

Desperate Times

Local peace activists step it up.

The U.S.-led war in Iraq is looking bleak. The Iraqi people are increasingly unhappy about the occupying American presence, and a majority of them now feel that things were better under Saddam. Kids who see their houses bombed, their parents disappear or their siblings die of cancer from depleted uranium are learning to hate America. Muslim extremists are pouring into the country to join the insurgency, and these guerilla fighters with hearts ablaze are killing American soldiers daily. The U.S. troops, for their part, are hot and tired and unsure why they're there. They're coming home mentally disturbed, wounded, or in body bags.

The White House may not care, but peace activists in Eugene do.

While George W. Bush refused to speak with grieving mother Cindy Sheehan, who camped outside his ranch in Crawford, Texas, to ask why her son Casey died in Iraq, hundreds of Sheehan's supporters in Eugene gathered for a vigil on the evening of Aug. 17.

The crowd was surprisingly big and surprisingly hushed. Organizers counted 680 heads at the Federal Building, probably the largest crowd in recent years. Many of attendees were elderly; about a third were college-age or younger. They didn't chant, and they didn't shout into microphones. They did, however, hold candles and sing. It was low-key but lasted two hours. *The Register-Guard* did not cover the event.

George Beres, a Eugene activist who attended the vigil, noticed a lot of his neighbors from the south Eugene hills, a wealthier part of the city. "To me, that gave a different dimension to this than many of the demonstrations in the past," he said.

Lifelong civil rights activist Ruth Koenig was also there. "There wasn't too much organization, so I just started singing 'Give Peace a Chance,'" she said.

Donating Blood

Two days after the vigil, activists staged a smaller but more cutting action. A group of people stood silently outside the military recruiting offices in Santa Clara Square while Luisa Beal, a veterinary surgeon from Tacoma, Wash., made a one-inch vertical cut in her left wrist.

Beal, dressed in white pants and a white shirt reading "WAKE UP!", pressed a synthetic fiber into the cut until it was soaked with blood. She carefully, neatly wrote "Bush Lied" in big letters on her white Ford pickup. Then she walked to the doors of the Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force recruiting offices and left a crimson handprint on each. She cleaned them up a few minutes later.

The crowd of supporters and passers-by worried about her health, but Beal was fine. She bandaged her wrist, sipped some carrot juice and drove her pickup into downtown Eugene — and later back to Tacoma — to display her statement to the world.

Beal waves off the idea that her bloody statement was extreme. "I didn't lose much blood," she said. "Maybe a quarter of a cup, less than when you donate blood. But I was donating blood, in a sense. People are insulated from what was going on in Iraq, and in a



Peace Activist Luisa Beal

way, I wanted them to see it here.

"A lot of people say, 'She's crazy.' And yeah, I'm mad. I'm mad as hell, and I want to disturb people. People are too complacent. Unless we know someone in the military or who has been arrested because of actions, the war is not in our consciousness."

Asked how people responded to the bloody words on her truck, Beal replied, "The reaction has been shock and awe."

Strike called at UO

On campus, too, peace activists are raising the stakes. On Aug. 19, UO graduate student Brian Bogart (author of "America Programmed for War," *EW* 7/28, 8/4, 8/11) declared a strike in opposition to universities' role in the war industry, beginning Sept. 26.

"I refuse to study inside the classroom of any school that sells itself to the war industry," Bogart wrote in a letter to President Bush, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Oregon Gov. Kulongoski, Association of American Universities President Nils Hasselmo and UO President Dave Frohnmayr.

Bogart takes offense to the fact that more than 300 American universities receive funding from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to develop war technology. "It is abundantly clear that you believe America's top priority is profit from the business of war, not the general welfare of its people," he wrote.

Bogart, the UO's first graduate student in the Peace Studies master's program, is launching IntelligentFuture.org, a website that challenges the growth of weapons research on campuses and develops peace education curricula. During the strike, Bogart plans to stand outside the university and speak against the partnerships between universities and the DoD.

Hundreds of scholars sponsored Bogart's action, including historian Noam Chomsky, Global Exchange founder Medea Benjamin and several UO grad students. College-level teachers and students can sign the petition by e-mailing bdb92@hotmail.com **ew**

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