

Marching for Peace

WBFO Commentary

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With a majority of Americans now against Bush's war in Iraq, along comes hurricane Katrina to unleash her fury on the Gulf Coast and nearly destroy the City of New Orleans. Where was the National Guard? Well, mostly in Iraq. Where was FEMA? Asleep at the switch and led by an incompetent Bush crony with no experience. As if things couldn't get worse for George Bush, on September 24 over 100,000 people convened in Washington, D.C., to protest the war and just about everything else. My wife Nan and I and our friends Sharon and Jim went too.

The march was a heady experience. So many people, all exercising their rights to free assembly and free speech. And the speech really was free.

Build Levees, not bombs. Peace is patriotic. Impeachment now. Bush -- liar, murderer, terrorist -- worst president ever. Buddhas Not bombs. Waging war for peace is like -- you know what -- for virginity. Plus your standard issue, fight U.S. imperialism. And of course U.S. out of Iraq -- and the Philippines, Haiti, Columbia, Venezuela, and just about everywhere else.

A symbolic cemetery had been set up in front of the Washington Monument with crosses for the soldiers who died. We walked next to a man in an electric wheel chair who held his home-made sign, a hippie dude pushing a giant round peace sign, and punkster protestor with multi-colored spiked hair. There were drummers, singing and chanting along the way. Some were carrying coffins draped with American flags.

We were leafleted by serious looking Communist types calling for revolution and as well as by those with more modest objectives like keeping military recruiters out of our schools and ending the use of depleted uranium in U.S. bullets.

On one street corner there was a guy dressed in drag, waving. His sign read "war's a drag." Then we were greeted by a young man of Arab decent, wearing a obviously fake long Osama beard, holding a sign which read "Expel all swarthy looking men." A man on the sidewalk campaigned with a sign reading "Let's bomb Texas, they have oil too."

Of course there were giant puppets and presidential imposters. One person wore a George Bush mask, playing a marionette puppet whose strings were manipulated by Dick Cheney who was manipulated by the devil.

As we passed the White House a George Bush greeted us with hands soaked in blood. Another George Bush held a sign, "Don't worry Gulf Coast, I'll save you just like I saved Iraq." There was the war criminal Bush in an orange prison suit and one who was leaving town, suitcase in hand with AWOL pasted on it.

Bush, by the way, was AWOL. Not just from the Texas Air Guard during the Vietnam War but also on September 24. He was out of town on some kind of important presidential business when a 100,000 Americans came to call.

While we spent the day with a State Department employee who was as sick of the war as we were, missing in action were any self-identified Republicans or Democrats. One might think that the Democratic Party would find its anti-war voice but it hasn't happened and that lack of leadership is disappointing.

Of course, one can debate whether pulling out of Iraq immediately is the right thing to do. We don't want to leave an even bigger mess in Iraq than we have already created. But at this point who really believes the Bush Administration is competent enough to do anything right in Iraq let alone gradually extricate us while supposedly building democracy.

One can also debate how far the peace movement can go when demonstrations like this are organized by coalitions which include substantial representation by groups like the ANSWER coalition – which apparently is an outgrowth of the Marxist-Leninist Workers World Party. I'm OK with anti-US-imperialism but I don't want to see the peace movement co-opted by a fringe group with authoritarian politics which supports unsavory characters of any stripe as long as they are fighting the U.S. Of course, the reality of the September 24 rally is that 99% of the people who attended had no knowledge of this and simply went to protest the war.

After five hours of walking, we weary protestors returned to a friend's house where we were staying for the night and couldn't resist watching a local TV newscast. After Katrina/Rita hurricane relief and local crime stories, news coverage finally turned to the march. The three minute story gave equal time to the 100,000 person anti-war march and to the 100 person pro-war counter demonstration. Did the White House write their copy or do they slant as a matter of corporate policy? With news reporting like that, is it any wonder it's taken the American people so long to figure this war out?