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The sun shines on a day of anti-war protest

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By DANIEL STURM

Aaron Stuttman, one of the 600 protesters gathered at the rally against the war in Iraq at the State Capitol Saturday, did not seem the least bit bothered by the rain. Stuttman said he hoped the demonstration would send a message that public opposition to the war remains strong.

Then the sun came out □ a change in the weather that fit the energizing message Stuttman thought the rally should send: "There are two types of energy. Some comes low and slow, and some comes fast and high. We are going to send out high-frequency energy today."

Carrying a banner with "Bush Lied, Thousands Died," and "Save the Bill of Rights" printed on it, the Capitol Area Green Party member said he believed Bush should be impeached for dragging Americans into an unwanted war with the world. "Bush deserves impeachment much more than a president who had a promiscuous affair while in the White House."

The research group, Iraq Body Count, reports that as many as 10,000 non-combatant civilian deaths have been the direct result of military actions since the invasion last year. 582 U.S. soldiers have also died, and more than 3,300 have been wounded.

Sponsored by the Greater Lansing Network Against War and Injustice, the Lansing march, rally and teach-in was one of 11 such events Michigan-wide, and one of thousands worldwide, marking the one-year anniversary of the U.S. and Great Britain's invasion of Iraq.

The demonstrators came from around Michigan, including 200 from Detroit. Standing in front of the Capitol, they shouted slogans like "peace now, peace now," and listened to the music performance of Pat Madden-Roth, and to speakers, among them State Rep. Rev. Michael Murphy (D-Lansing) and Abayomi Azikiwe of the Detroit Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice.

At the end of the rally, participants moved to Lansing Community College's Old Central Building, where workshops were held on topics like the USA Patriot Act, the domestic costs of war, global trade agreements, U.S. world domination and U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, Palestine and Iraq.

At one workshop, titled "Are you a terrorist?" participants analyzed the many uses of the concept of "terrorism," internationally and within the legal framework of the USA Patriot Act.

Anabel Dwyer, a professor of international law at Cooley Law School, pointed out that the legal meaning of terrorism had changed as a result of the USA Patriot Act. This act added for the first time the notion of "domestic terrorism," in the United States Code, Section 3077(1), Title 18. In its new legal definition, domestic terrorism

includes activities that "appear to be" influencing "the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion," or "to intimidate or coerce a civilian population."

Dwyer said that Americans experienced this redefinition for the first time in November 2003, when police forces cracked down on the protest against the Free Trade Area of the Americas Ministerial Meeting in Miami. "What they're assuming now is that anyone who gets together in opposition could already be considered a terrorist under the new Patriot Act."

The law professor said it was shocking to observe the congressional appropriation of public and private funds for the sole purpose of deterring political dissent. Congress authorized \$8 million for the police actions in Miami and raised an additional \$3 million in private donations.

James Ridolfo, one of 30 Lansing-area activists who went to Miami, said it was frightening to witness the level of violence exercised by the police. "We were not a revolutionary threat," recalled Ridolfo, a member of MSU Students for Peace and Justice. "But the state saw us as terrorists. They outnumbered us, and they attacked us for two days."

Ridolfo, a graduate student studying rhetoric at MSU, said it was frightening to see how this concept of "squashing" non-violent oppositional voices and independent media (journalists refused to be escorted by the police as "embedded reporters") through force and rubber bullets, was being seen as a model for dispelling dissent at future economic summits.

Rosina Hassoun, an adjunct professor of anthropology at Michigan State University, said she thought President Bush acted more like "a chicken with his head cut off" when he ordered the carpet-bombing of Afghanistan to hunt down Al Qaeda terrorists.

Hassoun, who has conducted interviews with more than 600 Arabs living in America, believed the redefinition of terrorism began in the 1980s. "All it takes is one person that's been proven to be involved with a terrorist organization, and they shut down the entire organization. That's already happened in the past."

Hassoun agreed that terrorism was a vague concept, and argued that while U.S. officials referred to all insurgency in Iraq as "terrorism," in Arab countries there is a counter-discourse that distinguishes Iraqi "freedom fighters," or those who are simply resisting foreign occupation.

Hassoun pointed out that military intervention in Iraq was never approved by the United Nations, and also emphasized that it would be a mistake to equate Al Qaeda military attacks, like the train bomb in Madrid, with the self-defense actions of freedom fighters. The anthropologist said that the image of the Taliban/Al Qaeda as "freedom fighters" was actually created by the U.S. government when they were recruiting Taliban soldiers to help defeat Soviet troops in the Afghanistan war. This image was turned around after 9/11, when every Taliban member was then suddenly a "terrorist."

Hassoun warned against forcing the Arab world to define terrorism so broadly. "This ethnocentric perspective could cause a huge backlash. So what we're actually doing is increasing terrorism and radicalism in the Middle East."

While exchanging the thoughts and reflections made in the various workshops, at a final forum the peace rally participants agreed that local and statewide anti-war actions needed to be intensified before the presidential election. Doing something about the aggressive military recruiters in Michigan high schools was emphasized. Others mentioned boycotting corporations that profiteer from the military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti, and making the Democratic presidential candidates aware that "beating Bush" is not enough.

The group expressed support for Bob Alexander, a Lansing area peace activist and state campaign organizer for Democratic presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, in his probable campaign for Congress in the 8th District, which includes Lansing, against pro-war Rep. Mike Rogers (R).

Also enthusiastically supported was the idea of a statewide peace demonstration, brought to the table by Kenneth Harrow, an MSU English professor. Harrow proposed co-opting the Mackinac Bridge during Labor Day, the only day of the year when pedestrians are allowed to walk across the bridge.

"Let's make Sept. 3 a Peace Day, let's rename the bridge the □Peace Bridge," Harrow said.

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