

Taking the War to Bush

Eugene activists disrupt inauguration ceremony. • By Kera Abraham

Three activists from Eugene — Carol Melia, Willow Rose and Peter Chabarek — traveled to Washington, D.C., to take part in protests of the Jan. 20 inauguration of President George W. Bush. “We could not sit on the sidelines for the coronation of mad King George, so off we went,” Chabarek says. “We are just ordinary folks with draft age kids who are extremely upset with what this administration is doing. We planned a little surprise for Mr. Bush and his guests.”

Last fall, Melia and Chabarek protested at the Republican National Convention and disrupted Bush and Cheney campaign rallies in Oregon with dramatic anti-war messages. Although Chabarek initially hesitated over the prospect of another grueling protest mission, unpaid time off work, and the threat of attack or arrest, he finally packed up his heavy winter gear and guitar and headed to D.C. “This was a chance to shame and embarrass the administration in their



A poster along the parade route

moment of supposed triumph,” he says.

The activists nabbed seats about 60 yards from the podium for the swearing-in ceremony on the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol

Building. Just as Supreme Court Justice Renquist was about to deliver the oath of office, they stepped into the aisle and started screaming, “Stop the war! Bring home the

troops!” Melia had a video camera rolling. The activists could hear their voices echoing off the Capitol Building, so they felt sure they were being heard.

Although military ushers guarded the aisles, Chabarek describes a slow response from security personnel. “The military ushers next to us were stunned,” he says. “They didn’t seem to know what to do. They decided not to do anything.”

More daunting were the Bush supporters in the crowd. One man doused the protesters with water and pushed each to the ground. Melia got into a wrestling match with a woman who tried to steal the camera from her. “But we all popped up and just kept screaming,” Chabarek says.

After about a minute, the capitol police showed up. “You can’t be doing that here,” one officer told the protesters. “I’ll have to ask you to leave for your own protection.” Melia, Chabarek and Rose felt they had completed the mission successfully and didn’t wish to be arrested, so they complied with police and were escorted out. “They did not charge us with anything and seemed to go out of their way to be courteous to us,” Chabarek says.

As they were being led out, Melia told people in the crowd, “Let’s bring home all



A Louisiana couple enjoys the show.



A military usher watches the aisles.

Eugene's Answer

A view from the streets • By Julian Michels

Eugene’s Jan. 20th counter-inauguration celebration and peace protest was a great success. Hundreds turned out at the Federal Building for an event that included activist speakers, a line of drummers, a sidewalk filled with protesters petitioning passing drivers, and a candle-lit walk around the Federal Building.

Probably the largest contingent present was the campus group, UO Students for Change. They sponsored a parallel event on campus from 12 to 4 pm, and at its conclusion hundreds of singing and shouting students marched *en masse* downtown to join the older generation of protesters. As a result of their incredibly ambitious goals, Students for Change is now receiving support and mentorship from MIT professor Noam Chomsky as well as an array of other activists and visionaries.

Exhausted after the event, student organizers collapsed together at Cosmic Pizza, ruefully glancing around at the crammed restaurant as political theater played loudly in the background. When I asked them what was next, a shrug passed around the table. One member of the group answered, “Come to the planning meeting on Sunday night. We can talk about that.”

High school-aged youth were present throughout the protest, some of them picketing with hand-made signs as others gathered on street-corners, dancing to their friends’ drumming. A number of religious denominations were represented, as well as nonprofits such as Justice Not War and the Pacific Green Party of Lane County. A convergence of Eugene’s secular and religious liberal activist groups seems inevitable in the growing extremity of general opposition.

And there was opposition. Young Republicans materialized in force, protesting the protest both at the university events and at the federal building. At the university, they stood above the protesters on the balcony of the Erb Memorial Union,

heckling speakers who presented information and read political poetry. Banner-bearing peace protesters moved up to join them, filling in the spaces around and between the hecklers, still showing their support and clapping for the UO speakers. A trio of hecklers followed the tail-end of the protest, yelling at an older activist who walked slowly with a bicycle and occasionally stopped to look over his shoulder and yell back at his pursuers.

Later, just as the candlelight march around the federal building began, marchers heard a recording of the national anthem. A huge-wheeled pick-up truck came into sight, replete with a megaphone audio system, several young Republicans, and a cardboard cut-out of George Bush the Second. The truck drove around the block as protesters turned to stare. “Well, isn’t that something,” commented a middle-aged man. His daughter gripped him with her left hand, a small, burning candle in her right. “You lost, buddy!” one of the float’s constituents shouted at a dreadlocked young student. “We all lost!” he called back without missing a beat.

A few banner-bearing young men walked up to one of the street corners. They stood near the front of the picketers and unveiled their sign: “These People Hate America,” in big, bold letters. A moment later, four young women moved up resolutely to stand in front of them. They held smaller signs emblazoned with “Peace,” which they held up in front of the banner-bearers. Both messages were visible to passing cars.

Police forces were apparent throughout the day. At first, officers seemed nervous with the growing crowds. But the police at the Federal Building were appreciative of the peacefulness and solemnity of the demonstration. “Everything’s fine,” one officer said.

Another officer stood at the street corner where the banner-bearing Republicans were now chatting with their peace-picketing counterparts. He looked out of place, sandwiched in a tight crowd of activists. When asked if he was enjoying himself, he laughed. Then his face sobered. “Tell everyone to be careful crossing the street,” he said, nodding to show he was serious. “The cars come around there really fast, and the drivers don’t look.”