

New York City protest opposes war in Afghanistan

Our reporter
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Over 10,000 people turned out in New York City on Sunday, October 7 to oppose the Bush administration's so-called war on terrorism. The demonstration, which had been planned for several weeks by a coalition of pacifist and activist groups, was expected to draw only a few thousand but grew in size as word spread that the US had begun bombing Afghanistan.

Marchers assembled at Union Square, which has been the site of an impromptu outdoor memorial to the victims of the World Trade Center attack. Speakers there included Ruben Schaffer, whose grandson Gregory Rodriguez was killed in the WTC collapse, reading a letter from Mr. Rodriguez's parents to President Bush: "Your response to this attack does not make us feel better about our son's death. It makes us feel worse. It makes us feel that our government is using our son's memory as a justification to cause suffering for other sons and parents in other lands." Rita Lasar, whose brother died at the World Trade Center when he stayed behind to help a wheelchair-bound friend, also spoke.

Heeding the call of the organizing coalition, a number of marchers wore white and carried white dove-shaped placards, as a symbol of mourning and of peace. However, the majority of people showed up in regular street-clothes, indicating a broad participation by layers not close to the usual radical activists.

Marchers wound their way up Broadway, at one point stretching out for 15 blocks, stopping just south of Times Square. The march included contingents of students from New York University and Hunter College, among others. Signs read: "New York, Not in Our Name," "Islam, Arabs and Immigrants Are Not the Enemy" and "Our Grief Is Not a Cry for War." Speakers at the rally on Broadway included two Nobel Peace Prize winners, Adolfo Perez Esquivel from

Argentina and Mairead Maguire from Ireland. Passersby flashed peace signs in support of the marchers, while one small group of counter-demonstrators heckled.

The perspective of the march organizers was limited to appeals to the Bush administration and the Democrats to abandon military action, calling instead for bringing terrorists before a "new, specialized international tribunal with jurisdiction over terrorist crimes."

The significance of the demonstration, however, lay in the active opposition of thousands of people to US military aggression in the city most affected by the terrorist attack, even in the face of a patriotic media frenzy. The October 7 march was only the latest in a string of anti-war protests in major US cities and on college campuses, including some 20,000 people rallying in Washington DC on September 29.

Demonstrations also took place in other countries in recent days, including in Paris where 5,000 marched from the Place de la Republique to the Place de Nation to protest military action by the US.

Mainstream media coverage of the protests has been minimal to nonexistent, compared to endless reports on every aspect of the war drive, including one retired general after another appearing as commentators. Despite repeated claims that there is widespread support for war, even the *New York Times* was forced, in its front-page news analysis October 8, to acknowledge the shakiness of popular support for the bombing with the headline "Home Front: Edgy Sunday, Nagging Uncertainty About Consequences." Indeed, as the consequences of US military adventurism become apparent, so will the split between millions of working and middle class Americans, on the one hand, and the ruling elite and their media mouthpieces on the other.



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