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The War is Over; Let It Begin

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2012 - N° 29. Janvier 2012 - English -

Date de mise en ligne : Sunday 15 January 2012

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January 27, 2007. Between 200,000 and a half million people were assembled in Washington, DC. They were joined by tens of thousands more in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, London and other cities around the world. Their reason for disrupting their lives that weekend was simple. They opposed the US-led and financed war on the people of Iraq. They were sick of the killing done in their name. The protests were similar to previous protests against the war. A rally. A march. Then everyone dispersed. The DC march was also politically similar to previous marches. The January 27 date had been originally reserved by the left-liberal antiwar network calling itself United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ). ANSWER, the other group organizing against the US wars then had agreed to working with UFPJ in order to make the largest possible showing on that date. This was despite some very sharp political disagreements between the two organizations.

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I took a bus from Asheville, NC to that protest. It was one of seven very full coaches from that small city in the mountains. When we arrived at the New Carrollton Metro stop around 7:30 in the morning the parking lot was already full of buses from cities and towns up and down the US East Coast and from as far away as Cleveland and other points west. The Metro system was running extra trains and it seemed like everyone riding those trains was going to the protest. After disembarking and imbibing a couple cups of coffee, I headed to the Mall. On the way I ran into several friends from various places and exchanged greetings and conversation. The ultra-right group Free Republic had a couple dozen folks hanging out on the grass in one of DC's traffic circles harassing protesters and questioning everything from their manhood to their politics. I joked to a friend I was with that being called a communist never bothered me since I pretty much considered myself one anyhow.

I couldn't tell you what the speakers said that day. I wasn't really listening that closely. Most of the signs that people were carrying were provided by UFPJ and ANSWER. Most of them simply called for the troops to be brought home immediately. Most of the speakers didn't mention Washington's adjunct war in Afghanistan and neither did the pre-printed signs. Some protesters did carry signs demanding an immediate end to that war, too. I asked a friend of mine whose organization had been involved in planning the protest why the war in Afghanistan was not being mentioned. His answer was that the leadership of UFPJ could not agree as to whether or not they opposed that war. His organization had argued to include a demand for immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan as a key demand, but had been voted down. The reason given by the leadership was that such a demand might diminish the size and message of the protest. His take was that the leadership of UFPJ was too interested in maintaining good relations with the Democratic Party, especially with the presidential elections coming up.

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Since that January day there has not been another large antiwar protest. Several smaller ones took place in the following years, but even the larger ones that took place at the Pentagon and in New York City had little or no effect. UFPJ fell apart and many of its members, including elements of the leadership, allowed themselves to be hoodwinked into campaigning for Barack Obama, preferring to believe that campaigning for his presidential hopes would be a more effective way to end the imperial wars of Washington than actually organizing against those wars. We all know how that idea turned out.

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But wait, they say, the war in Iraq is over. My response is that this is partially true. Very few US GIs are dying there any more and most of them have indeed been removed from that country. Some of them have been sent to Afghanistan and some have been sent to one of the other 737 military bases the Empire maintains around the globe. Many more have been sent back to the streets and hometowns of the United States to work out the demons they are

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now possessed with, thanks to their war experiences. Meanwhile, in Iraq the number of bombings is increasing as various groups fight over turf and control while the democracy and freedom promised by George Bush and heralded by Barack Obama continues to be a figment of some DC speechwriter's pen. The world's largest CIA station outside of Langley, VA. operates at will from Baghdad, stirring up trouble in Iraq, Iran, Palestine and other nations in the region while the US client state in Tel Aviv continues to ramp up the war rhetoric against Iran while tightening its grip on the people of the West Bank and Gaza (and the political system of the United States). Let's not forget Saudi Arabia, whose autocratic monarchy just purchased 84 F-15s at the cool price of approximately \$25 billion. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the guerrilla war waged by the Taliban and other anti-occupation forces continues, as does the close-to-\$200-million-per-day US effort to destroy that resistance. Over the Afghan mountains the people of Pakistan wonder if they will be the next targets of US ground troops while US-armed drones fly and kill almost daily into some areas of that country.

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There is no group of protesters in the United States currently addressing this. The Occupy Wall Street movement, for all of its positives, has yet to loudly and clearly make the connection between the war industry's role in the plights they protest against. This is partly due to the organizational structure of Occupy (in fact, unlike many other Occupy camps the DC and Oakland Occupy groupings have worked hard to make this connection), but another reason for this failure is the lack of antiwar organizing in the Occupy movement. The sole remaining national antiwar network—the United National Antiwar Coalition—has been holding the torch in the years since its inception in 2008 and is currently organizing protests against the May meetings of global capital and its army (the G8 and NATO) in Chicago. Indeed, this coalition of political, religious and labor organizations is holding an organizing conference the weekend of March 23rd in Stamford, CT that will focus on these protests.

Despite recent pronouncements by the Obama administration and the Pentagon that the US military is going to shrink, the occupations and wars of the Empire will not just disappear. neither will its aspirations for full-spectrum-dominance. The new Pentagon Plan, titled Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense has as its goal “protect(ing) the broad range of U.S. national security interests... (maintaining) the free flow of commerce...preventing Iran’s development of a nuclear weapon capability...standing up for Israel’s security...(and) continu(ing) to place a premium on U.S. and allied military presence in — and support of — partner nations in and around this (the Middle East) region.” Despite its claim that the US military will no longer be depended on to occupy and “build” nations, a key element of this plan is “to assure access to and use of the global commons....” In other words, to go wherever capital demands the military goes, then the military will go there and stay there until capital's work is done. A close reading of this document will tell the reader that nothing has changed and the military remains ready and happy to do Wall Street's bidding. All of which balances out to the continued domination of the war-based economy.

Post-scriptum :

on Jacobs is the author of The Way the Wind Blew: a History of the Weather Underground and Short Order Frame Up. Jacobs' essay on Big Bill Broonzy is featured in CounterPunch's collection on music, art and sex, Serpents in the Garden. His collection of essays and other musings titled Tripping Through the American Night is now available and his new novel is The Co-Conspirator's Tale. He is a contributor to Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion, forthcoming from AK Press. He can be reached at: ronj1955 at gmail.com.

Counterpunch January 10, 2012

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/01/10/the-war-is-over-let-it-begin/>