

“Bring them home now” tour holds rally in Detroit

A reporting team
13 September 2005

The northern “Bring Them Home Now Tour” stopped in Detroit over the weekend of September 10-11, holding a rally in Grand Circus Park downtown Saturday afternoon attended by 200 workers and young people.

The tour group set out from Camp Casey near Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Texas, where Cindy Sheehan and her supporters held a nearly month-long vigil seeking a meeting with the president. Sheehan’s son Casey, 24, was killed in Baghdad on April 4, 2004. The vigil became a focal point for antiwar sentiment, drawing sympathizers from throughout the country. The tour is one of three caravan groups planning to cover 42 cities in 26 states en route to a September 24 demonstration in Washington, DC, to oppose the Iraq war.

Sponsoring the event were Gold Star Families for Peace, co-founded by Cindy Sheehan, and several other organizations including Military Families Speak out and Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Parents of soldiers serving in Iraq as well as several Iraq war veterans addressed the rally.

Lila Lipscomb, the Flint mother who lost her son in Iraq and who figured prominently in Michael Moore’s documentary film *Fahrenheit 911*, welcomed the tour to Detroit.

“Many people have found their voices,” she said. “Cindy Sheehan has found hers and hundreds and thousands of Americans have found them too. We’re tired of being treated as if we have no intelligence and are nothing. It is a shame that our children had to die in Iraq for us to find our voices.

“Our sons and daughters are being forced to tear up someone’s home in Iraq and now cannot be at home to take care of their own in New Orleans.

“We must continue inspiring everyone to wake up. My son was number 54 and now there are nearly 1,900 dead. I have founded a new organization—American Families United. Membership requires that you go to a veterans

hospital and visit a vet. We need to show Americans what peace is about. We will not be broken.”

Andrea Hackett of Detroit spoke as a member of Military Families Speak Out. Her 24-year-old daughter Tatjuana served a full year in Iraq as a member of the Michigan National Guard, including operations against Fallujah:

“I went to Camp Casey to join Cindy Sheehan. I had to leave everything and go there and support her and her cause. Mothers are crying because our children are crying. This experience touched me deeply. We then returned here and set up Camp Casey Detroit and fed the homeless and shared a vision.”

Ms. Hackett referred to the line of empty boots in front of the monument where the speakers addressed the crowd: “I am looking at these boots here and think of thousands dying. My child survived, but when she returned she could not find a job. There are no funds for education; she was told that she’d have to pay the money up-front for college and then they’d see if she might get reimbursed. This is not justice.”

Al Zappala of Philadelphia lost his son Sherwood Baker. Baker was the first Pennsylvania National Guardsman to die in combat since World War Two. He was killed while taking part in an operation seeking Iraq’s nonexistent weapons of mass destruction.

“Sherwood died in Baghdad on April 26, 2004,” Zappala told the rally. “He was 30 years old; he left behind a 27-year-old widow and a 9-year-old son. Our family was devastated. But we don’t have a monopoly on grief. Sherwood was number 720, but the Iraqis have no numbers. Perhaps 100,000 Iraqis have been killed. However, this government is so racist that only American lives count.

“Sherwood came to our family when he was 13 months old. He had been abandoned by his parents. After he came to our family, we had two additional sons. He was always

big and grew to 6'4" and he always looked out for his brothers. We lived in the inner city and it was tough, tougher than I realized at the time.

"After high school, Sherwood went off to Wilkes-Barre to college. He graduated in Early Childhood Education and tried to get a job. He was hired at only about \$12,000 a year, so in 1997 he joined the National Guard. He did this for many reasons. First, there had been flooding in Wilkes-Barre and he had helped load sandbags to assist the community. Alongside him had worked many National Guard and he felt this was a good way to give back to the community.

"We all have seen now that the Louisiana National Guard [when needed to assist flood victims] was in Iraq; the Mississippi National Guard was in Iraq; and beside the men, all the equipment—buses, trucks, etc.—how much of that could have saved drowning people if it had been in New Orleans? It shows what the government thinks of poor and working class people.

"Secondly, Sherwood had an outstanding loan of \$10,000. That was another reason he joined the National Guard. They promised to repay it for him; but they never paid it off.

"In Chicago, I visited a Latino high school and spoke to classes there. We spoke to 18 classes in all. Teacher told us that recruiters walk the halls like they 'own them.' This is where the recruiters stay, in the inner city schools.

"Visiting Crawford, Texas, with the Cindy Sheehan camp was one of the best things that has happened in my life. I was there only four days, but it changed my life."

Zappala later told the WSWS, "Camp Casey was outstanding for its camaraderie and solidarity. People were volunteering the cars, giving food, water and sharing everything. It was like a microcosm of America. We watched the counter-demonstrators selling water to each other.

"I met fathers and mothers like myself who had lost their children from around the country—California, Chicago and Texas. It is hard for the military families to speak out, many are frightened."

Francesca, from Lansing, Michigan, also lost her son in Iraq. "The best way we can honor all the troops who have died is to bring our troops home. I thought Cindy was a brave woman to camp out there to make President Bush talk to her. I lost my son to his lies. My son had a baby to come home to he had never met. Yes, Mr. President, I am angry because I have a broken heart. I believe our troops should be here, and not fighting for a lie."

Cody Camacho of Chicago served in Iraq for a year and spoke representing Iraq Veterans Against the War. He told the crowd, "I want to apologize on behalf of Americans for what the US is doing to Iraq.

"I joined the army to be able to go to college, but that is not happening. I am trying to right the mistake I made, by being part of that atrocity of Iraq, by explaining why we need to get out of there.

"It's not a noble cause, but a nobility cause—the rich getting richer. In fact, we had Halliburton employees coming up to us, saying how sorry they felt for us because we weren't making the money they were. I joined to defend the US Constitution, but I now know that the government here is one tearing up the Constitution."

The WSWS spoke to two young people who attended the rally. Collette said, "I have been opposed to the war since before it started. Poverty in the US is not being addressed, all the money is going to war. The US has taken over governments before, but this is so unashamed. The opposition is not getting media coverage. Also, the Democratic Party has not been heard from for the interests of the people for a long time; it has become a corporate interest. Their support of the war is a continuation of that."

Satomi Ziegler, 23, added, "I came really to support Cindy Sheehan. I admire what she is doing. People are dying every day, not just in Iraq now, but also in New Orleans and in Detroit. The level of poverty is increasing and that's a war too. We call it going to other countries to liberate the people when people here are not liberated."

After leaving Detroit, the northern tour is headed for Buffalo, New York. Earlier in the week, members of the caravan addressed a meeting of 1,000 people in Madison, Wisconsin. The central tour visited cities in Indiana and Ohio this week on its way to Pennsylvania. On Saturday, Cindy Sheehan spoke in Stone Mountain, Georgia, before an audience of 400 people.

The tour has been ignored by all the leading figures in the Democratic Party, which is holding firm in its support for the Iraq war. The *Detroit News* and *Free Press* did not report on the rally at Grand Circus, and across the United States the tour has received almost no coverage in the mainstream media.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact