

We're Losing Our Anti-War Heroes Right When We Need Them Most



Caitlin Johnstone

12 hr ago



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"Daniel Ellsberg", oil on canvas board, 2023

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"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."

~ Greek proverb

The heroic whistleblower and peace activist Daniel Ellsberg is dying.

In [an open letter](#) to his friends and supporters, Ellsberg announced that two weeks ago he learned that he has inoperable pancreatic cancer with a prognosis of three to six months. The letter is beautiful and inspiring, but it's also as heart-rending as anything you'll ever read, largely because within it Ellsberg makes it abundantly clear that he has extremely urgent concerns about the world he will soon be leaving behind.

"As I write, 'modernization' of nuclear weapons is ongoing in all nine states that possess them (the US most of all)," Ellsberg writes. "Russia is making monstrous threats to initiate nuclear war to maintain its control over Crimea and the Donbas – like the dozens of equally illegitimate first-use threats that the US government has made in the past to maintain its military presence in South Korea, Taiwan, South Vietnam, and (with the complicity of every member state then in NATO) West Berlin. The current risk of nuclear war, over Ukraine, is as great as the world has ever seen."



Daniel Ellsberg
@DanielEllsberg

I wrote this letter recently to my friends in the antiwar and anti-nuclear movements. I see it's being circulated, so I've decided to share it here. For all of you working on these issues, thank you, and please keep going!

inoperable pancreatic cancer on the basis of a CT scan and an MRI. (As is usual with pancreatic cancer--which has no early symptoms--it was found while looking for something else, relatively minor). I'm sorry to report to you that my doctors have given me three to six months to live. Of course, they emphasize that everyone's case is individual; it might be more, or less.

I have chosen not to do chemotherapy (which offers no promise) and I have assurance of great hospice care when needed. Please know: right now, I am not in any physical pain, and in fact, after my hip replacement surgery in late 2021, I feel better physically than I have in years! Moreover, my cardiologist has given me license to abandon my salt-free diet of the last six years. This has improved my quality of

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Ellsberg writes of the "scientific near-consensus" that a nuclear war between the US and Russia would cause a nuclear winter that ends most life on earth, and mourns the fact that this understanding has had no bearing on the behavior of the world's major nuclear powers.

"There's tons more to say about Ukraine and nuclear policy, of course, and you'll be hearing from me as long as I'm here," he writes.

But Ellsberg will not be here long. And I personally find this to be a very dear loss, for reasons that go much further than the death of one man.

At 91 years of age it is entirely unreasonable of me to resent the exit of Daniel Ellsberg from this stage at this time; the man is no spring chicken, and he's done more good with one lifetime than thousands of us lesser souls combined. And yet still I find myself objecting: "Why now? Damn it, why now?"

Right when the threat of nuclear war is, as Ellsberg says, "as great as the world has ever seen," we lose what is probably the most famous and influential voice dedicated to opposing the madness of governments stockpiling armageddon weapons and brandishing them at each other in ways that imperil us all. Right at the moment when a powerful anti-war movement is [more urgently needed](#) than at any point in human history, we lose one of the greatest peace activists that has ever lived.



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Stephen Cohen Has Died. Remember His Urgent Warnings Against The New Cold War.

"Cohen has for years been correctly predicting this chilling scenario which now threatens the life of every organism on earth, even while his own life was nearing its end."



medium.com

Stephen Cohen Has Died. Remember His Urgent Warnings Against The New Cold War.

2:06 PM · Sep 19, 2020

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And Ellsberg is just the latest voice we're losing on this front right when we needed them the most. Stephen Cohen, the renowned scholar and expert on US-Russia relations, [died of cancer in 2020](#) after spending his final years warning urgently about the dangerous escalations the west was waging against Moscow. Consortium News founder Robert Parry [died in 2018](#), also of cancer, and also after spending years warning of the dangerous waters that western brinkmanship with Russia was dragging the world into. (Fuck cancer, by the way.)

And with each new loss I find the same objection coming up: "Why now? Damn it, why now?"

And of course when I settle down and get real honest with myself, I know that the source of my argument with reality is not an objection to the fact that everyone has their time and that sometimes elderly men get cancer. No, when I am really honest with myself, I know that the real source of my objection is that I know these losses mean an increase in my own responsibility. Because every time we lose a giant in the fight against imperial omnicide, that means the rest of us need to step up and fight that much harder.



Daniel Ellsberg
@DanielEllsberg

To @POTUS and @TheJusticeDept: Stop the extradition of Assange. I am as indictable as he is on the exact same charges. I will plead "not guilty" on grounds of your blatantly unconstitutional use of the Espionage Act. Let's take this to the Supreme Court.



BBC HARDtalk @BBCHARDtalk

EXCLUSIVE: "Let me tell you a secret... I had possession of the all the Chelsea Manning information before it came out in the press" - Pentagon Papers whistleblower

Daniel Ellsberg says he was given leaked US diplomatic cables "as a backup" by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange

<https://t.co/qQbjtzwkgK>

10:54 PM · Dec 6, 2022

12,900Likes5,255Retweets

Ultimately my argument isn't with mortality, or with cancer, or with Daniel Ellsberg, Stephen Cohen or Bob Parry. My argument, when I am really honest with myself, is with my own fear of going on fighting this battle without those titans at my side.

But that's reality. The loss of our anti-war heroes does not afford us the luxury of collapsing in grief and defeat, because it means those of us who remain here have all got to step up, and step into some very big shoes. The loss of the Ellsbergs, Cohens and Parrys of this world means nothing other than the need for more Ellsbergs, Cohens and Parrys. And there's no one who can step into those giant shoes but us.

Thank you for your service, Daniel Ellsberg. You are a beautiful and courageous soul who has lived a beautiful and courageous life. May your remaining days be your best and brightest. Go in peace knowing that we will carry on the fight.

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