



Protesters hold placards as they attend an anti-war rally in Hong Kong on Saturday, Feb. 15, 2003. About 600 people protested against U.S. President George W. Bush's threat to attack Iraq if President Saddam Hussein does not disarm. The rally was followed by a march to the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong. (AP Photo/Anat Givon)

Virtual Protest

Social movements use Internet as key tool for mobilization

by Teresa C. Stanton

On February 15, 2003, millions of people around the world marched to protest the then imminent invasion of Iraq by the United States, United Kingdom, and their allies. Beginning at dawn in New Zealand, the protests spread around the globe from time zone to time zone. Marches were held in every region of the world, from the Pacific Rim to Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, North America, and South America. Together, this series of events represents the largest anti-war demonstration ever.

As is to be expected, head counts by local police and organizers differ greatly, but the numbers are impressive either way. In Rome, between one and three million people turned out. In England, nearly one million marched. More than one million people joined the protest in Barcelona, along with 500,000 in Madrid. Paris and Berlin each boasted about 300,000 marchers, while 10,000 people rallied near the U.S. Consulate in Mexico City; 60,000 in Oslo; 50,000 in Brussels; and 35,000 in Stockholm. Thousands also marched in cities across the United States, including rallies in Chicago, Detroit, Miami, New York, and San Francisco. This mass mobilization was due in large part to the Internet.

E-mail, discussion forums, and the Web have revolutionized the manner in which grassroots organizations and activists communicate and conduct their activities. Conference calls, faxes, and mimeographed or photocopied fliers are giving way to electronic media. Activists can now “telecommute” using personal computers, no longer having to choose between working for a better world and making it to soccer practice by 4 p.m.

Digital Networking

The Internet gets the word out to more people more quickly and provides the opportunity to reach outside one’s own community to find others of like mind. The perceived anonymity of online communication facilitates both exploring and expressing alternative points of view. This electronic word-of-mouth system gives people the freedom to listen to political messages at their convenience by reading e-mail or joining conversations in chat rooms. It has made mixing personal and political conversation more socially acceptable. For instance, forwarding an acquaintance an e-mail with a social or political message is less obtrusive than handing someone a leaflet at a cocktail party, according to Andrew Boyd in the August 4, 2003, issue of *The Nation*.

News reports about current peace movements often mention the diverse backgrounds of people who have heeded the electronic “call to arms.” Beyond students and left-wing activists, these anti-war demonstrations have included blue-collar and white-collar workers, families with young children, and representatives from a wide variety of social and religious groups. David Paulsen, a journalist for the *Wasau Daily Herald* in Minocqua, Wisconsin, noted that a “refreshingly diverse coalition of peace activists, anarchists, and church leaders made the worldwide rallies possible.”

The Internet also allows mobilization to arise from independent groups, rather than

the more traditional top-down hierarchy model of mobilization. The February 2003 protests had no single identified leader and no central headquarters. When no central decision-making authority exists, protests can be localized, or educational programs can be made available to people living outside areas where social protest information is available. For example, Mothers Acting Up was started by four women sitting around a kitchen table in Boulder, Colorado. With their Internet site, www.mothersactingup.org, they have been able to reach hundreds of like-minded

“ **E-mail, discussion forums, and the Web have revolutionized the manner in which grassroots organizations and activists communicate and conduct their activities.** ”

people across the country, many of whom participated in the February marches, according to Jennifer Lee in the February 23, 2003, issue of *The New York Times*.

The Internet has broadened the base of the anti-war movement, but it is also important to remember that not everyone is online. Almost half of U.S. households do not have Internet access. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore this topic, but it is an important note to remember. For information about who is, and who is not, online, visit Digital Divide Network (www.digitaldividenetwork.org).

New Information Sources

The Internet has affected citizen participation and activism in more ways than just increasing the speed and convenience of communication and mobilization. Anyone with access to the Internet can publish, whether by e-mail, in a virtual forum, or by posting materials on a Web site. This means that news and information are no longer the sole province of corporate or governmental media. The Internet can carry the alternative information that is essential to sustaining social movements.

Working Assets and Peoples Video Network may be on opposite ends of the anti-establishment spectrum, but both are examples of organized alternative media. Working Assets (www.workingasssets.com) was founded on the premise that building a business and building a better world are not

antithetical. It offers credit card, long-distance, and wireless services and donates a portion of the monthly charges to nonprofit organizations working for peace, equality, human rights, education, and a cleaner environment. Working Assets publishes WorkingForChange (www.workingforchange.com), an online journal of progressive news and opinion from nationally syndicated reporters and columnists.

Peoples Video Network (www.peoplesvideo.org) is a group of media activists with public access shows around the United States. As noted on its homepage, the group has hundreds of videos “documenting the struggle.” Its stated goal is to send correspondents around the world to produce and edit videos about issues the corporate media does not cover.

The Early Days

The current protests against U.S. military activities in the Middle East are one part of the broader anti-war sentiment in the United States. The pro-peace movement is, most immediately, an outgrowth of the 19th century peace movements in Europe and North America. In 1815 and 1816, “friends of peace” groups were established in Britain and the United States due, in great part, to the brutality of the Napoleonic wars. Early membership was drawn from Quakers and non-conformist Protestant sects.

By the end of the century, these groups were highly active societies established throughout Australia, Europe, and the United States. Membership included laborers, women’s organizations, educational reformers, temperance activists, economists, and sociologists. These different constituencies shared a common mission to promote an interstate environment that would provide international security without force or violence. Some groups looked to reform social and economic policies, others looked to international law.

The first peace groups in the United States were established by strict pacifists in New York and Massachusetts in 1815. These community-oriented activists worked with their counterparts in Europe and exerted public pressure for disarmament and international cooperation. They argued that war was unnecessary, that pacifism was logical and utilitarian, and that educating people about the horrors and waste of war would help prevent future wars.

The American Peace Society, founded in 1828, was the first national peace group in the United States. Its leaders were successful in business, law, and government service. Not surprisingly, the society’s policies were more establishment-oriented, focusing on

Further Exploration

Barr, Robert. "Rallies Around the Globe Pummel U.S. Stance." *Charlotte Observer* (February 16, 2003).

Boyd, Andrew. "Web Rewires the Movement: Grassroots Power of the Net." *The Nation* (August 4, 2003).

Chatfield, Charles. "Peace Movement in the United States." *World Encyclopedia of Peace*. 2d ed. Vol. 4: 235-240. New York: Oceana Publications, 1999.

Cooper, Sandi E. "Peace Movements of the Nineteenth Century." *World Encyclopedia of Peace*. 2d ed. Vol. 4:241-245. New York: Oceana Publications, 1999.

Dictionary of the History of Ideas. *International Peace*. University of Virginia Library: Electronic Text Center. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv3-55>.

Eagleton-Pierce, Matthew. "The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests." *Peace Review* 13 (2001): 331-337.

Harmon, Amy. "A Nation Challenged: The Dissenters." *The New York Times* (November 21, 2001).

Klein, Hans K. "Tocqueville in Cyberspace: Using the Internet for Citizen Associations." *Information Society*, 15, no. 4 (October-December 1999): 213-221.

Lee, Jennifer. "The Nation: Critical Mass. How Protesters Mobilized so Many so Nimbly." *The New York Times* (February 23, 2003).

Paulsen, David. "Internet Draws Peace Activists Together From Manila to Minocqua." *Wasau Daily Herald* (March 1, 2003).

Vrazo, Fawn. "Millions Rally Against War with Iraq." *The Miami Herald*. (February 16, 2003).

international law, especially arbitration of disputes. Like the pacifists, they maintained contact with their European peers and by the 1870s were part of the groundswell advocating peace congresses, an elaborate international code, and the formation of a permanent court for international arbitration. These are the forces responsible for a wide array of disarmament treaties, the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, the League of Nations, and, ultimately, the United Nations.

Today's Pacifists and Activists

The two schools of thought on achieving world peace are still a part of the anti-war and pro-peace efforts of the 21st century. Educational and inspirational materials representing both views proliferate on the Web. Today's pacifists and social activists are represented by groups like United for Peace and Justice (www.unitedforpeace.org), Win Without War (www.winwithoutwarus.org), Peace Action (www.peace-action.org), and Peace.Protest.Net (<http://pax.protest.net>). These Web sites have their beliefs clearly posted—not every activist Web sites does.

These sites are a well-organized collection of documents, publications, campaign and protest notices, press releases, and links to other peace organizations and resources. Visitors can find organizing tips and contact information for speakers and trainers. The sites also include suggestions for local action, posters and bumper stickers for download or for purchase, and songs and chants for peace. Activist toolkits include step-by-step instructions on teach-ins, handling the press, and presenting resolutions to city council.

Proponents of peace through the rule of law and arbitration also have a strong Web presence. Some of the institutions and organizations founded during the peace movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries are still with us today, including the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. The Norwegian Nobel Institute (www.nobelpeaceprize.org) was founded in 1904 to help the Nobel Committee select and award Peace Prize recipients. Part of its mission is to serve as a center for knowledge related to peace and international affairs. To this end, the institute has built a library collection with more than 181,000 volumes. The library is open to the public, and its

online catalog is searchable through the Web (www.nobelpeaceprize.org/eng_ins_lib.htm).

The philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie in the early 20th century is another important factor in the 21st century search for peace. Carnegie believed that war could be eliminated with strong international laws and organizations. In 1910, he announced the establishment of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (www.ceip.org) with a gift of \$10 million. The endowment's Web site has information about the institution's library and offers a virtual library with links to resources for

“ [Peace Web site v]isitors can find organizing tips and contact information for speakers and trainers. The sites also include suggestions for local action, posters and bumper stickers for download or for purchase, and songs and chants for peace. ”

international affairs research (www.ceip.org/files/news/newslibrary.asp). The Endowment's Democracy and Rule of Law Project (www.ceip.org/files/projects/drl/drl_home.asp) is a source for independent research, analysis, and discussion on promoting democracy.

Carnegie also gave us the Peace Palace at The Hague (www.vredespaleis.nl). Built in 1913 to serve as headquarters to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the Peace Palace is also the seat of the International Court of Justice and The Hague Academy of International Law. Part of Carnegie's original plan, the Peace Palace houses a library of international law and the law of individual nations. Today, the Peace Palace Library (www.ppl.nl) has one of the world's largest collections in the areas of public and private international law. The library also has a special collection of the works of Hugo de Groot, or Grotius, often referred to as the father of international law.

Founded in 1919 during World War I, the League of Nations did not survive the Second World War. However, it did pave the way for the establishment of the United Nations (www.un.org). The United Nations was founded in 1945 to maintain international

“ ... news and information are no longer the sole province of corporate or governmental media. The Internet can carry the alternative information that is essential to sustaining social movements. ”

A Few Movements on the Web

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
www.ceip.org

Mothers Acting Up
www.mothersactingup.org

Norwegian Nobel Institute
www.nobelpeaceprize.org

Peace Action
www.peace-action.org

Peace Palace
www.vredespaleis.nl

Peace.Protest.Net
<http://pax.protest.net>

Peoples Video Network
www.peoplesvideo.org

United Nations
www.un.org

United for Peace and Justice
www.unitedforpeace.org

United States Institute of Peace
www.usip.org

Win Without War
www.winwithoutwarus.org

Working Assets
www.workingassests.com

WorkingForChange
www.workingforchange.com

peace and security and to preserve and promote human rights. U.N. programs exist around the world, which is reflected in the vast number of U.N. and U.N.-affiliated Web sites. The United Nations sponsors programs for peace (www.un.org/peace), economic and social development (www.un.org/esa/index.html), human rights (www.un.org/rights/index.html), and international law (www.un.org/law/index.html). Online access to U.N. library resources and valuable document guides is available through www.un.org/Depts/dhl/index.html.

Whether a true peace organization or an arm of government, mention should be made of the United States Institute of Peace (www.usip.org). Established by Congress in 1984 as a nonpartisan federal institution, its activities include supporting policymakers in the legislative and executive branches of government. The institute focuses on promoting the resolution of international disputes in areas of interest to the United States. The institute has a Rule of Law Program (www.usip.org/ruleoflaw/projects.html) that includes projects for constitution-making, peace building, and national reconciliation.

What is old is made new again. The desire for peace must have existed since time immemorial, and it is likely that this wish has played some part in all civilizations throughout history. In the 21st century, the Internet is a communication and mobilization tool for peace activists and rule of law traditionalists alike. The search continues. ■

Teresa C. Stanton (tstanton@email.unc.edu) is the reference/foreign and international law librarian and clinical assistant professor of law at the Kathrine R. Everett Law Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.