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Community Commentary: Who are they?

by Faith Attaguile



Many people ask this question when they see the picketers.

For the past several years, every Sunday rain or shine, they've been at the corner of Encinitas Boulevard and Coast Highway.

From noon 'til 1p.m. they stand with signs, smiles, and waves for the people who pass by. Sometimes they're only two; sometimes they're 10 or more. Aged between 18 and 84, they say they're waiting for others to wake up and join them.

Whether social worker, teacher, engineer, student, parole officer, construction worker or international troublemaker (as one of them grinningly told me), they come from varied backgrounds. If individually some are part of groups, on this corner they stand together with shared common values and no group name. Unless of course, it's "The Pickets on the Street Corner."

When I asked one of them to describe some of these shared common values, Walter said, "Well, I think we all agree that we support a society based on the idea, To Each According to His Needs; From Each According to His Abilities."

Larry piped in: "It's a basic family value, you know. In the ideal family, kids get what they need and parents do whatever they can to meet those needs. As kids grow up, they're taught to contribute according to what they can do. This teaches them responsibility towards the family community. If someone in the family breaks a leg, no one says, 'Sorry, we can't fix this unless you can pay for it yourself.' My God! Parents would be hauled in for child abuse if they said that. Yet that's what our family community is told by those in power when they refuse to provide health care of all. We need to change that."

Then David added, "If you're really going to write about us, say that we specifically reject a society based on the idea, I pledged that I will do my best to help myself and screw the rest."

"Hmm," I thought. "These guys rock."

While we talked, cars passed by honking and waving as they read Miriam's sign, "Honk to End the Wars!"

Or maybe it was Irene's sign, "Honk to Jail Wall Street!"

Chloe held another one, "No More Arms to Israel! Free Palestine!"

As I stood there talking with them I was impressed with the positive responses of passers-by, whether walking or riding in cars.

Of course, there were exceptions. A few drivers didn't care much for the signs. Almost apoplectic, they screeched their tires and shouted that over-worn, two-word epithet we all know so well.

After one of them did so, Miriam said (smiling and shrugging her shoulders), "They have a very limited vocabulary."

I told "The Pickets on the Street Corner" I was going to write about them and asked what message I should relay. Almost in unison they said,

"Tell them to stop complaining, get off their butts and join us. If they want change they have to make it happen. They can start here. We need to talk with each other and take a stand. They can bring their own sign or hold one of ours. The point is to stand up and speak out. The only way things will change is when *we* demand that change."

I took up one of their signs ("Afghanistan: Obama's Vietnam?") and stood with them until one o'clock came around. I thought, "They're right. The idea of 'We, the people...' should be more than just something in the Preamble to the Constitution."

Faith Attaguile is a writer, activist and artist living in Del Mar.