wrong. That's when we lose. Back with the Progressive Party in 1948, we used to laugh and laugh at how dumb the other side was. We're still laughing, and we're further behind now.



Free Our Time!

On the other hand, the stuff on Iraq was powerful. There, he didn't need cheap shots. The real story was in the faces. All those faces on the Bush team. What you saw was the spiritual emptiness of those people. Bush has one of the emptiest faces in America. He looks to have no more depth than spit on a rock. It could be that the most incisive personal crime committed by George Bush is that he probably never said to himself, I don't deserve to be president. You just can't trust a man who's never been embarrassed by himself. The vanity of George W. stands out with every smirk. He literally cannot control that vanity. It seeps out of every movement of his lips, it squeezes through every tight-lipped grimace. Every grin is a study in smugsmanship.

JBM His face does bring out the rage of the left. Never before have I seen so many people's blood boil at the sight of an American president. Especially in New York. Of all the cities out there, why would the

Republicans pick New York to hold their convention?

NM I would say they are hoping for ugly attacks. If I were a voice in top Republican circles, I might be offering this advice: What we need for New York is a large-scale riot. Some of those activist kids will be crazy enough to do a lot on their own, but we can do better with a few of our guys, well-placed, ready to urinate on the good American flag. Let us recognize that if we lose, all we've been doing since 2000 is bound to come out. Back a couple of years ago, Karl Rove was saying that we could gain a twenty-year hegemony by winning the next election. He hasn't said it lately, not since the worst of Iraq came through. Because now we could be out of power for those same twenty years. So I recommend that we put as many of our people into the protest movement in New York as we can find. Or so, at least, speaks the cool Republican planner I envisage in my mind.

JBM There could be such people out there. But the Republicans may not even need them. There are thousands of 15-, 16-, 17-year-old anarchists who are truly angry. These kids don't really know what anarchy is all about, but they do know that when they throw a brick through a window, it makes them feel good and there's a chance they will end up on television. This feeds into the celebrity craze that

America is under right now of Get on TV, man! That's when you're really important! This may be the first protest where there will be as many cameras as protesters.

NM Some of them will have footage to sell afterward. The networks and cable companies will be looking for clips.

When I was young, the suggestion to be moderate was like a stink bomb to me. An orderly demonstration? What were we, cattle?

JBM Right, but it's also for the demonstrators' own protection. A cop is much less likely to bash a protester in the head if he's holding a video camera.

NM I must say, I hadn't thought of that.

JBM I feel we've entered a realm where the question is, whose propaganda is better? The left is beginning to figure out that they can't beat the right with intelligent argument. They need punch phrases that get to the heart of the average American. If that's the case, what is the future for our country?

NM That's not my first worry right now. Do the activists really know

what they're going into? That's my concern. Or do they assume that expressing their rage is equal to getting Kerry elected? It could have exactly the opposite effect. The better mode may be to frustrate the Republicans by coming up with orderly demonstrations. Now, when I was young, the suggestion to be moderate was like a stink bomb to me. An orderly demonstration? What were we, cattle? You have to speak out with your rage. Well, I'm trying to say, we would do well to realize that on this occasion, there are more important things than a good outburst. I wish we could remind everybody who goes out to march of the old Italian saying: Revenge is a dish that people of taste eat cold. Instead of expressing yourself at the end of August, think of how nicely you will be able to keep expressing yourself over the four years to come if we win. Just keep thinking how much the Republicans want anarchy on the street. I say, don't march right into their trap.

JBM What can activists do to avoid that?

NM Well, the trouble with being in a cautionary position is that you're limited. You're trying to slow down a wave. Everyone expects excesses it's a question of how many there will be. Most of the leaders of most of the activist organizations are responsible, most of them, certainly. And I think

some of them see the peril. They will do well to look at their own ranks and see if they've got some peculiarly rotten apples in the barrel.

JBM One of the problems with this movement is that there's no leader per se. There are spokespeople for each group. But this is a movement that has grown organically and has relied on the goodness of human nature almost to a fault. And I believe it's coming to a head, where, without somebody directing the huge crowd that's going to be there, without saying, This is what the movement believes in, Middle America will see nothing but anarchy.

NM You make me think of the march on the Pentagon in 1967. There was a marvelous guy named David Dellinger, now dead, who led it, and a man named A. J. Muste, an old anarchist, also gone, a fine old anarchist. They got together and realized they had to find some kind of umbrella organization that could have input to all the activist groups. And they succeeded. They had a series of discussions with the various elements. And there was virtually no disarray to speak of, compared to what it could have been. The march on the Pentagon even ended up having a final effect that was impressive. I think it was the beginning of the end of the war in Vietnam, and for a very simple reason: Lyndon Johnson saw 50,000 mostly middle-class people

come to Washington to stage a set of demonstrations that were going to be opposed by troops and police. LBJ knew people well. From his point of view, most middle-class people were hardly full of physical bravery. If they were going to pay their own money and come by car or bus or train to march into the possibility of being hit over the head with a cop's club, then there had to be millions of people behind them.

JBM I don't know that there's time to change the mood before the RNC begins.

NM I don't think there is, but my hope is that there are also going to be enough people whose most powerful passion will not be to get on TV, but to defeat Bush.

JBM I don't know that we can make it through another four years of Bush.

NM Oh, we'll make it through, although I'm not saying what we'll be like at the end. By then, Karl Rove may have his twenty years. Just think of the kind of brainwashing we've had for the last four. On TV, Bush rinses hundreds of thousands of American brains with every sentence. He speaks only in clichs. You know, I happened to run into Ralph Nader recently in Chicago, and I, like a great many others, was looking to dissuade him from his present course. He's a very nice man, maybe the nicest man I've met in politicsthere's something very

decent about Nader, truly convincing in terms of his own probity. So I didn't feel, Oh, he's doing it for ugly motives. Didn't have that feeling at all in the course of our conversation. Still, I was trying, as I say, to dissuade him, while recognizing that the odds were poor that I'd be successful. At one point, he said, You know, they're both for the corporation, Kerry and Bush. And it's true; both candidates are for the corporation, and I do agree with Nader that ultimately the corporation is the major evil. But in my mind, Bush is the immediate obstacle. He is a collection of disasters for America. What he does to the English language is a species of catastrophe all by itself. Bush learned a long time ago that certain key words, evil, patriotism, stand-firm, flag, our-fight-against-terrorism, will get half the people in America stirred up. That's all he works with. Kerry will be better in many ways, no question. All the same, he will go along too much with the corporations who, in my not always modest opinion, are running America. At present, I don't see how any mainstream politician can do otherwise. Finally, they're working against forces greater than themselves.

JB: Can we talk about the moderate Republicans' role in this election? Like McCain, for instance. He came out strong for Bush. Why?

NM McCain, I think, wants to be president. He certainly has every right. All the same, successful politicians have to make hard choices. Very few good people can do it because the hard choices are so often godawful. In addition, you have to smile standing next to people you despise. Even a relatively honest man has to become pretty phony. If you don't know which way the wind is blowing, you're dead as a politician. You can have the honesty and incorruptibility of Ralph Nader, but, as we see, that does not get you elected. So, even McCain must have said to himself, I could be president. I could be a much better president than George Bush ever dreamed of being. Whereas, if I go with Kerry, and Kerry loses, I'm doomed I will be a black sheep to my own party. And if Kerry wins, I'll be a lame-duck vice-president all the way. On the other hand, if I go with Bush and he wins, in four years I'm the logical choice to be the Republican candidate. Indeed, win or lose for Bush, I'm the front-runner Republican candidate for 2008.

JBM However, if McCain comes out strong for Bush, were he even to run as his vice-president, and Bush wins, I can't imagine McCain would be able in all good conscience to put up with what Bush would do with another four years. How is he in a strong position to run for president if he kowtows to Bush?

NM Politicians do have their vanity. McCain might think, George is an empty vessel. If I were vice-president, I could influence him. He might become a better chief executive if I were vice-president. That could be the barb on the harpoon that hooks McCain. I owe it to the country to make George W. Bush a better president. Yes, McCain could decide, I have to bite the bullet and work for a man I truly despise. But it's necessary. America needs it. The moment a politician says to himself, America needs it, he can shift the direction of the wind within the halls of his own brain.

I can't remember an election when the stakes were so high. There has been, after all, such mendacity about the entrance into Iraq. It sits like an incubus over the first week of November.

JBW Let's talk about protest as an end in and of itself. Are there benefits other than the political?

NM Yes. I think so. People who run protests have a chance to exercise power where they couldn't otherwise, since generally they are against the system in one large way or another. Yet, some of them have serious talents for organizing, directing, and leading. And people who join very

often get a good bit of therapy. Literally. They are not only able to vent real rage but can test their courage.

JBM Well, they are also doing something about the way they feel politically.

NM That's the third benefit a dubious one. You can feel that, yes, you're working to change the system, but are you changing it or confirming it? Never assume that a protest is going to accomplish what you want it to. Media interpretations of your protest dull the impulse, warp it, or even choke it off. If you could talk to the people you really want to reach out there, people far from New York, talk to them face to face, eye to eye, they might listen, because you do have things to say. Of course, you have to stay cool. Americans get nervous when listening to anyone who's keyed up. Major politicians are always cool. The one moment, for example, when Howard Dean went over the top, remember? The media never forgave him. And the mass of TV viewers followed like sheep. Dean had committed a no-no he had expressed his pain and anger loudly. The problem with mass protests is that you have to pass through that immense filter of the news media. So you do get on TV for your fifteen seconds of Warholian fame. All your friends say, Hey, man, you were on! As if you've accomplished something. You might

have been screaming. You might have had your face painted with ketchup to look like blood. Even if you manage to be semi-reasonable on the air, the odds are against speaking incisively and calmly. Because you've just got the one moment. So, all too often, protests accomplish the opposite of what they desire. Over the long term, protests can do a lot, but not at once. For example, when we had the march on the Pentagon in the fall of 1967, the immediate reaction was bad. The media trashed us. But we did have a positive effect over a period of time. In contrast, the demonstrations in Chicago in the summer of '68 probably lost Humphrey the election.

JBM Why?

NM Well, liberals did react against the open, ugly, and unforgettable spectacle of the police smashing into the front ranks of the marchers, but even more voters felt that anarchy was loose in the street, so they blamed the marchers for aggravating the cops. A great majority of Americans are very much keyed to public order. We're a country where everyone who came here tore up old roots by leaving their home country. That creates a long-term anxiety. So in America, the reluctance to cause disturbance is always sitting there in opposition to the other big American desire which is to express oneself, to be free and free-spoken. I can speak from my own experiences as a candidate for mayor

in the New York primaries of 1969. I thought people would want what I offered. But I was opting for too much change. In politics, people want continuance. Americans don't want their lives disturbed. That's the basic problem with protest. It's good for the protesters, but not always so good for the candidate you want to get in.

JBM Let's go back to the '68 protest. What were its successes?

NM I think it was not too bad for a lot of people who were in it, individual kids who discovered that they did have the balls to protest. Because when you do, you have to pass through your fear. After all, you can get beaten up. Not everyone can face that possibility. So it could have been good for some of those who forced themselves into the protest, good for their self-respect down the road.

JBM Don't you think that it was thanks to the protests, in large part, that the Vietnam War ended?

NM That was one large reason. But I've always felt that what made the suits who run so much of America truly nervous was the notion that they could no longer trust the kids who came to work for them from the best universities. In that sense, protests against the war were serious, were effective. But that's not the situation today.

JBM When you have an issue such as End the war in Vietnam, it's a set goal. You know what you're going for. One of the problems with this

movement is that there's no specific goal to be achieved, aside from Get Bush out. When I ask the protesters, What exactly are you protesting at the Republican National Convention?, no two answers are the same. Perhaps it is because there are too many abominations being committed to pick one.

NM When and how are you going to protest? Which group would you join?

JBM On August 30, I plan to march with KWRU.Org, the Poor People's Campaign. That's Cheri Honkala's organization. After that, I'm not sure.

NM Okay.

JBM What could the protesters do that would further the cause?

NM What they could do is not what they're going to be allowed to do. It won't all be their fault. You can be damn sure Pataki and Bloomberg do not want to embarrass George Bush. If these demonstrations ever hurt Bush, and he still gets reelected, New York will be penalized in terms of receiving money from Washington. That's one reason Bloomberg and Co. kept them from holding their protest in front of the Garden. If a million people were to walk down Fifth

Avenue which is where it should be that could have a significant effect. Especially if it was a peaceful march. But the Republicans don't want a peaceful demonstration with that number of bodies. One of the things about the Pentagon march back in '67 is how peaceful it proved to be. Despite all the negative media hype that came out afterward, the second word that came, if slowly, was: Peaceful these people were peaceful. The ideal is exactly to have a huge, passive demonstration. If it could take place without calamitous incidents, odds are Kerry will probably win. But a combination of riots with media coverage will give Bush a huge spike.

JBM Would you say New York is part of America, or is it its own entity?

NM You want to talk about great American cities, speak of Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, San Francisco. Put up your own favorites, if you have any. Los Angeles, if you must. But New York is our only world city. It does not have a hell of a lot in common with the rest of America; it doesn't even have much to do with upper New York State. Which is why all those years ago I said, let's separate. I saw New York as eventually becoming comparable to Hong Kong, a semi-independent city-state. For better or worse, it may yet happen.

JBM Do you think Kerry or

mainstream Democrats are going to associate with the protesters at all?

NM I think they'll have people out there, trying to put a little oil on these very troubled waters.

JBM How so?

NM Well, they have contacts. Power is power. We were talking earlier about what people get out of a protest movement. A leader who's pretty good at exercising a little local power doesn't mind getting a little more. Hell, Kerry started as an activist. So there will probably be hints from his people: We'll treat you right when we get elected. I can't believe Kerry's people will sit by passively and say, Oh, dear, isn't this awful, like I'm saying right now.

JBM Are you going to come protest with me?

NM No. Even if I believed in the efficacy of the protest, I wouldn't go. I can't walk anymore without two canes. Standing in place is worse. It drives me nuts. Two arthritic knees. So, I'm out of it. I won't go in a wheelchair. I want to be able to defend myself if things go wrong.

JBM What if there were no protests?

NM I'm not sure that would be a loss.
There's so much anger at Bush. It isn't
as if more anger has to percolate.

JBM Then what do you think will be
the Democrats' tactics?

NM I'd say they demonstrated their
tactics during the July convention.
They will look to catch the swing
voters and those conservatives who
are repelled by the Bush cabal but are
still loyal to the Republicans. To do
that, the Democrats will present
themselves as the good, sensible,
highly patriotic, serious party of the
middle class, resolute about terrorism,
strong for peace, reliable for war, and
passionately loyal to the working
class and the disadvantaged
because this may be their subtlest
claim! they are the true compassionate
conservatives. These tactics do not fill
me with joy, but given the brunt of
my argument, I confess that I am
obliged to go along. The Republicans,
in turn, will do all they can to make
the street protesters look like the
disruptive, concealed, and explosive
heart of the Democratic Party. You
know, I can't remember an election
when the stakes were so high. There
has been, after all, such mendacity
about the entrance into Iraq. It sits
like an incubus over the first week of
November.

JBM Doesn't Vietnam relate to this?
In Iraq, aren't we in the same kind of
quagmire?

NM Bad as Iraq has been up to now,
Vietnam was worse. We were there in
force for ten years. Fifty thousand of
our soldiers were killed and 2 million
Asians. What is immediately
comparable to Iraq is that the logic for
being in Vietnam proved false. The
domino theory did not play out.
Southeast Asia may have been a mess
afterward, but only Vietnam turned
communist, and it was well on the
way before we came in. The major
difference is that in Iraq we have
exacerbated the two major branches
of a religion that has had power over
its followers for more than thirteen
centuries. Communism had only been
in existence for fifty years. Its historic
roots were not nearly so profound. It
is not the size of the casualties in Iraq
so far that weighs on us so much as
the prospect of a century of unending
terrorist acts that we do not know how
to terminate by military force.
Whether this fear will work to Kerry's
benefit, I can't say. The question is
how clear will it become in the
awareness of Middle America that
Kerry was a combat hero and Bush
was in a National Guard flight suit. It
will be interesting to see how the
Republicans will look to tarnish
Kerry's war record. Not all the
Republicans, however. I think a
minority of conservatives are ready to
go for Kerry.

JBM You really do?

NM I've been saying for a couple of years that Bush is not a conservative. He's what I call a flag conservative, a Flag-Con. He's not as interested in conservative values as in empire-building. The classic conservative, someone like Pat Buchanan or, to a more complicated degree, Bill Buckley, does believe that certain values in society must be maintained. The classic conservative believes in stability. You make changes grudgingly and with a great deal of prudence. Don't move too quickly, is the rule of thumb, because society, as they see it, is essentially a set of compromises and imbalances that can be kept going only by wisdom and, to use the word again, prudence. So you don't go off in wild, brand-new directions. None of this characterizes Bush. As a Flag-Con, he is surrounded by the tycoons of the oil industry, plus neoconservatives, plus gung-ho militarists who believe that since we've created the greatest fighting machine in the history of the world, it's a real shame not to use it. These three different groups came together on a notion that I would call exceptionalism. The more ideological among them believe that when the Cold War ended, it was America's duty to take over the world. They believe God wanted America to run the world. All too many Americans do believe that. Just look at the

patriotic fever every time there's an occasion for people to show their flags. Very few fascist nations ever failed to put a huge emphasis on getting people to wave flags. This is not the same as calling America fascisticwe are not next door to fascism yetbut even as certain people fall into a pre-cancerous condition, I would say America could be approaching a pre-fascistic condition. And the basic notion behind such an impetus, what the Flag-Cons fear, is that America is going to lose its preeminence in the world unless drastic steps are initiated. As, for example, taking over the oil of the Middle East, as well as enlarging our reputation as a superpower to such a degree that China, India, Japan, and Europe will not be ready to stand up against us in any important way. These flag conservatives would argue, I expect, in their private colloquies, that if they don't embark on such steps, America's control of world economics could be lost forever. There are many indications that the Chinese and the Japanese are much more suited to live in a technological world than we are. Our long prosperity has one irony built into it. We have become a pleasure-loving nation. Fifty years ago, Americans were more hardworking. They still believed it was good in and of itself to work for most of your life. That's no longer so true. In science, our college youth are weak when it comes to studying the so-called stem subjectsscience, technology,

engineering, and mathematics. Living with technology is, after all, not always so agreeable. If one's going to sum it up in four words: More power, less pleasure. And Americans are pleasure-loving. The majority of Chinese have not had that opportunity. Perhaps they can put up with monotony, boredom, and cruel, repetitive working environments far better than we can. I think the exceptionalists feel the need for America to become a Roman power in contrast to other nations, who will serve as our hardworking Greeks. Let China be our Greeks, and Japan, England, evenwhile we're about it! After all, the Romans used the intelligence of the Greeks to carry out tasks that Romans no longer had the desire to fulfill.

JBM But I don't think it's possible anymore to take over the world with military force.

NM Can it be that Iraq is telling us as much?

JBM Let's go back to why the Republicans selected New York for the convention. Do you think they still have hopes of cashing in on the memory of 9/11?

NM A couple of years ago, New York may have seemed like the perfect place to go; the event had been so

traumatic. And there is a large political profit in offering emotional closure to a national nightmare like the fall of the Twin Towers. Nine-eleven felled the two most opalescent pillars of the American economy. It also attacked the implicit assumption that if you worked for the corporation, you were part of a new upper class. To offer an analogy, let us suppose that in the seventeenth century, Versailles had been razed and sacked overnight by latter-day Huns. France would have been emotionally gutted. So it was with us. After all, those Twin Towers spoke of America's phallic hegemony in the world even as Versailles declared the divine right of kings. Many an American male felt gelded by the event. Equally, the average American housewife was desolated by the terrifying possibility that one could work for years to build a family and lose it all in an hour. How could the Republicans not choose New York as the place to hold their convention? Given the heroic deaths of the New York firemen and police, the site will also appeal to working-class votes. The Republicans will certainly not fail to make the connection that the protesters are besmirching the memory of 9/11. But a couple of years have gone by, and we've also learned that there are a few things wrong about the picture we've had of 9/11. A new set of conspiracy theories are building. There are just too many facts that are not readily explicable. There may well be room after the convention for the protest

movement to look into 9/11 with some critical incisiveness. I am no longer a conspiratorialistI spent too many years wandering around in the byways of the Warren Report. But there are elements here which are not easy to explain. I don't believe for a moment there was direct complicity. In America, we don't go in as yet for major political coupsthere's too much to lose for the powers that be, and we are still a democratic society. But there may have been a sentiment in the administrationlet them scream and squeal over this onethat maybe the worst thing in the world might not be that we suffer a disaster. Pearl Harbor, after all, galvanized America. Without Pearl Harbor, we might never have been able to go to war in the company of the Russians. Indeed, Roosevelt was accused of knowing about Pearl Harbor in advance and welcoming it. Well, I wouldn't go that far. I don't think the administration knew that the World Trade Center was going to be attacked. Still, some odd things did happen that day. Immensely odd. There was more than unbelievable inefficiency. I don't know that the 9/11 Commission did all they could with that. They were determined, after all, to bring in a unanimous report. That always means that the radical ends are cut off. It's like playing poker without the aces, kings, and queens, the twos, threes, and the fours.

JBM What happens if there's a terrorist attack between now and the

election?

NM I don't know whether it'll benefit Kerry or Bush. That's hard to decide. Bush has been saying to America: I've made America more secure. I've made America safer. He could be hurt badly by a large attack. On the other hand, there is a knee-jerk reflex in Americans to rally behind the president when there's a catastrophe. So, I can't pretend to know the answer.

JBM Starting with the WTO protest in Seattle in '99, a culture has formed around the anti-corporate, anti-globalization, anti-Bush movement. Where do you think it's going? Where should it go?

NM A good many people of the right, not flag conservatives but true conservatives, can feel in accord with men and women on the left concerning one deep feeling. It is that the corporations are stifling our lives. Not only economically, where corporations can claim, arguably, that they bring prosperity (and frankly, I'm certainly not schooled enough in economics to argue that point pro or con), but I can say the corporation is bad for us aesthetically speaking, culturally speaking, spiritually speaking. Just contemplate their massive empty architecture, their massive emphasis on TV commercials, which are a seedbed for

concentration

interrupting one's ~~conversation~~, and their massive complacency about their virtues. They tend to flatten everything. They are the Big Empty. One of the strengths of Michael Moore's movie, if I can go back to it for a moment, is that you could see all the faces of the present administration, those empty faces, those handmaidens and bodyguards of the Big Empty. And then Moore contrasted them with all the faces of American soldiers over there: innocent, strong, idealistic, or ugly, but real faces, real people. Plus all those suffering Iraqis. Obviously, people in such torment are always dramatic and eloquent on film. Still, most of those Iraqis had different kinds of faces. That shade of alienation from natural existence had not yet gotten into their skin. They might be hard to live with, but they were alive. Whereas the people running this country are all with the notable exception of one guy I'll get into in a moment kind of awful. They don't look as human as thee and me. That's a large remark, but I support it. The one exception, oddly enough, and by this I'll probably antagonize a good many people, is Donald Rumsfeld. Of that whole gang, he's the only one who seems real to me. In other words, I might not agree with him on anything, but he does believe in what he says. It isn't as if he searches for the most useful response he can come up with at the moment to wield or save his power. He's interested in his ideas first. The power is subservient

to the ideas.

JBM What makes you say that?

NM Because he's real. He reacts. He doesn't weigh his words. If something makes him angry, he's angry. If something pleases him, he smiles. If he has doubts about how the situation is going, he expresses those doubts. In that sense, he's the only one of that coven I'd call an honorable man. Let me emphasize: I can disagree totally with people I consider honorable. But never have I seen an administration that has had, by that measure, so few honorable men.

*refuted
in error
on p 28 of 31*

JBM Back to Seattle. Where is the protest movement going? Because it is not going to stop after the convention.

NM It certainly won't. After all, how much can we hope for from this election? If Kerry gets in, he can repair some of the boundless damage Bush wreaked on foreign opinion. But Kerry will still be essentially pro-corporation. No major American politician can afford not to be. In fact, if you outlawed the corporations tomorrow, America would have food famines, a frightening loss of jobs, name it. They are installed for decades to come, and we can't look for quick results. The war against the corporation is profound, as it should

be. They are deadening human existence. That, I think, is the buried core of the outrage people feel most generally. There is, after all, a profound difference between corporations and capitalism itself, at least so long as capitalism remains small business. The small businessman is always taking his chances. He leads an existential life. He's gambling that his wit, his energy, and his ideas of what will work in the marketplace will be successful. He can be a sonofabitch, but at least he's out there in the middle of life.

JBM He's creating something as well.

NM He could be creating something that's awful. But at least he's taking chances. Whereas the corporation is the reverse. The corporation turns capitalism inside out. The majority of them no longer give their first concern to the quality of their product. Since they have the funds to advertise on a large scale, that diminishes their need for a good product. Marketing can take over by way of language and image. Over the years this has produced a general deterioration of the real value of products for the same real money.

JBM Well, I agree we're fighting a spiritual war against the corporation. And what we're missing right now is the ability to say, We can provide for you, we can make sure you have jobs

and food. What they're offering is stability. What we're offering is a deeper quality of life.

Rumsfeld is the only one of that coven I'd call an honorable man. Of that whole gang, he's the only one who seems real to me.

misplaced

see p 26

NM To win this war will take at least 50 years and a profound revolution in American values. We'd have to get away from manipulation. What we've got now is a species of economic, political, and spiritual brainwashing, vastly superior to the old Soviets, who were endlessly crude in their attempts. Our governmental and corporate leaders are much more subtle. Remember years ago, when you were around 15, you were wearing a shirt that said ~~ass~~ on it? And I said, Not only do you spend money to buy the shirt, but you also advertise the company that sold it to you. And you said, Dad, you just don't get it. All right, you were right, I didn't get it. But now, I notice, you don't wear logos on your shirts.

*?
wrong
word.*

JBM I try my best not to. It's hard to find a shirt that doesn't have a logo these days.

NM There's one more point I'd like to make. I don't sneer at people who enter protest movements. At the least, it can be good or even necessary for

their personal development. But I would like these kids to disabuse themselves of the idea that they are going to have some immediate, exciting political effect. If they have any, it could be negative. And if Bush wins, we're a most divided nation. Kerry can put it together better than Bush. Bush can't solve any of our problems. He never was able to. That may be the main reason he looked to empire-building. He had nothing to offer but world conquest. So, if he's reelected, what will he do if things remain bad in Iraq? You'll look back on the Patriot Act as being liberal and gentle.

JBM I will never look back on the Patriot Act as being liberal and gentle. While the protests will not have a direct, political gain

NM You agree with me on that?

JBM Yes, I feel confident in saying that given the parameters of how we will be allowed to protest, I don't see any way it could have a direct political gain. However, I do feel that when you're out there, and see all the different types of people who have come together particularly now with the mixture of groups that will be there you do get a sense that the spiritual revolution may be awakening. And that's the only hope, I believe, against the total corporatization of America.

NM All right, but if we lose the election, it's going to be a very expensive spiritual education. I would be much happier if the protest movements could spread their activities over the next four years. I don't have a great deal of hope that most of the people involved are really thinking of this election so much as expressing the need to vent, to gain some self-therapy, and to express their outrage at what's been done to them, plus their need to gain power in the counterculture. There's all sorts of motives, some noble, some meretricious. But it's a poor time to exercise our most dramatic democratic privileges. What we do have over all the years to come is the confidence that we breathe a cleaner spiritual air than the greedbags who run our country, and so it is not impossible that over decades to come, much that we believe in will yet come to be. But I do not wish to end on so sweet and positive a note. It is better to remind ourselves that wisdom is ready to reach us from the most unexpected quarters. Here, I quote from a man who became wise a little too late in life:

Naturally, the common people don't want war, but after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a

communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.

That was Hermann Goering speaking at the Nuremberg trials after World War II. It is one thing to be forewarned. Will we ever be forearmed?

**The Shalom Center / web: <http://www.shalomctr.org> / email: ShalomCtr@aol.com
mail: 6711 Lincoln Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19119, USA / tel: (215) 844-8494**