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ARCHIVES

Kaua'i's peace movement localizes international issues

BY Jon Letman - Special to the Garden Island
 Posted: Wednesday, Apr 18, 2007 - 10:45:52 pm HST

Last month, as hundreds of thousands around the world protested against the Iraq war, some two dozen demonstrators stood beside the Kaumuali'i Highway near Kaua'i Community College holding signs calling for America's withdrawal from Iraq.

Passing motorists, however, may have been more concerned about the worsening traffic in which they sat, increasing development, the spread of big box stores or the impending arrival of the Hawai'i Superferry.

Some might argue that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not local issues.

Members of a local anti-war organization, the Kaua'i Peace Group, couldn't disagree more.

"These wars are being fought by people from Hawai'i, stationed in Hawai'i bases. How much more local can you get?" said Ray Catania of the Kaua'i Peace Group.

Catania, who has actively demonstrated against militarism since he was a high school student in Wahiawa during the Vietnam war, has been involved with the Kaua'i Peace Group since 2004 when he met fellow organizer János Samu.

Samu, who grew up in rural Hungary during the Soviet occupation and 1956 revolution, recalled his own youth and how parents saw the importance of getting their children involved in the movement against the occupation. Kids 13 and 14 years old were politically active, something Samu sees lacking in America's youth today.

"People who are well-fed and comfortable will never make a revolution," Samu said, adding, "we don't need a revolution, but we need to make changes and that will never happen if people are complacent or mistrust one another."



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Samu added, "Our goal is to educate people to act for peace, and about the propaganda war in the U.S. today."

Catania explained that the Kaua'i Peace Group organizes peace vigils and anti-war demonstrations in cooperation with the Kaua'i Chapter of the Surf-rider Foundation, the American Friends Service Committee, politicians, educators and a cross-section of the community.

Catania added that the Kaua'i Peace 'Ohana and Green Party were instrumental in arranging public talks by the parents of First Lt. Ehren Watada who refused to deploy to Iraq.

Last December, the Kaua'i Peace Group organized presentations by independent journalist Dahr Jamail who reports extensively from Iraq, Syria and the greater Middle East. Jamail spoke of what he called the corruption of mainstream media and its inadequate coverage of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq at free public talks at Lydgate and Salt Pond parks, as well as before a group of local high school students.

Samu and Catania have also appeared frequently on Ho'ike Kaua'i Community Television and have spoken on KKCR Kaua'i Community Radio.

Explaining the nature of the anti-war movement on Kaua'i, Catania said that compared with the Vietnam era, conditions are very different today. "Back then there was the civil rights movement and an active draft. It's not the same mindset today, and particularly on Kaua'i, the peace movement is reflective of the culture on the island."

"We're more laid back and not as aggressive as Maui or O'ahu which have larger, more urbanized populations."

Catania added, "We already have an audience with progressives and professionals, and see our increasing connection to the blue collar working class and young people as key. It's our goal to help people see the connection between American militarism and other issues, like economics and the environment which are closer to daily life."

Along with demonstrations, the Kaua'i Peace Group has organized showings of anti-war documentaries like Eugene Jarecki's "Why We Fight" and Patricia Foulkrod's "The Ground Truth," which examines the experiences of young Americans who went through military recruitment, training, combat, homecoming and their struggle to reintegrate into society.

Recent demonstrations organized by the Kaua'i Peace Group have been held simultaneously with other national protests, on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and most recently on the fourth anniversary of the Iraq War.

Last Jan. 27, coinciding with massive national protests, the Kaua'i Peace Group organized a rotating demonstration around the island which stopped at eight key roadside areas over the course of the day.

Protestors included ordinary residents, government workers, teachers, students, retirees and even island visitors.

Also present was Hawai'i State Representative Hermina Morita who said, "As a politician, I have a moral obligation to our children and future generations, who cannot vote, to ensure their opportunities to live in a peaceful and healthy environment are fulfilled. The Bush war strategy, based on falsehoods and saddling the country with huge debts, does not fulfill that promise."

Founders of www.islandbreath.org, a local community Web site, organized letter writing stations at two stops where citizens penned some 200 written appeals to members of Congress and the president, demanding an end to the Iraq war.

Samu estimated there were never fewer than 20 protestors at each stop with around 60 demonstrators gathered at the final stop in Kilauea.

Both Samu and Catania believe today's anti-war movement is part of a long process in which it is crucial for young people to become more active.

"I fear that parents don't consider their children's involvement important, but honestly, it is mostly about their future," Samu said.

"Adults have to teach youth how to create a more peaceful world for themselves in order to survive."

The Kaua'i Peace Group will present a free showing of "The Ground Truth" at the Kalaheo Neighborhood Center on April 29 at 1 p.m.

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