

Opposition to war with Iraq growing in Lansing

December 18, 2002 Publication: Lansing City Pulse (MI) Word Count: 2203

Opposition to war with Iraq growing in Lansing

By DANIEL STURM

As the Bush administration pushes for war against Iraq and begins to vaccinate emergency workers and soldiers against smallpox, protests continue. In Michigan, the city councils of Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo passed resolutions opposing the war, and in Lansing last Friday a newly formed action group called the Greater Lansing Network Against War in Iraq held its first demonstration for peace.

Following a press conference to announce the group's formation, about 150 antiwar activists, religious leaders, and university faculty and students rallied in front of the Capitol during a peace vigil at noon. Some held up posters claiming "Drop Bush, not bombs!," others sang songs. Margaret Kingsbury, a longtime peace activist of the Unitarian Church, said she'd retired a large antiwar poster after Vietnam War. "Now it's time to bring it back." Bus drivers and individual motorists cheered the protesters by honking their horns.

The new network, made up of 19 sponsoring groups and 57 individuals, said they're coming together in order to create a voice against the war in Iraq "through non-violent action." Before the rally, representatives gathered for their first press conference, hosted by the Shalom Center for Justice and Peace, and held in Central United Methodist Church, 215 N. Capitol Ave.

"Instead of attacking Iraq, we need to attack the root causes of terrorism, which are found in the grinding poverty and injustice experienced by millions around the world," said the Rev. Fred Thelen, pastor of Cristo Rey Catholic Church and a founding member of the coalition.

Kathie Kuhn, president of the People for Positive Social Change at LCC, said the Bush administration used "common myths" in order to construct a necessity for war. Kuhn said the United States empowered Saddam Hussein in the 1980s by supplying him with weapons including anthrax. "Today, no evidence has been

induced to demonstrate that he has any weapons of mass destruction. There's no reason why a policy of containment, which has been working all along, wouldn't continue to work. All of a sudden Bush decided he has to overthrow Saddam Hussein."

On the wall behind the speaker's podium hung an 8-foot-by-12-foot mural, created by the Greater Lansing Youth for Peace and Justice, a group of local high school students. Called the "Plywood for Peace," the piece depicts the silhouettes of eight Iraqi people, against a backdrop of news articles pertaining to U.S. policy on Iraq. Molly Leatherman, who represented the students, said, "We hope this mural will help people rethink the consequences humankind faces by going to war with Iraq."

Ann Francis, a member of the Red Cedar Friends Meeting, said, "We want the children in the United States and in the world to have a better life -- one without hate, terror and killing. We come together to offer an opportunity for people in the Greater Lansing community to ask questions about alternatives to war." She said that since Sept. 11 more than 750 area residents have gathered for a weekly peace vigil at the Federal Building and recently also at the Capitol.

The director of the Shalom Center for Justice and Peace, the Rev. Robert Roth, said that George W. Bush has been the first Methodist president in the history of the country who refused to meet with his own bishop. "The bishops want to raise questions about a new, preemptive and massively lethal war on Iraq. We call upon Bush to at least give the bishops a hearing."

At the rally Michael Perez, a co-founder of Students for Peace and Justice at Michigan State University, said they plan to draft a peace resolution by February 2003. "This would be in direct response to the undergraduate student body's recent decision to make it a non-important issue," said Perez, referring to a peace resolution made to Michigan State University's Academic Council that was recently turned down by the student body, which concluded that taking a stance on war was not an academic issue.

Cooley Law School Adjunct Professor, Anabel Dwyer, told rally participants that she'd recently testified at the City Council of Kalamazoo, to answer questions on international law that the Council needed for its decision to oppose war. "This is a very important way to raise this issue. There were two large public hearings in Kalamazoo." According to the non-profit organization National Priorities Project, in 2002 Lansing residents paid \$96 million in federal taxes for the military budget. Instead of spending money for the "war machine," Dwyer suggested that Lansing "address serious problems, such as lack of education, and funding for AIDS."

Retired United Church of Christ pastor John Duley said he embraced this idea. He pointed his finger toward a Christmas decoration in front of City Hall reading, "Peace on Earth." "Instead of just responding violence with violence, we should rather think of the non-violent programs we used after World War II, such as the Marshall Plan, that helped countries to get their feet back on the ground."

In addition to asking area city councils to pass antiwar resolutions, coalition representatives said they plan to sponsor local events and to help organize buses and vans for the upcoming national antiwar demonstration in Washington on Jan. 18. They believe it will be the largest anti-war demonstration in the United States since the Vietnam War.

After Friday's rally, 12 protesters walked to the Lansing State Journal office building on Lenawee Street to complain about the paper's lack of coverage of the event. "First, we were simply told that ... the editor reportedly covering these types of things, was gone," Thelen said. Thelen said they finally spoke with the

managing editor Don Hudson, who Thelen said told them it was "completely inappropriate" for the activists to show up in person at the paper. "Well, I believe it's inappropriate that you didn't send a reporter," Thelen said he responded. Thelen said they were told they should have notified the LSJ in advance and the event would have been covered. The group said e-mails had been sent to several reporters and editors, as well as a faxes. A press notice was put in the House of Representatives media mailboxes, and the newsroom was given a reminder call two days in advance, and again three hours before the press conference. After another call to the newspaper late Friday afternoon, a small news story was published under "Community Briefs," with incorrect contact information. "I am tempted to assume this was done on purpose," said Thelen. Hudson was out of town and unavailable for comment.

Members of the new antiwar organization also include: Church of the Brethren, Fellowship Greater Lansing Youth for Peace and Justice; Green Party Capital Area Chapter; Groundwork for a Just Cause; Lansing Peace Coalition, Michigan Peace Team, MSU Faculty, Staff, and Student Coalition against the war in Iraq; Pax Christi Lansing; Pax Christi Michigan; Red Cedar Friends Meeting; St. John Catholic Student Parish; St. Stephen Community Church; Shalom Center for Justice and Peace; Students for Peace and Justice; Social Action Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Church.

Those interested in joining the network or receiving antiwar yard signs should contact Fred Thelen at (517) 394-4639, or Margaret Kingsbury at (517) 394-2054.

Care to respond? Send letters to letters@lansingcitypulse.com. View our Letters policy.

Lansing City Pulse (MI)

Date: December 18, 2002

Copyright (c) 2002 Lansing City Pulse. All rights reserved.