

Rallying Against the War

Local Anti-War Movement Picks up Momentum

BY MATT MARSHALL

HUNDREDS OF ANTI-war demonstrations took to the streets of Santa Cruz in a recent protest against the rapid build-up of US military forces in the Persian Gulf. At a rally reflecting the growing strength of opposition to US policy in the region, local residents were asked to open their homes as refuge to soldiers who refuse to ship out.

"I would like us to declare Santa Cruz a sanctuary for GI resistance," shouted Marine Corporal Erik Larsen, standing before a crowd of more than 600 at Mission Plaza on November 17. Larsen, who lives in Hayward and has received national attention with his public denunciations of US policy in the Middle East, brought the crowd to its feet with his rousing criticism of US policy.

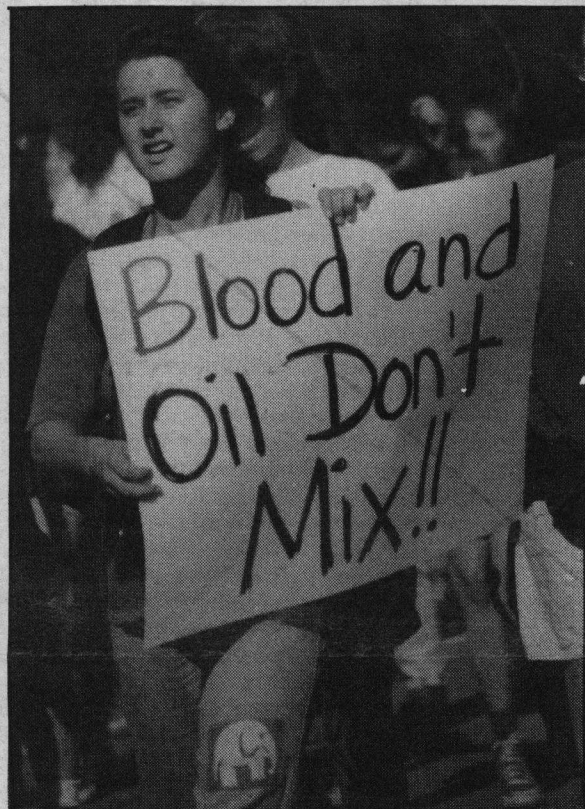
Before the rally, hundreds of UCSC students and city residents walked from the campus to downtown Santa Cruz. "Our goal is to cry out to the people, students and government of this country, to let them know that we should stop this war before it starts," said Gordon McIver prior to the march. McIver is a member of Santa Cruz Students for Social Responsibility, the group which organized the protest.

"It is time we get the power in the people's hands"

—Vietnam veteran Michael Jobe

Chants of "Hey, hey, ho, ho, we won't die for Texaco" and "No war for big oil! Bring the troops home!" rang out across UCSC's meadows as the protestors made their way down the hill.

The police tried to prevent the march from turning onto Mission Street and directed the protesters to continue down Bay Street. Despite police efforts to keep traffic on Mission moving, protesters suc-



Aminda Galtin

Hundreds of demonstrators marched from UCSC to downtown

ceeded in temporarily blocking both lanes of traffic. Several of the protesters were arrested as a result.

Some participants rode bicycles with protest signs on their backs. One read: "Bicycle! Boycott Oil Now! Cars—Driving US to war." Others shouted to occupants of the stopped cars on Mission Street to join them in their boycott of gas.

The speakers invited to address the crowd at Mission Plaza represented a diverse range of perspectives. Michael Jobe, a Vietnam veteran, said he is vehemently opposed to the prospect of fighting in the Gulf. He recalled how he and other Vietnam veterans were spurned by the peace movement when they came home and urged the crowd to work with soldiers, not against them, in opposing the war. Jobe said the current tendency, just like it was during the Vietnam war, is for the president's advisors to alienate the president from the people when making war decisions. "It is time we get the power into the people's hands. We already know that there exists a government

within the government that is running the country. Ollie North proved that."

"We now have a significant portion of our population against the war," said UCSC Community Studies Lecturer and former Santa Cruz Mayor Mike Rotkin. Observing that the crowd was about twice the size of an anti-war protest that gathered at the same place a month ago, he said "it took a couple of years during Vietnam, now it has taken only a couple of months." Noting that 84 members of Congress recently signed a petition against the war, Rotkin argued that a strong coalition is forming in opposition to the war, and this has been reflected in the declining popularity of President Bush in recent polls.

"The intervention in the Gulf is a way to justify the vast amounts of money spent in operating weapons labs and funding military research at universities," said Students for Social Responsibility activist Nick Cain. "We should use these same labs and universities to research

alternative fuels and alternative transportation technologies," he said. Cain questioned why the US had chosen to intervene so decisively in the Gulf, and bypassed plenty of other areas of the world in which to resist oppression. He criticized the \$300 billion US defense budget and the systematic dispersal of military contracts to companies throughout the nation, which creates a situation in which every state has an interest in sustaining military spending.

Newly-elected Santa Cruz City Council Member Scott Kennedy also lambasted the US government's policy in the Gulf. "The US has its

hat out begging for money from other countries, as though our men are paid mercenaries," he complained. Kennedy said that if the costs of Operation Desert Shield are included, the price of oil imported into the US is now \$495 a barrel.

Many speakers at the rally voiced concerns about current government priorities—insufficient investment in education and public infrastructure, declining economic performance spurred by an oversized defense budget, and the simultaneous dependence on cheap foreign oil and neglect of research into alternative energy forms.

Dissenting Soldiers on the Defensive

At last count, there were 26 "public" military resisters nationwide, and all of them were actively organizing to oppose the US war mobilization. As grassroots activists across the country intensify their efforts to oppose a war in the Middle East, the US military is trying to deal with dissent in its own ranks.

UCSC's Students for Social Responsibility is organizing a week of local events (see News on the March, p.9) in support of Marine Jeff Paterson, whose court martial trial will begin on Monday, December 3. Paterson refused to ship out from his base in Hawaii, and faces three to five years in jail for resisting orders to fly out with his unit to Saudi Arabia. Paterson is charged with two counts of unauthorized absence, one count of missing a movement by a Saudi bound aircraft, and one count of disobeying orders by his command.

In an editorial that recently appeared in the *LA Times*, Paterson stated, "I felt that tens of thousands of lives were being threatened for imperialistic economic interests...what is really at stake here is who will manipulate the Earth's resources to the benefit of whom in the post-Cold-War era."

Paterson's application for Conscientious Objector status was denied by his military commanders. According to a press release by the US Out of the Persian Gulf/Committee to Defend Jeff Paterson (based in Hawaii where Paterson was stationed), "the rejection was primarily based on their belief that Jeff's objections to the war are 'politically' motivated, rather than moral or ethical."

His trial will be watched closely by anti-war activists across the country, who are organizing demonstrations and rallies in support of Paterson across the country during the week of December 3.

On Wednesday, November 21, Marine Corporal Erik Larsen underwent questioning in Hayward by military commanders reviewing his application for Conscientious Objector status. Larsen's attorney told *City on a Hill* that he is confident that Larsen will be granted CO status and be honorably discharged. "He was subjected to intense questioning and he answered it very well, with eloquence and sincerity," said Attorney Robert Rivkin of San Francisco. "He is obviously a sincere CO and meets the requirements." Rivkin has specialized in military law for 20 years, and represented dozens of COs during the Vietnam era. He said that a decision may be reached on Larsen's application by Friday, November 29. It would then go to commanders in Washington DC for final approval.

—Mike Blain