

War-avoidance efforts escalate as time runs out

by Marianna Wertz

Domestic opposition to war in the Persian Gulf has intensified in the week remaining before the Jan. 15 deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait set by George Bush.

With the collapse of the last American cosmetic show of a "dialogue" with the Iraqis on Jan. 9, when Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz insisted on Iraq's justified demand for a comprehensive diplomatic solution to the Middle East crisis, preparations are intensifying to bring millions of Americans into the streets in a series of mass demonstrations, planned to coincide with the opening of a probable hot war in the Gulf after Jan. 15.

The addition of new forces from both traditional right and left in the equation against war, as well as a powerful statement from American Catholic leaders denouncing Bush's plan as "unjust," make clear that the growing reality of war is moving Americans to more serious action.

The congressional debate, which began Jan. 10, is expected to endorse President Bush's war effort, but will nevertheless undoubtedly reflect reported "overwhelming" opposition to war flooding into congressional offices from their constituents. The discrepancy between the official polls, which show public opinion favoring war, and the report of more than "12 to 1" opposition to war in congressional mail, has left even seasoned members of Congress stunned.

Press called 'bellicose, jingoistic'

On Jan. 4, the leadership of a coalition of forces opposing the war gathered for a press conference at the National Press Club, to focus attention on the planned Jan. 19 mass demonstration. Representing the National Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East were former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, comedian Dick Gregory, civil rights leader Rev. James Bevel, Washington, D.C. City Coun-

cilwoman Hilda Mason, and other religious, minority, and trade union representatives.

Clark told the press that the need for the Jan. 19 rally, expected to draw over 15,000 people to the capital, as simultaneous demonstrations in dozens of other cities worldwide are held, was motivated by two crises: the threat of catastrophic war in the Gulf and a crisis in democratic government. "A war in the Gulf would involve primarily U.S. minorities pitted against dark-skinned peoples, in order to gain control over oil," said Clark. In relation to the crisis in democratic government, Clark said the United States is faced with an "imperial presidency, which even Bush himself admits, a paralyzed Congress, and a bellicose, jingoistic press."

A 23-year-old Navy enlisted man, Donald Ray Alexander, startled reporters by announcing that he was refusing to deploy to the Gulf because he could not support any "military move to re-establish a regime which engages in chattel slavery" (see interview, p. 50).

Also speaking at the press conference was Barbara Davidson, president of Local 476 of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFL-CIO), who denounced the notion that workers should support a war drive engineered by the same people who are busting unions and destroying workers' standard of living.

The so-called right wing's opposition to war was given voice on Jan. 8 at a forum of the Cato Institute, a free enterprise-oriented think tank in Washington, D.C. The day-long conference on "Oil, War and the Economy" included a luncheon address by Sen. Brock Adams (D-Wa.), one of the leading opponents of the Gulf deployment in the U.S. Senate.

Adams told the crowd of more than 200 that Congress, through its inaction, "has been complicit in the erosion of its rights." Adams also noted that "President Bush appears to con-

sider thwarting aggression in the Gulf more important than upholding the Constitution at home." Under the U.S. Constitution, only Congress can declare war. Adams is co-sponsor with Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Ia.) of a resolution demanding that the President seek approval of Congress before committing U.S. troops into offensive action in the Persian Gulf.

'Those I fight I do not hate'

Conservative columnist and former White House Press Secretary Patrick Buchanan intensified his opposition to the war drive with a scathing indictment of the Bush administration's policy, in a syndicated column appearing Jan. 2. Buchanan reported that a senior official from a Persian Gulf nation recently said, "Do you think I want to send my son to die for Kuwait? We have our white slaves from America to do that." Buchanan comments, "This crack is revelatory, about whom we are defending with the best and bravest of America's young. . . . If U.S. fighter-bombers soon blacken the skies over Baghdad, the American pilots may well echo William Yeats' Irish airman of World War I who saw death coming: 'I know that I shall meet my fate somewhere among the clouds above/Those that I fight I do not hate/Those that I guard I do not love.' . . .

"When the Emir of Kuwait is returned to his ruined capital and the people he abandoned, will those who lived through the hell of the occupation welcome back the white-robed rulers who spent the war sipping coffee in Taif? . . . No matter how decisive our victory, we delude ourselves if we think war will make the Gulf safe again for monarchy and polygamy."

Pope galvanizes Catholic opposition

The Catholic Church in America was galvanized into action as well, spurred on by extraordinary intervention by Pope John Paul II. The Pope bypassed all normal diplomatic channels and sent a personal message directly to the European Community foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg on Jan. 4. While recognizing that international law has been violated by the Iraqi intervention into Kuwait, the Pope reiterated his strong appeal for dialogue and negotiations because "an armed conflict would surely be disastrous."

The message was intended to break the deadlock in Europe and push continental Europe in particular to undertake a peace initiative totally independent from the United States. It is generally thought in Vatican City that the United Nations has lost all credibility for a possible last-minute mediation effort.

Concurrent with the Vatican effort, Pax Christi, U.S.A., the Catholic peace organization, took out a four-page advertisement in the Jan. 7 issue of the weekly *National Catholic Report*, opposing President Bush's Gulf war on the grounds that it is immoral. The advertisement is signed by over 1,700 prominent Catholics, including 11 bishops. Pax Christi has also issued a statement, signed by 31 bishops, calling on

Catholics serving in the military to consider refusing orders to participate in Gulf hostilities.

In the event that Bush does trigger war, Pax Christi is considering plans for demonstrations and civil disobedience.

Pax Christi, U.S.A., President-elect Bishop Walter F. Sullivan of Richmond, Virginia was interviewed by the *Virginia Pilot*, the major daily which covers the Norfolk-Hampton Roads area, where the leading industry is the huge naval base. The Jan. 7 issue quotes Bishop Sullivan: "A Catholic who is a member of the [military] service has to make a conscientious decision whether to engage in this war, which the Catholic Church considers unjustified and immoral." The Richmond Diocese includes Hampton Roads, home of one of the largest naval bases in the free world. It is the main departure point for the U.S. forces stationed in the Gulf.

According to the *Virginian Pilot*, other representatives of Pax Christi have made statements encouraging Catholics in the military to become "selective conscientious objectors," or objectors opposed to fighting in this specific conflict. In such a situation, Bishop Sullivan said, "you can't say, 'Well, I am under orders.' You can't participate if you feel a war is unjust and immoral."

Accompanying its dramatic interview, the *Virginia Pilot* reports the Catholic criteria for a "just war." The criteria include: "Military action cannot indiscriminately harm civilians as well as combatants. The war must be legitimately authorized. The harm must be in proportion to the good expected. The action must be either for self-defense or to protect the innocent."

Teach-ins and town meetings

Teach-ins and town meetings are beginning to proliferate across the country, as citizens realize that the nation is indeed headed for a bloody war:

- On Jan. 5, over 300 concerned citizens attended a teach-in on the Persian Gulf crisis, sponsored by the Pasadena Area Peace Coordinating Council, held at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California. The speakers included Jews, Muslims, Christians, historians, actors, and political activists.

- On Jan. 9, the Madison, Wisconsin city council sponsored the first official open public hearing on the Gulf crisis.

- On Jan. 10, the Schiller Institute sponsored a national day of lobbying on Capitol Hill, to coincide with the opening of congressional debate.

- On Saturday, Jan. 12, a National Day of Prayer has been called by evangelical Christians, and is officially endorsed by Pat Robertson, Jerry Rose of National Religious Broadcasting, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, and G. Raymond Carlson of Assemblies of God. Some participants, including those in foreign countries, are planning to link via phone and videophone with a prayer convocation sponsored by Redeem America, a group based in Southern California.