

# Anti-War Activists Come Together at Oberlin College

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Over two hundred activists from Ohio and surrounding states descended upon Oberlin College during the weekend of December 7-8 for the first regional anti-war conference sponsored by the newly-formed Oberlin Coalition Against the War (OCAW). The coalition, which has only been in existence since October, organized the event to help promote a national movement against U.S. war with Iraq.

"People are coming out against the war by the tens of thousands," junior OCAW member Vanessa Fattouh said. "We need to organize ourselves on a local, national and international level... We have the momentum."

Although the conference was not as well-attended as some participants might have hoped, it did manage to attract delegates from all over the region, including many well-known activists like Michael Albert, co-founder of *Z Magazine* and South End Press, and students from campuses as far and near as the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, The College of Wooster, Eastern Michigan, Ohio University, Ohio State, Case Western Reserve, and Wittenberg University.

The first day of the event, proved to be the busiest part of the anti-war weekend, filled from morning till night with workshops facilitated by Oberlin College professors and out-of-town speakers, covering such widely-varying topics as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the policies of the Bush administration, U.S. international relations, and "How War Affects People of Color Communities."

Conference attendees also came from a variety of ideological standpoints, including socialism, anarchism, neo-liberalism, and others. For instance, Joe Tanniru, head of Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, distributed socialist literature at the conference and propounded his view that, if activists are really going to address the issue of war, they will have to approach it from a socialist perspective. "If one doesn't oppose the causes of the war, then how does one oppose the war?" he said.

Emily Schadler, on the other hand, hailing from the College of Wooster's Student Environmental Action Coalition, was not so interested in advocating her own position as in gathering information. "On our campus," she said, "there are lots of students interested in anti-war organizing, and so we wanted to attempt to find out what others are doing."

Generally, though, there were not many in attendance who seemed optimistic that a war with Iraq could be avoided.

Michael Albert, the conference's keynote speaker, was among the more enthusiastic for the future, saying quite assuredly, "[I hope] that my attendance [at this conference] will help clarify U.S. policies and motives... I am optimistic that we can build a movement to raise social consciousness that will compel the government to reverse its policies--yes!"

Oberlin politics professor Eve Sandberg, however, was not so upbeat. "We *will* be attacking Iraq with this administration," she said. "...[and] setting a precedent of [such] a pre-emptive strike will change the rules of international relations."

Zeeshan Hasan '93, a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School, also lacked Albert's optimism. In his session entitled "Understanding Islam," he detailed how Western stereotypes lead to false explanations for the behavior of Muslim populations, concluding, "I'm not optimistic at all... America has such a large international force, [yet] most Americans are not tremendously interested in international affairs."

On the brighter side, many of the conference's organizers and participants seemed pleased with the outcome of the event itself.

For instance, Andy Pyle, an Akron-area activist, seemed particularly satisfied, saying, "I always think of 'movement' conferences as a stew-pot for the mind," he said. "...You come out with ideas that are seasoned, balanced against each other, and altogether richer than the raw ingredients. ...The Oberlin anti-war conference... was no exception."

The event concluded on Sunday afternoon with a several-hour-long plenary session, in which a few remaining participants made plans to keep the movement going after the conference. The result of this was a new regional organization called United Campuses Against the War - Midwest (UCAW), a coalition of regional anti-war groups, unified under the five points of unity: no to war on Iraq; no to sanctions on

Iraq; commitment to defending civil liberties and stopping racist attacks; yes to money for jobs, education and healthcare; and an end exploitation and oppression at home and abroad.

A follow-up conference is in the works for some time this coming spring at another regional campus, and some UCAW members are already preparing to stage walk-outs, actions, and teach-ins in the event of U.S. bombings against Iraq.