



Police at the February 15, 2003 demonstration in New York City.  
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## **GLOBAL DEMOCRACY IN ACTION? PERSPECTIVES FROM THE AMERICAN ANTIWAR MOVEMENT**

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Jonathan Schell pointed out what many were amazed at—a massive coalition stretching around the globe, united to press for a single cause, a “global democracy” against war. In many cases, the protesters put forth these opinions in direct opposition to the stance of their own government, yet the antiwar movement was not without established guidance or spokespersons. Organizations emerged for a plethora of purposes: they created small pockets of resistance at the community level, and they also sponsored the best-known actions of the movement.

These are *institutions* created by the movement, yet clearly these groups did not constitute an old-fashioned leadership—they did not deploy a single message or voice of the opposition. Part of the amazement at the February 15 protests against the Iraq War stems from their utter diversity. Within this single movement, groups employed highly varied strategies and belief structures to work towards a new expression of democracy.

**BardPolitik** How did your organization form and become part of the antiwar movement?

**Farmer** MoveOn.org formed in 1998. Wes Boyd and Joan Blades set it up with help from their friends. Their first issue was the Clinton impeachment - the name came from "censure and move on." See the 'about' section of the website for a full history.

**Sen** Not In Our Name (NION) began with an initiating letter (see the 'history' section of our website) signed by many people. Many people who came to the initiating meeting were activists, religious folks, students, and youth.

**Juhasz** It is important to stress that Direct Action to Stop the War (DASW) has been so successful because of two constant elements: many extremely experienced well connected activists interacting on the same level (read this as *No Leaders*) with new, inexperienced, developing activists, all learning from each other. It is hard to come up with one origin with so many people contributing to the idea. But here is at least one version of the story: shortly after the September 2002 International Monetary Fund/World Bank protests in Washington, DC, Starhawk and Mary Bull, two amazing long-time Bay Area activists, decided it was time to start a direct action antiwar movement with an edge in the Bay Area. So, at the October NION rally at Union Square in San Francisco, Starhawk announced a direct action antiwar planning meeting.

The group planned the first direct action to focus on the congressional war vote. The group organized a march to the federal building and an all-night vigil, skills-share, training, and then a non-violent civil disobedience the following morning. We used our bodies to successfully block the entrances and shutdown the building to demonstrate our opposition to Congress supporting the war. It was wildly successful. With only one to two hundred people, we kept the office building closed by linking arms and chanting for several hours. Passersby were extremely supportive and many joined

the action. About fifty people were arrested, most of whom had never done civil disobedience before.

**Cortright** The October 25, 2002 meeting that resulted in the formation of United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) also led to the creation of Win Without War. Impatient with the tedious process and lack of focus at the United for Peace meeting, and eager to create a more structured and focused antiwar coalition, several groups met for dinner that night and agreed to begin working together to create a mainstream committee of national organizations. The groups wanted a coalition that could attract major constituency organizations, not just traditional peace groups. They also wanted a quick and efficient decision-making process. They believed that the political message of the activist movement should emphasize alternative means of containing and disarming Saddam Hussein without war. They also agreed on the pressing need for an effective public relations and communications campaign to reach mainstream audiences. Forty organizations eventually joined the new national coalition, which was officially launched at a press conference in Washington in early December.

The development of the new coalition and of the broader antiwar movement benefited enormously from a planning and strategy retreat the weekend of November 15-17, 2002 at Blue Mountain Retreat Center in the Adirondacks in upstate New York. It was during a creative brainstorming session at Blue Mountain that the name "Win Without War" was selected. The participants agreed on a proactive and positive political message: the United States and the United Nations can disarm Iraq and enhance security through vigorous weapons inspections and continued containment. All agreed on the need for a sophisticated and large-scale public relations effort to communicate a patriotic antiwar message.

**BardPolitik** How do people become involved with the organization? What do members or participants do as part of the group?

**Farmer** People become involved at the most basic level by signing one of our online petitions - they are usually referred by friends. People forwarding our emails to others is absolutely central to how the organization succeeds.

Once they are on the list, they receive offers to participate in other actions. Everyday ones include calling their senators about the reconstruction of Iraq or judicial nominations. There are also letter-to-the-editor campaigns fairly often. When we hear about something relevant to a particular state or region from another organization, we will forward it to people in that region. Then there are larger actions, like meetings with senators or representatives, and peace vigils. Members sign up to lead or attend those. Depending on the event, people from the MoveOn list may be choosing the time and place for the meeting, calling the senators' and representatives' offices to get an appointment, opening and closing the meeting, making sure everything stays orderly, sending press releases - doing all the things you would expect local organizers to do.

Finally, members donate for things like local newspaper ads and T.V. spots in major cities. Some of the donors for a round of T.V. spots also spoke to the press about the ads. Their donations also pay the staff.

Members' emails, postings on forums, and responses to surveys help set the organization's focus.

**Lewis** Member organizations as well as individuals participate in UFPJ actions by helping get the word out about our demonstrations, actively participating in events and getting involved in event planning, leadership, or volunteering in office work or other activities.

**Sen** People become involved with NION by being part of or organizing events, taking the Pledge of Resistance, coming to meetings, or flyering. We do not have an official membership, but people become part

of our databases in order to get upcoming information.

**Juhasz** People become involved by coming to actions and attending spokescouncil meetings. Ideally, they then form their own affinity groups and just send one affinity group member to represent them at the spokescouncil meetings so that meetings do not get unworkably large. All decisions are made by the spokescouncil. Who is on a spokescouncil depends upon what affinity groups attend a given meeting and whom they choose to represent them at the meeting. There is a description of spokescouncils, affinity groups, and the consensus process on our web site.

**Cortright** Mostly through the member organizations, especially MoveOn. We do not have individual members but operate as a coalition. We have sponsored many significant newspaper and television advertising efforts, in conjunction with MoveOn.

Virtual organizing became the *métier* of the Win Without War coalition, as it mobilized the vast membership networks of its Internet-based groups and constituency organizations for coordinated lobbying and action campaigns. Its most ambitious effort was the "virtual march" on Congress on February 26, 2003. Citizens all over the United States phoned, faxed, or emailed their elected representatives to oppose the march to war. All across Capitol Hill on February 26, the phones and fax machines were jammed.

**BardPolitik** Does your group interact with the antiwar movement internationally?

**Farmer** Yes. We have an international list originally from the 9-11Peace site, and we have international petitions. International members are about a third of our list. We and the American Friends Service Committee delivered printed copies of an emergency petition to the UN in several of the Security Council countries.



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**Lewis** Our event planning has been only national at this point. However, February 15 was a global day of action that UFPJ participated in.

**Sen** NION's main focus is to create a movement of mass resistance here in the U.S.. We have communicated with groups internationally but are mostly focused on the people living in the United States.

**Juhasz** Yes. Most directly in our organizing against corporations that pushed us into and profit off the war, we have worked with international communities in struggle with these corporations. For example, the action DASW organized against the Bechtel Corporation was supported by activists around the world who are currently in struggles against Bechtel.

In addition, we use our actions to create international awareness that there are large numbers of people in the U.S. that do not agree with the Bush Administration and its drive to war and empire.

**Cortright** To some extent. We were especially connected to international groups during the vigils the last weekend before war. The coalition issued an international call for antiwar vigils the following weekend, March 15-16. The response was overwhelming, as thousands of groups all over the world announced plans to hold candlelight and prayer vigils in their communities. Main contacts were through the Stop War coalition in the UK and the French antiwar move-

ment coalition. We also established contacts with Spanish antiwar groups.

**BardPolitik** Has participation with your group overlapped with other social justice movements? In what direction do you see the group moving in the near future?

**Farmer** MoveOn has always been a multi-issue organization. Before 9/11, we were involved in gun safety and protecting the estate tax. If you look on the MoveOn web page, you can see some of the things we are working on now.

**Lewis** Sure. When UFPJ formed, the idea was to prevent the war in Iraq. As time goes on, human rights and civil liberties are issues that have also been taken on by UFPJ. For example: the budget cuts, illegal detentions, disappearances, and round-ups of immigrants are concerns that UFPJ has become increasingly involved in.

**Sen** NION is committed to stop the course of the U.S.'s war on the world, the attacks on immigrants, and increasing police state restriction. Our work is focused on making links with the war abroad and the repression here at home. We are committed to work with other groups on issues but are focused on addressing the overall trajectory of war and repression.

**Juhasz** We have increased our focus on opposition to empire. We are currently focusing on the interlocking relationship between expanding power through corporate globalization and through military invasion.

We have organized extensively with the local environmental justice community in its struggles against Chevron/Texaco, as well as with international communities of indigenous people who are fighting Chevron/Texaco in their own communities; we work closely with unions in their struggles against Stevedoring Services of America (SSA), one of the

companies to win a U.S. contract in Iraq and a hated local union-buster. We work extremely closely with the local religious community that is full of activists who have engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience for decades and have taught us much. We continue to work closely with all of these communities and to expand our connections to community groups throughout the Bay Area and the world.

**Cortright** Since the war we have remained very active and are in the midst of a major campaign at this very moment. We launched the Misleader campaign in June. In September we created the "Change the Course, Change the Team" campaign against the occupation calling for Rumsfeld's resignation. We're pressing very hard now on the \$87 billion vote with a "no blank check" message.

**BardPolitik** Finally, how would you describe your organization's role within the antiwar movement?

**Sen** NION's sees our role in the antiwar movement as creating a mass, diverse, and societal wide resistance to the trajectory of war and repression.

**Juhasz** DASW brings the tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience to the antiwar movement. We represent a non-hierarchical, directly democratic form of organizing that is open to all and controlled by none. We honestly try to organize in the same way that we wish to live our lives: with extreme respect for those around us, without leaders, with extreme appreciation for the different skills and talents that we each bring to the table, learning from each other, and growing as a group.

We have always had close contact with the larger antiwar movement and many of the larger groups have affinity groups that participate in our actions - e.g. the ANSWER Affinity Group, etc. We all respect each other's work and try to work together, acknowledging that it takes a variety of tactics to reach out to others, motivate them, and create avenues for change.

**Cortright** From the outset Win Without War sought to portray itself as mainstream and patriotic. Its press releases and newspaper ads featured an American flag, and its mission statement began with "We are patriotic Americans." By framing its message in patriotic terms, Win Without War sought to capture the flag and thereby inoculate itself against the usual charges of aiding the enemy.

The Win Without War coalition name was itself a form of message framing. The phrase was alliterative and easy to express. It conveyed a positive theme (everyone wants to "win") without the negativity of being "against" war or the military. Yet it was specific about seeking a solution "without war," thus marking a clear break with the position of the Bush administration. The Win Without War name projected a new, proactive image for the antiwar movement. It was both message and sound bite, and it became a brand that was the most widely communicated message of the antiwar movement.

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