

### Building Cities for Peace

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Amy Lake and 159 other residents of Salisbury, Connecticut, trudged through snow and freezing cold to gather at the Town Hall on the night of January 17. There, Lake read a resolution declaring that the townspeople of Salisbury oppose a pre-emptive military action against Iraq and calling on President Bush and Congress to work with the United Nations for peace.

When the 44-year-old social studies teacher finished, someone made a motion to approve the resolution and just about everyone in the hall yelled "Second!" Then, by a vote of 156 to 4, this rural, Republican-leaning community became a "City for Peace." First Selectman Val Bernardoni wrote a note to President Bush urging him "to lead the world community toward universal understanding and good will," television stations broadcast the news, and folks from across the state started calling Lake to ask how their towns could do the same. "Our intent was to make some noise, to really get people talking, to educate people," says Lake. "The Cities for Peace movement has turned out to be the perfect vehicle. I think we all felt as if we had reclaimed our citizenship."

Lake's enthusiasm is matched by that of activists in communities across the United States. Over the past five months, jurisdictions that are home to more than 30 million Americans have passed 140 antiwar resolutions--forming what Telluride, Colorado, Council member John Steel described at a February 13 rally of Cities for Peace activists outside the White House as "the collective conscience of our country." Says John Cavanagh, the director of the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), which has played a critical role in

promoting the Cities for Peace movement, "What we are witnessing is a remarkable grassroots movement that has had a role in transforming the debate about the war and that, I think, offers us a new model for educating and organizing that gives people at the grassroots a real voice in debates about national and international issues."

In Cavanagh's view, that model has enormous potential on a number of fronts. He foresees the possibility of networks of local officials who could "think globally, act locally," and who could work with organizers and activists across the country to put neglected issues on the national radar. Ultimately, says Democratic Representative Jan Schakowsky of Illinois, one of the most enthusiastic backers of the Cities for Peace push, these networks could become vehicles for pressuring Democrats in Congress--and perhaps even some Republicans--to weigh in on issues that they are now too politically cautious to address. "We could use that pressure," says Schakowsky, who gets no argument from local officials who have backed Cities for Peace resolutions. As Los Angeles City Council member Janice Hahn said when she announced she would vote for that city's antiwar resolution, "We're debating this issue because those we have elected to debate this issue [in Congress] have abdicated."

Anger at that abdication is at the root of the Cities for Peace movement, which began around the time of last fall's Congressional vote to cede authority on decisions regarding Iraq to Bush. "A lot of folks decided that if the people at the federal level were refusing to listen, they would start talking to City Hall," says Karen Dolan, a fellow at IPS, which has established a Cities for Peace clearinghouse. The first communities to take a stand--places like Santa Cruz and Sebastopol, in California, and Tompkins County, New York, did not pass peace resolutions as part of a planned protest. But as word spread that antiwar resolutions were being enacted, college towns that have long been centers of antiwar activism--Berkeley and Ann Arbor, Madison and Amherst, Oberlin and Ithaca--acted. Then came the big cities: Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Paul, San Francisco and Seattle. Washington, DC, voiced its objection to war early, while New York City said no to war on March 12. "It's like wildfire," says Dolan. "By the end of the holidays, we had about twenty-two cities. By the end of January, we had fifty-seven, and that's when there started to be some publicity. Then this movement just exploded. Now we've got more than 130 in thirty states, and there are more than 100 additional campaigns under way." At the National League of Cities conference in early March, the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials offered a resolution on the war, and representatives from cities that had passed resolutions integrated discussions of the impact of a potential war--and new homeland security panels--into the debate over how cities will meet fiscal challenges.

Modern technology, particularly the web and e-mail, has powered the Cities for Peace campaign as it has other aspects of the antiwar movement. After activists in Washington organized the effort to pass that city's resolution, Dolan helped develop a website with a "tool

kit" for local activists. "When we started talking about doing a resolution in Los Angeles, I went to [citiesforpeace.org](http://citiesforpeace.org) and found the tool kit, and then I said, 'Look, this is how to do this,'" says Suzanne Thompson, an organizer of the campaign that won passage of the LA resolution by a 9-to-4 vote. The effort has also been aided by the Northampton, Massachusetts-based National Priorities Project, which has helped local officials detail the potential costs of war to their cities. Information about the economic trade-offs has frequently been included in resolutions--as an answer to those who ask why cities and countries are weighing in on national and international issues. "Workers in Millinocket face a more immediate threat to their livelihood than Saddam Hussein: They need their mill reopened," argues Maine State Senator Ethan Strimling, a prime mover of antiwar legislation in his state's legislature. "More than 300 people were recently laid off at L.L. Bean in Freeport. The city of Portland is thinking of giving pink slips to more than 100 of its workers. For all these reasons, we need the federal government to focus on our struggling families with the same energy and determination it has focused on Iraq. That was one of the major goals of [Maine's] resolution."

Maine's debate over antiwar legislation was front-page news there, as resolutions have been in many places where they have been considered. And the coverage extends well beyond local papers, drawing widespread national and international media attention. This, in turn, has inspired dozens of communities in Japan, Canada, England and other countries to pass antiwar resolutions; the mayors of London, Rome, Berlin, Vienna, Paris and Brussels recently issued a joint declaration, saying, "We, the Mayors of the major capital cities of Europe, wish to forcefully assert that a new conflict in Iraq can and must be avoided."

But the biggest impact of the campaign has been felt in US political circles. On the floor of the House, Jan Schakowsky proudly announced that her hometown, Chicago, has voted 46 to 1 against launching a pre-emptive attack. Says Schakowsky, "I think a number of members feel validated in their opposition to the war by the fact that the cities they represent have taken the same stand." Representative Sherrod Brown of Ohio, one of the savvier political players in Washington, says that even if President Bush doesn't bow to the demands of Gary and Kalamazoo for a shift in national priorities, you can bet that the White House has noticed. "[White House political czar] Karl Rove thinks about nothing but politics, and I think this has got to be driving him crazy," says Brown. "When cities like Cleveland and Lorain pass antiwar resolutions, you know they think about that at the White House. This isn't people demonstrating in Paris. This is local elected officials, who know what the mood is in their towns, and they are taking an antiwar stand."

Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, concurs. "The cities getting organized has given a real boost to the broad antiwar movement that I think caused the Administration to slow down at least for a time, and that's something we should all be paying attention to," says Edgar. "When local officials, who usually are the officials that most people

know best, start to address national issues, and when they make the connections between national debates and what is happening at home, that sends a powerful signal."

In fact, it is nothing new for City Councils to pass resolutions that address issues that are seemingly outside their legislative purview. As far back as 1774, New York officials condemned the closing of Boston's port by the British, and in the 1850s the Chicago City Council challenged the federal Fugitive Slave Act. Before World War I, referendums in Midwestern towns expressed opposition to joining Europe's fight. Similar votes were held in communities across the country during the Vietnam War. In the 1980s, cities across the country declared themselves to be nuclear-free zones, and antiapartheid resolutions were common. But, says veteran political strategist Steve Cobble, "With the antiapartheid movement, and even with the nuclear freeze, it was a slower process. Now, with the Internet and e-mail, it's easier to get people on the same page quickly, to get things rolling and then to build on our victories. Peace is a pretty good issue, but there's no reason to stop there."

Already, the Bill of Rights Defense Committee has launched a Civil Liberties Safe Zone campaign, which so far has been endorsed by sixty-four towns, cities and counties across the country. In March, before Federal Communications commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein came to Seattle to hold a hearing on media consolidation, media reform activists convinced the City Council in Seattle--one of the first big cities to pass an antiwar resolution--to pass one urging the FCC "to protect content diversity and press freedom by retaining and strengthening existing media ownership regulations, including regulations that limit the number of stations one owner may hold." Within hours of its passage, media reform activists were talking about launching a campaign to have other cities do the same.

IPS's Cavanagh says local elected officials who have seen the power of the Cities for Peace initiative are already talking about working together on broader initiatives that could make cities--including those from Republican-leaning states--a force to challenge the Bush Administration on a variety of fronts. Adds Edgar: "Many of the people who run cities came up as activists, either on national issues like civil rights and the Vietnam War or on neighborhood issues. But they are activists, and they are smart. They know that resolutions like this would only have a limited effect if one or two cities passed them. But, as part of a national movement that is getting a good deal of attention, they know this makes them part of the debate."

It is that movement-building potential that excites Green Party activists like Ben Manski, co-chair of the party's national steering committee. At least twenty peace resolutions passed around the country were sponsored by Green elected officials, Manski says. "We've always believed that you cannot talk about problems in one city without looking at what is going on

nationally and internationally." He adds, "What's happened with Cities for Peace shows how having Green elected officials, who communicate with one another regularly, makes it easier for movements like this to get started."

Democrats, too, are excited. "There is so much disappointment among grassroots Democrats with how the party leadership in Congress has responded to the question of war. I think some of these coalitions that we are seeing come together around the country will, ultimately, try to address that," says Edgar, who served six terms in the House as a Democratic representative from Pennsylvania. "It may not change Congress overnight, but I think it could, eventually, lead to a transformation of the Democratic Party in Congress." Schakowsky says she expects that Democratic members of Congress who did not challenge the Bush Administration on the war will be asked why local officials were willing to take a stand and they were not. "Cities for Peace votes at the local level drive home the fact that this is a political issue. That's going to make it hard for some members of Congress to explain why they were so silent," she says. "This could shake the party up, and it could be a factor in the presidential primaries."

Lisl Standen, an 87-year-old refugee from pre-World War II Germany who spearheaded the campaign to pass the antiwar resolution in rural Kent, Connecticut, hopes the shake-up will go well beyond party politics and cause Americans--including some powerful Americans in Washington--to re-engage with democracy. "One of the duties of living in a democracy is to join the great debates, to make ourselves heard by the powerful. So Kent's Town Meeting has made itself heard," she says. "President Bush would do well to listen to the little towns of America. We, in these small towns and the great cities of America--we uphold democracy better sometimes than does our Congress."