

Opposition to War Grows

by Channing Joseph

The Oberlin Review

November 8, 2002

Joining a growing international anti-war movement, Oberlin students have come together to oppose a U.S. war with Iraq through a student coalition, Oberlin Coalition Against the War. Bringing together activists with a diverse set of political interests, the newly-formed umbrella group is planning a number of public actions to unite members of the local community around a five-point agenda. Their agenda centers upon opposing military aggression Iraq, ending U.S. economic sanctions on Iraq, defending civil liberties, demanding money for education and health-care and commitment to anti-oppression.

"People are coming out against the war by the tens of thousands," junior coalition member Vanessa Fatton said. "We need to organize ourselves on a local, national and international level... We have the momentum... [and] we just need to take it forward."

OCAW has gathered over 100 signatures in a petition calling for a Student Senate referendum publicly stating that the Oberlin student body opposes a war in Iraq. Through the Senate referendum, the group hopes to gather more local attention to their anti-war cause.

OCAW is also continuing to organize campus caravans to peace rallies, such as recent ones in New York City and Washington, D.C., as well as an upcoming demonstration in Columbus this Saturday, Nov. 10.

The Coalition is not, however, limiting its activities to protests and demonstrations.

As part of its current plan, the group is calling a regional anti-war conference to be held at Oberlin College during the weekend of Dec. 7-8, and which will specifically focus on organizing and educating youth and student activists from Ohio and surrounding states. Delegations from many colleges throughout the Midwest region are expected to attend, including Ohio State University, University of Michigan, University of Minneapolis and Antioch College.

"We are going to bring in speakers and invite faculty to hold workshops... [as well as invite] other student organizations from other schools," senior Marianna Leavy-Sperounis, one of the Coalition's most vocal and active members, said. "The theme is organizing the organizers and bringing together youth and student activists so that we can come together to create a broader coalition."

Possible topics for the conference's workshops include: understanding Islam, the post-World War II history of Iraq, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East since the Gulf War, and the role of the media since Sept. 11, 2001.

"We want to come out of [this conference] better educated and with a network [of activists] prepared to call actions and take the movement forward," Fatton said.

The organization is also lending its support to the recent demonstrations against College layoffs, as well as planning a national day of action with the "Not In Our Name" youth and student committee for Nov. 20. The group is considering a walk-out, teach-in or other form of public demonstration on that day. On the whole, the members of OCAW seem to have a positive outlook for the work that the Coalition is doing.

"Just given how quickly youth organizations have mobilized this fall and their overwhelming presence at anti-war demonstrations in D.C. and New York, I am very optimistic that we can build a vibrant and active youth and student anti-war movement," Leavy-Sperounis said.

Leavy-Sperounis, however, did not seem naïve in her ambitions.

"Given the Republican sweep in Tuesday's election," she said, "it's clear just how much we're up against in this fight, but the anti-war movement as a whole is growing rapidly, and I think we could have a significant impact on the course our government takes in Iraq."