

Santa Cruz Vigil Against Two Wars

Activists unite to protest the War In Iraq and the War Against the Poor at home.

by Becky Johnson

Even before the bombs began to fall in Baghdad, a small band of people, both homeless and non-homeless, began the 24-hour Vigil to End Two Wars. The war against Iraq loomed, but the war against Santa Cruz's homeless people was ongoing. HUFF activists and others set out to show the emergency by gathering at Cooper Street and Pacific Avenue to distribute literature, band together for comfort, and to demonstrate that not everyone in America was gung ho on a war with Iraq.

One of the offerings of the vigil was the Peace Scroll which lay unfurled to a blank spot, and colorful markers and crayons invited all members of the community to write a message of peace on the scroll. "What are you going to do with the scroll when its done?," one man asked who had stopped by to talk with vigilers. We told him we were going to videotape it, then have 50 people carry it all through town Chinese paper dragon-style, and then roll it up and mail it to George W. Bush.

"I'll supply the vaseline," he offered.

MOHAWKS FOR PEACE

In his long coat, bandana around his head, and his piercing blue eyes, "T.J." set his own vigiling record of over 40 hours in a row at the vigil and without sleep. He remains one of the main forces at the vigil. Gabe, a high school student, considers the vigil to be his primary focus right now. Shelsea Hodges, whose original

impetus began the vigil, is a UCSC student and also working with Standing United for Peace. "Dopey," whose intelligence belies his assumed moniker, shaved his head into a blue mohawk as part of "Mohawks for Peace."

Throughout the day and night, vigilers hold signs, share food, and light candles, as passing motorists honk their horns in support, or on occasion, shout obscenities or throw water bottles at the protesters.

The 24-hour Vigil to End Two Wars focused on preventing the war in Iraq, and on resisting the ongoing war against the poor locally, which is played out by police using selective enforcement to harass those they feel "don't belong" or who are "causing problems." The Santa Cruz City Council's sleeping, sitting, and begging bans, as well as its newer Downtown Ordinances which ban "unattended backpacks" and require "one-hour move alongs" for political tablers, have been used to harass and drive away homeless and poor people.

"We have just as much right to public spaces as anyone else," said Babba Ji, a vigil supporter wearing a long robe with two large crystals suspended from his neck.

SEX FOR PEACE

At the stroke of midnight on March 11, the demonstrators at the Vigil Against Two Wars began their event, Sex for Peace. Inspired by groups of mostly young males who continually drove by the Vigil at unsafe speeds shouting something like "F__K peace!," vigilers were inspired to schedule a very special round of civil disobedience for the cause of world peace.

"A piece for peace!" vigil-goer Yani proclaimed. Throughout the day, vigilers invited people to return at midnight and have Sex for Peace. "Bring the sexual partner of your choosing and come to Cooper Street and Pacific Avenue at midnight!" announced Robert Norse of

HUFF. Most members of the public seemed keen on the event.

One man, who admitted sadly that he had no sexual partner, offered to attend and provide backup if asked.

At two minutes to midnight, Sgt. Pruger and five other police officers arrived in four police cars, temporarily interrupting some heavy necking for peace. Officer Kline, when informed that the SCPD had arrived just in time for the "Sex for Peace" event, advised vigil organizers that the indecent exposure ordinance would be enforced. "It's a misdemeanor, and I highly recommend against it," warned Officer Kline.

The organizers explained that sometimes at demonstrations, people do commit civil disobedience for the cause of the greater good. Police officers then examined the two non-commercial display devices for conformity to the size-restriction rules that limit the size of a table. Police left satisfied for the moment.

One very dedicated couple disappeared beneath the HUFF protest table, and vigilers placed several protest signs around the table. They proceeded to give it their all for the greater good of mankind. Such was their dedication and perseverance, that long after 1 p.m. they were still actively pursuing the cause of peace. "Take that Ashcroft!" the dedicated peace worker mumbled from beneath the table. One elderly onlooker commented: "When they say 'Make Love, Nor War,' they ain't kiddin'."

POLICE HARASSMENT PLAGUES VIGIL

The history of Vigil Against Two Wars has been marked by key incidents of police harassment. The vigil began on March 7 at Cooper and Pacific. In the first few days, police issued five tickets for chalking peace symbols and slogans on the sidewalk. Later, one vigil supporter drew the attention of six police officers, as well as a \$162 citation, for chalking "No War" next to his car on the street. He used the opportunity to loudly educate the public about police selective enforcement against peace and homeless activists.

On March 13, Officer Wendy Bynes intimidated the vigilers into disassembling their table and removing most of their literature by threatening to selectively enforce the one-hour move-along law. issue \$162 tickets, and confiscate property. At their next location in front of

Border's Books, vigilers called police when two drunks assaulted the protest. Police responded by holding the whole protest at gunpoint and then pressured the protesters to move on.

MERCHANT ASSAULTS VIGILERS

At their next location, in the plaza near Jamba Juice, the vigilers were physically assaulted twice by Lulu's Carpenter's owner Manifree Srinath after they announced a boycott of the coffee shop in response to Srinath's verbal abuse and refusal to serve "your kind." Vigilers asked the public to respect the boycott and/or ask the owner and workers to change their policy. They continued to vigil below the World War I monument — minus a table, minus chairs, and minus all but a few signs, given Officer Wendy Bynes' confusing instructions over what constitutes a legal non-commercial display.