

Akron Protests 4th Anniversary of Iraq Invasion

Speech given by Dana Williams, AFSC
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105 Akronites (plus 6 dogs) came out for this demonstration sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Statement read before the march.

This will not be a speech to convince you of the importance of protesting against the US's war in Iraq. You are undoubtedly here because you already oppose it, and perhaps you have since before it even began. If you are like the majority of the US population, you have opposed this war for some time now.

So, do I really need to detail the long, laundry list of reasons to oppose the US's military actions? You already know that the reasons for the invasion changed with the weather: first it was about weapons of mass destruction, then about stopping Baghdad's supposed aggression against its neighbors, then to carry-out a supposed mandate from the United Nations (regarding resolutions that had been long since followed by Iraq), then about toppling the Hussein regime, and finally about freeing the Iraqi people. It is clear that this war was sold to Congress and the American people on the premise of a lie... a lie that was, of course, not a very creative lie and one easily refuted.

Do I really need to tell you that this war is being fought for oil? You're already aware of the huge oil reserves under Iraqi soil (North Korea and Cuba don't seem to have much black gold). You're already aware of how it was decided without the input of the Iraqi people that foreign oil corporations, not the Iraqi people themselves, should benefit from the profit of the oil underneath their own soil. And, you're surely aware that the engine driving all US wars abroad is the military industrial complex—a network of military specialists, weapons-making corporations, and imperialist-minded politicians. Who benefits from war?

Those who sell weapons to the military benefit, such as the war-profiteering Lockheed-Martin Corporation located here in our own community. Lockheed gave \$2.2 million during the 2004 election cycle to US politicians, and was rewarded by \$19.4 billion in military contracts in 2005. Quite a cheap investment.

And, we all know that the US has been subtly shifting its military bases from Saudi Arabia and Turkey to Iraq, to help guarantee its control over the region and its resources. More than a dozen bases—huge bases, the size of small cities—are now scattered through the countryside of a land the US conquered with brute force, against its will. And, of course, the US has been fighting wars like this for decades. Whether overt or covert, with enlisted, drafted, or mercenary forces, via military or CIA units.

The US has had its fingers in the national affairs over half of the world's countries during the last 50-years. How many coups have been sponsored, dictatorships propped-up, leaders assassinated, death squads organized, countries invaded, bombed, or mined? Should it surprise others that everyday Americans would dislike the US government doing these things?

And, lastly, I bet you knew that somewhere around 655,000 Iraqis have died since the invasion. 2 million have been made refugees in Syria, Jordan, Turkey, and Iran. 1.8 million are internally-displaced—still living in the midst of civil war, but forced from their homes. Over 3000 US troops have died in Iraq, almost 4000 Americans when counting private contractors. How many

countless thousands have been injured, maimed, and paralyzed? How many decades of psychological trauma have been guaranteed? And for what?

Akron's share of the \$456 billion spent on the war is \$237.8 million. In Ohio, we could have insured 5 million with health care, paid for a quarter million school teachers, or built 1400 elementary schools. I bet you agree with me, that these things should be our priorities and that the subjugation of Iraq is only the priority of Exxon-Mobile, Chevron-Exaco, and British Petroleum.

So, if we know the reasons why we're here... what should we do now? It's no mystery as to why we're meeting here in Hardesty Park—and it's not because the Pentagon can only find Grace Park and spy on us there (as they did in 2005). We're here, because right over there [pointed to UFCW building] is the former office of Sherrod Brown and the current offices of Betty Sutton, this area's representative in Washington. Brown voted for every bill to keep funding the Iraq occupation, despite his supposed opposition to it. We are asking Sutton to do better than her predecessor, and realize that she has a mandate from us—the American people—to de-fund the military's presence in Iraq.

We must emphasize that cutting off funding to the occupation has nothing to do with “the troops”. US military personnel will keep getting their paychecks, whether they are in Baghdad or North Carolina, Basra or Dayton. There is already adequate money left in the funding “pipeline” to pull the military out of Iraq, troops, bases, and spies. That's what we want. We want all Americans to apply merciless pressure to Sutton and her colleagues, that they end the occupation now! (Call her right now, if you'd like: 330-865-8450)

We're also here to encourage the American people to a more active role in resisting the occupation. Polls have shown that popular opinion is against the war, and has been for a while. Yet, there is no mass opposition to it yet. The peace movement, while dedicated, is still relatively small and ineffectual. We need more visibility, more activity, and more resistance. Why not start a small peace group in your neighborhood, place of worship, workplace, or school? Hold weekly or monthly meetings, events, movie showings, vigils, protests, or civil disobedience. Don't wait for a large event like this to get involved—help to organize one yourself!

To increase our visibility, we have picked Akron's busiest street to march on today. We'll head west on Market Street, to Pershing road, cross Market, and head back this way again. Once we get to this busy intersection again [point to intersection of Hawkins/Exchange/Market], I encourage you to spread out on every single corner of where Hawkins, Exchange, and Market come together. There are many, many areas for people to stand, so spread out! Let's be visible at this intersection after the march for a while, so our fellow Akronites will know that there are people like us who would spend a few hours of our Saturday morning to live our convictions and oppose this inhuman, unjust, illegal, and insane war and occupation.

Finally, if the peace movement is to become stronger, it needs to transition from protest to resistance. It's not enough any more, in our media-driven culture, to believe something. There are messages, opinions, and talking heads everywhere. We must take action to stop the violence. Over 40 years ago, at the University of California, a student named Mario Savio said it best:

“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!”

We will be holding a resistance action at the Naval Recruiter Station at 46 South Summit Avenue, this coming Monday the 19th from 9am to 5pm. There is a clipboard going around [find person with clipboard] asking for people to sign-up for a one-hour shift (or even two). There will be a continual protest outside the Station, and folks will be going inside all day long to talk to recruiters about how they disagree with US actions in Iraq. Take a photo of a dead US soldier or of a killed Iraqi. Find a way to take up as much of their time as possible. If you cannot make it to the Station during the day, try to find time to give them a call or send them a fax. If the Recruiter Station was to receive hundreds of faxes of large pictures of deceased US soldiers, that would be less opportunity for them to prey upon our fellow Akronites. We want that Station shut down! In a just society, college education would be free and the poor youth of our communities would not have to sell their labor to the Navy for a chance to improve their lives.

Although we should continue our efforts to protest the war (like we're doing now), we also need to start resisting the war! Please help us.

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