

# Groups criticize U.S. role in tense Persian Gulf area

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Despite the clear blue sky overhead, 70 peace activists demonstrating in front of the Liberty Pole Wednesday evening, Aug. 29, seemed to see only war clouds gathering.

"One, two, three, four, we don't want any war!" some chanted, as they carried placards bearing such slogans as: "Cheap gas isn't worth dead boys," and "Diplomacy, not guns."

The demonstrators — representing various peace groups within the city — aimed their message at U.S. citizens and political leaders, as the possibility loomed that this country would enter into war against the Middle Eastern nation of Iraq.

The rush-hour demonstration was organized by the Peace and Justice Committee of Corpus Christi Church and the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center's Committee for Middle East Peace. Members of several other peace groups also participated.

The organizers released a statement calling for the "immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops and military hardware from the Middle East," and for "vigorous support for international diplomatic efforts to resolve deep-seated disputes" in the region.

The statement also condemned anti-Arab bigotry, which it said is being aggravated by Persian Gulf crisis. The group also lamented the amount of money being spent

on maintaining the U.S. military buildup, contrasting the expenditures with the lack of health, social and educational services available to U.S. citizens, particularly children.

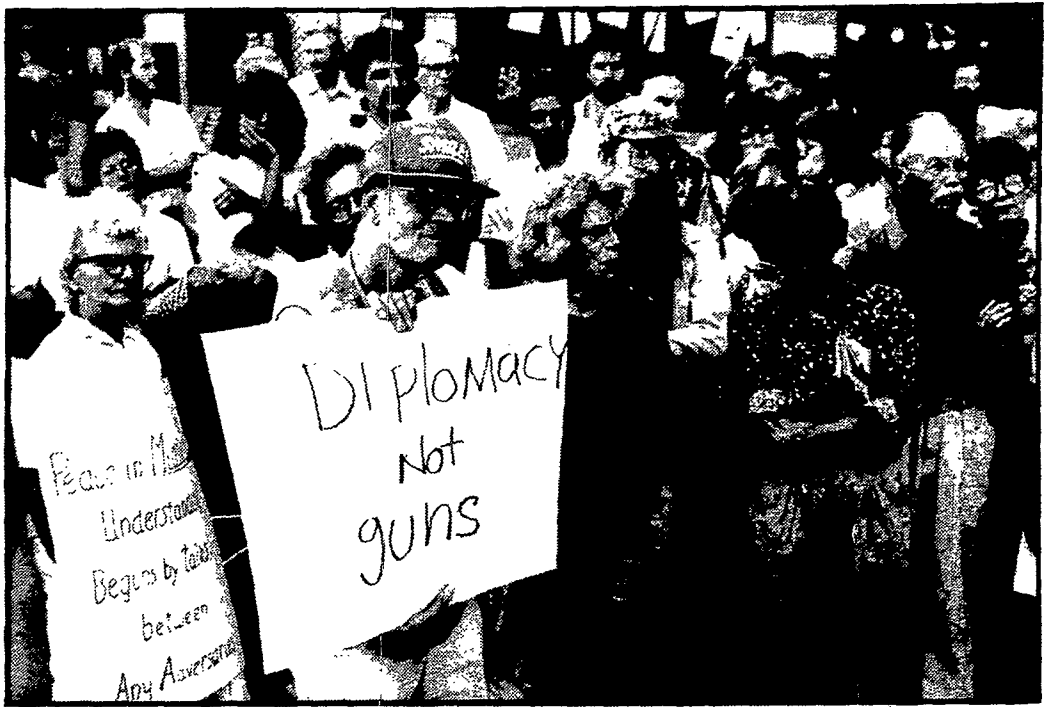
Iraq's invasion of Kuwait echoed the recent U.S. invasion of Panama, the statement noted, adding that in the Middle East, U.S. troops were being "pledged" to an attempt to re-establish a Kuwaiti monarchy organizers said was undemocratic and repressive.

While the demonstrators were unanimous in their concern over the U.S. military buildup, they brought to the demonstration a variety of perspectives on the steps being taken by President George Bush.

"I think as Catholics, we should oppose the military intervention based simply on Catholic theology of a just war," said Father Laurence Tracy, pastoral assistant for the Diocesan Office of the Spanish Apostolate. "The use of force and violence is the absolute last means to be used to resolve conflicts between nations, and in this instance it was the first used."

Many of the protesters expressed similar views that the United States had moved too quickly to use military pressure on the Iraqis.

"I'm anxious to see that we don't make another Vietnam," said Kenneth Maher, manager of the Catholic Family Center's Justice and Peace Department and a member of the Seamless Garment Net-



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Some of the 70 peace activists who marched Aug. 29 in front of Rochester's Liberty Pole listen to speakers comment on the Persian Gulf crisis.

work, a nationwide ecumenical group based in Georgia. Maher emphasized that he represented the network at the demonstration, not the Catholic Family Center.

He noted that he had taught English for six months at the University of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia in 1981, and regularly viewed television reports about the Iran-Iraq war then raging. Maher added that the Saudis had supported Iraq against the fundamentalist Moslem rulers of Iran, and that the Riyadh newscasts reflected the Iraqi point of view.

The United States should back off and allow the Arab nations to deal with Iraq, Maher argued. Acknowledging that Iraqi President Sadaam Hussein may be untrustworthy, he nonetheless said that Arab nations aligned against the ruler may be able to persuade him to pull out of Kuwait.

"The Arabs have a kind of moral suasion that we don't understand," Maher said, noting that the United States is seen as a "colonial power" in the Middle East. U.S. policy is also playing into the hands of Arab nationalists, he remarked. "(Hussein) is a hero," Maher said. "We create the (Arab heroes) by backing them into a corner and forcing them to say, 'We are Arab nationalists.'"

He also criticized President Bush's rhetoric. "I think we're playing little boy games of 'drawing a line in the sand,'"



Diane Wilczewski, one of the event's organizers, speaks to protesters. Wilczewski represents Corpus Christi Parish's Peace and Justice Committee.

Maher said, referring to a phrase the president used when warning Iraq not to invade Saudi Arabia. "I think Bush is using that to contrast with his wimpy public image — and very successfully."

Another demonstrator expressed approval of the president's actions, but said she was worried that the United States would act independently from its allies.

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## Legislators support abortion bill

Three state assembly members whose districts are located within the Rochester diocese have reportedly signed a letter supporting a federal bill that would prohibit states from enacting restrictions on abortion.

According to the New York State Right to Life Committee, Inc., the letter, which favors the "Freedom of Choice Act," was signed by 49 state legislators, including Republican Assemblywoman Audre "Penny" Cooke and Democratic Assemblyman David F. Gantt of Rochester, and Democratic Assemblyman Martin Luster of Ithaca.

When contacted for comment, Luster said he remembered signing the letter, which was sent to the U.S. Congress, whereas Cooke said she did not. However, Cooke, pointing out her pro-choice stance, remarked: "But it sounds like something I might do."

Despite repeated calls to his office, Gantt did not respond to the *Catholic Courier's* inquiries about the letter.

The Freedom of Choice Act stipulates that a state "may not restrict the right of a woman to choose to terminate a pregnancy — (1) before fetal viability; or (2) at any time, if such termination is necessary to protect the life or health of the woman."

Luster said that if the bill is passed, it would "restore formally" the legal right to

have an abortion as it existed throughout the country before last year's U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services*. The decision gave states the right to enact restrictions on abortion.

The letter the legislators signed stated, in part: "The Freedom of Choice Act ... would prohibit states from restricting the right of an individual woman to (have an abortion) ... Through the *Webster* decision, the Supreme Court invited the creation of a patchwork of new restrictions on abortion. Laws now vary from state to state. The Freedom of Choice Act would set a national policy — ending the battle in the states."

George Green, executive director of the Rochester Area Right to Life Committee, said no action had been planned as of yet regarding the legislators who signed the letter. "They're all for this pro-death legislation," he said.

Last November, Democratic Congressman Don Edwards of California introduced the bill which is currently pending in the U.S. House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights.

Deborah Ward, secretary to the subcommittee, told the *Catholic Courier* that no hearings are scheduled on the bill.

— Rob Cullivan



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