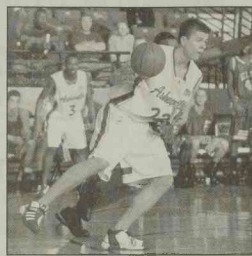


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Peace activists organize counter rally

Peace rally organizers concerned about pro-war sentiments of 'Support Our Soldiers' rally

Dearborn McCorkle

News Editor

Local peace activists reacted to the perceived pro-war sentiments of the "Support Our Soldiers" rally by organizing their own "Support Our Soldiers - Bring Them Home" peace rally.

"I felt someone needed to step forward and expose the sham of neutrality concerning that event (SOS rally)," said Cecil Bothwell, managing editor of *The Mountain Xpress* and organizer of the peace rally.

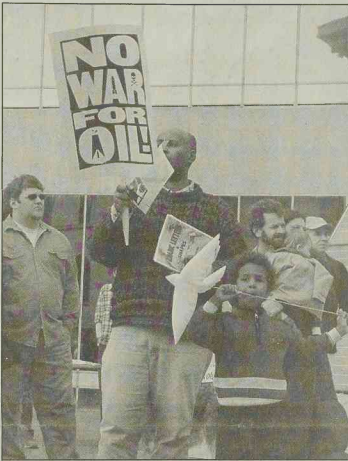
Hundreds of local residents turned up for the peace rally, which took place in Pack Square just an hour after the "Support Our Soldiers" (SOS) rally began in the City County Plaza.

"Other SOS rallies around the country have been distinctly pro-war, and the fact that they are spontaneously occurring elsewhere suggests some measure of information sharing between organizers," said Bothwell.

"I am under the impression that it (was) a concerted effort to divert the public's attention from the war, which most American's oppose if we don't have U.N. support, and finess the issue by insisting that now we must quit opposing the war and back the effort for the good of our troops. So I decided to do whatever I could to offer a corrective."

Approximately 1,000 people attended the rally, according to Bothwell.

The peace rally kicked-off at 2 p.m. with Bothwell speaking to the crowd about why he organized the rally. Originally, Bothwell aimed to have *The Mountain Xpress* join other media outlets, such as the Asheville Citizen-Times (AC-T) and WLOS,



DEARBORN MCCORKLE/NEWS EDITOR

Professor Elmoiz E. Abunura holds a sign reading "No War For Oil" at the peace rally March 1. His son stands beside him carrying a white dove.

in supporting the SOS rally, but felt the event leaned more towards a pro-war stance, according to Bothwell. "I first learned of the SOS rally from an editorial by AC-T editor Bob Gabardi," said Bothwell. "He described the event as non-political and suggested that all local media outlets should get together behind the rally."

"I checked into the event further and the tone of the advertising and background of the speakers was distinctly pro-war."

In order for the SOS rally to be non-political, it needed speakers representing a variety of viewpoints and issues, according to Bothwell. "I wrote to Gabardi, as well as to WLOS, WCQS and the organizers of the SOS event, to state my interest in having Mountain Xpress support the event," said Bothwell.

"(I) also pointed out that the event appeared to be pro-war and that some sort of balance should be injected," said Bothwell.



MAX TAINTOR/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Two children hold a "Kids For Peace" sign while listening to rally speakers.

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Cecil Bothwell,
Managing Editor of *'The Mountain Xpress'*

"I offered to address their rally on veterans affairs, or help them find others who could help broaden the message. Gabardi replied by saying that he had nothing to do with picking speakers. The others did not reply."

The Asheville Citizen-Times did not sponsor or endorse the SOS rally, rather provided meeting space for the SOS planning committee and coverage before and during the event, according to Asheville Citizen-Times Editor Robert Gabardi.

"Whenever there is any kind of community effort, we want to be a partner in that," said Gabardi. "Essentially, in the end, all we did was open our building to them for a series of meetings they held here. We tried to, both in our coverage in advance and in the coverage the day of, to be as balanced as we could, but we were in no way a sponsor of anything."

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'Support our Soldiers' rally packs downtown

Byth Wyche

News Reporter

Exercising the right to peacefully assemble, an estimated 1,500 gathered at the City County Plaza in downtown Asheville for the Support Our Soldiers (S.O.S.) rally March 1.

The purpose of S.O.S., as stated in the title, was to support our soldiers," said Bill Fishburne, co-chairman of the S.O.S. committee.

"We wanted to let the soldiers know that we appreciate their sacrificial service. It's a sacrificial service (out of) the love of this country. We wanted to be there for them when they're gone by supporting their families and providing moral support."

Located only a few hundred yards from the anti-war protest at the Vance Monument, the S.O.S. rally featured an array of American flags, speakers and performers, according to *The Asheville Citizen-Times*.



MAX TAINTOR/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

"Support our Soldiers" rally participants waved flags, sang and listened to gospel music March 1.

Formed by a group of private citizens, the S.O.S. committee felt the need to support the soldiers after witnessing the abuse many endured when returning from Vietnam, explained Fishburne.

The S.O.S. committee organized

the rally in five weeks with the help of many volunteers and private donations.

"I'm here to support the soldiers of course, because I want them to come home," said James Raiford, a UNCA alumnus, who also attended

both the S.O.S. rally and the anti-war protest. "I think most everybody is in agreement with wanting to support the troops, but that's where the agreement ends. I am anti-war, but I also come from a military family, so, I'm very much

aware of the situation soldiers are in right now."

S.O.S. organizers emphasized the rally's purpose centered on supporting the soldiers and that the event did not have a political statement, either for or against the potential war, according to Fishburne. "We wanted to raise the community's awareness that these are our boys and girls that are over there, serving their country," said Fishburne.

"I know it sounds simple and that people are looking for a pro-war motive, but it's simply not there. You're not going to find it, because it's not there."

Despite the organizers' intentions, S.O.S. rally participants still voiced opinions concerning the potential war with Iraq.

Most signs favored the Bush administration's current policy towards Iraq, with posters reading "Forget France, France forgot us" and "Wake up U.S.A., radicals are encouraging Saddam."

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Are anti-war protesters Un-American?



"I believe it is un-American for people to not support their fellow troops while in battle."

Randy Padgett,
sophomore drama major



"Just because you are anti-war doesn't mean you're any less of a citizen."

Stephanie Jones,
undeclared freshman



"I think that we should go to war and I think that the anti-war activists are un-American because they need to support our country and what our troops and president want us to do."

Jason Modell,
senior business major



"I don't think it's un-American for anti-war protest, if nothing else, it's a wake-up call for the government to understand that we're not all behind this."

Thomas Transue,
Senior Business Major