

700 Santa Cruzans March Against A Mideast War

A growing wave of dissatisfaction and outrage over potential war in the Middle East has taken an active hold in Santa Cruz. As demonstrations mount across the country, veteran peace organizers as well as newer student activists have successfully begun a series of rallies and protests within this community. The number of people participating in Santa Cruz demonstrations more than doubled since October's rally.

On October 13th, 300 people rallied against U.S. intervention at Mission Plaza Park. With further deployments of troops to the Gulf and serious questions raised about the constitutionality of Bush's military policy, more and more Santa Cruzans are becoming involved.

On November 15th, the Persian Gulf Peace Coalition continued its "Stop the War Before it Starts" campaign with an organized nonviolent blockade of the Military Recruiting Center in Capitola. Other organizers included Santa Cruz Students for Social Responsibility (SCSSR) and Pledge of Resistance. About 150 protesters gathered at Jade St. Park and then marched to the Center, where they successfully prevented recruitment for the day. They left at 5:00 pm, after being threatened with arrests, vowing to return at 8:00 am the next day. There were no arrests made.

The energy and direction of the two-day blockade carried into the weekend, when over 700 people, mostly students, marched down from UCSC onto Mission St. and into the Plaza, blocking traffic and chanting anti-war slogans. The turnout was over twice the number of the previous rally.

Speakers included Vietnam veteran Peggy Tuxen-Akers, Michael Job of the Lavender Vets for Peace, former Mayor Mike Rotkin, Marine resister Erik Larsen, Marine reservist/resister Todd King, folksinger Blase Bonpane, SCSSR speaker Nick Cain, and newly-elected City Councilmember Scott Kennedy. The tone of the speeches ranged from the politically persuasive to the emotionally wrenching, and as the speakers crossed the platform, a sense of urgency gripped the crowd. M.C. Gail Bloebaum of the Persian Gulf Peace Coalition announced Santa Cruz's "The Day Of" emergency rally, a

phenomenon that is occurring nationwide. It calls for an immediate public response to the war on the day that shooting breaks out, designating a time and place for a mass rally/strategizing meeting. Atlanta, Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and Honolulu have all planned TDO and TDA ("The Day Of" and "The Day After") events. Santa Cruz's will be at 5:30 pm in the old Ford's parking lot, current site of the Downtown Farmer's Market.

Within the national context of anti-war sentiment, certain comments had a timely and immediate ring. Peggy Tuxen-Akers (interviewed this issue), a veteran who served with the medical forces in Vietnam, delivered a moving and powerful speech that spoke to the horrors of war and the youthful naiveté of her audience. "People often ask me if being there was like life at the 4077th with Hawkeye and Trapper John. Our patients didn't walk away at the end of the day. The maimed remained forever maimed, and the dead forever dead."

Mike Rotkin echoed the spirit of the rally: "We need to build a movement. There are a lot of reasons to oppose this war. It took 15 years to stop the war in Vietnam. We don't have 15 years."

— Claire
Riccardi

