

# Tens of thousands march in the US and Europe against war preparations

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Tens of thousands of people marched in the United States and Europe this past weekend to oppose the use of military force in retaliation for the September 11 terror attack on New York and Washington that left over 6,000 people dead.

At the largest demonstration, 15,000 participated in a march and rally in Washington DC on Saturday, September 29. Smaller protests were also held in Los Angeles and New York, as well as a second demonstration in Washington DC on Sunday.

Demonstrations were also held in the Netherlands, Spain and Greece. Over 10,000 people filled Amsterdam's central square, the Dam, on Sunday for an open air meeting. It was the largest peace action in the Netherlands since the 1980s, when half a million people marched against the deployment of NATO missiles in that country.

"Justice, not revenge" was the main slogan of the protest, which included people who had previously marched against the Gulf War and the 1999 war on Yugoslavia. Also present were resistance fighters who had fought against Hitler's occupation of the Netherlands between 1940 and 1945.

In Barcelona, Spain, 5,000 people attended a rally and marched behind a banner that read: "No More Victims—For Peace." In a statement read at the end of the rally, the protesters urged the Spanish government not to support any US military intervention or NATO retaliation.

In Washington DC, those marching expressed heartfelt sorrow for the victims of the terror attacks and their families, combined with a determination that the attacks not be used as a pretext for US aggression in Central Asia or the Middle East. Protesters also denounced racist attacks against Arab-Americans and Muslims in the US, and accused the Bush administration of carrying out a sweeping attack on civil liberties.

"Our Grief is Not a Cry for War," "Violence Begets Violence," and "An Eye for an Eye Leaves the Whole World Blind" were among the slogans on the signs and banners carried by the marchers.

The demonstrators included rescue workers and volunteers who had searched for survivors in New York City. "Like a lot of people here I want justice done, but I don't want to see the destruction of more innocent lives," said James Creedon, a

rescue worker. "We don't want to see a hundred or a thousand more World Trade Centers in this country or abroad."

Two young workers from Brooklyn, New York attended the rally. Andrew said, "I watched as the trade center collapsed from the roof of my apartment in Brooklyn. I can't describe the feeling of shock, terror and panic that I went through. To think of how many people were killed, and of those who were trapped inside the building, is horrible.

"I did nothing but watch TV to try and find out what was going on. By about the second day, when all the politicians were coming on and talking about a unified America, I started getting a realization that they were going to use this to justify more killing.

"The scariest part of the event is that those of us who want a peaceful solution will not get a hearing. It is like the media is a propaganda arm of the government."

Joehoon, who was working in an office near the Empire State Building at the time of the attack, explained that he and his coworkers were all watching it on the TV: "When we saw the plane hit the Pentagon we realized that anybody could be a target and we all started going home. As I walked towards lower Manhattan, first I saw military planes and helicopters flying around and ambulances racing downtown, then I began seeing people coming up, people who were in shock, people who were covered in dust.

"As I crossed the Williamsburg Bridge from Manhattan to Brooklyn, I stopped four or five times and turned around expecting to see the World Trade Center towers standing there in the skyline. But they were gone.

"I do believe that the politicians are using this as a rallying cry for war and that the majority of people want a war. But people also are not getting the view that there might be another solution. When there were 3,000 to 5,000 people in a peace march at Union Square, neither the *New York Times* nor any of the local New York papers reported it."

Most of those present at the Washington rally came from New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC, but others traveled from Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Carolina, Florida and as far away as Seattle. The vast majority of those participating were college students.

Nearly 20 percent of the 1,300 students who attend Bard

College in upstate New York were at the rally. Three hundred students came from Oberlin College in Ohio, despite a warning by the school's president that there would be violence and bloodshed at the event. Also in attendance were a sizable number of young workers and veterans of the Vietnam protest movement.

"I came here to show support for international justice and a peaceful conflict resolution," said Nat, a web developer from New Jersey. "There are a lot of people who want a military solution, but we have to understand that the people of Afghanistan are no more responsible for terrorism than the American people are for the behavior of the American government.

"If it gets to the point where we can't speak freely then we are in lot of trouble in this country. I understand that Bill Maher of the television program 'Politically Incorrect' had to apologize for disagreeing with Bush, or else his career would have been dead meat. If they stop people from disagreeing with rallying around the flag, then this is the worst kind of nationalism."

The news media, which has functioned as a conduit for the White House and the Pentagon since September 11, virtually ignored the protests. Most TV networks gave scant coverage to the march if they reported it at all. *USA Today* ran one paragraph in its news brief section. The *New York Times* ran a small article on its inside pages about the various protests. It included a photo in which a full view of thousands of anti-war marchers was blocked by a close-up of a sign carried by one of a handful of right-wing counter-demonstrators, which read, "Osama thanks fellow cowards for your support."

While condemning the attacks, many of the marchers blamed US foreign policy in the Middle East for creating a climate in which terrorists could recruit people willing to carry out suicide attacks against the US. "These things happen for a reason," said Rachel, a young professional worker from Washington DC. "We would be remiss if we did not investigate our political and economic policies that caused it. After all the death, destruction and tragedy that have taken place, I think the most important lesson is rethinking America's interaction with that region of the world. I work with professionals, and I got into arguments with them when this happened. Most of the people I talked to were just angry and frustrated, and they were for an actual war and eliminating the Taliban. I am not for the Taliban, who oppress women and oppose education, but I am not for war. I think you have to understand what policies are behind this attack, and change them."

Antoinette, a student from Maryland College of Art, said, "The World Trade Center disaster was a horrible event. Most people are just waving the flag. But we all have to change. We have to think about things more deeply.

"I think Bush liked this incident because it saved his presidency, although he does not seem to have a clear direction of what he wants to do. US foreign policy is based on very

narrow and selfish interests which produce a lot of hatred."

The march was organized by a coalition of groups called International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism). Several speakers from this organization denounced the terrorist attacks and Bush's militaristic response, but were unable to provide any deeper explanation of the social and political roots of the attacks and the build-up for war.

Significantly, none of the speakers raised any criticism of the Democratic Party and the manner in which it has rushed to give the Bush administration a blank check to wage war, boost the Pentagon budget and carry out sweeping attacks on civil liberties. Silence on the role of the Democratic Party is in keeping with the politics of the Workers World Party (WWP), which played a prominent role in organizing Saturday's demonstration.

The WWP, a survivor of the Vietnam-era protest period with a pro-Stalinist political line, has long used socialist phrases to cover an orientation to sections of the Democratic Party and opposition to the struggle for the political independence of the working class. Now it hopes to revive a 1960s-type anti-war movement, which would subordinate popular opposition to sections of the capitalist class and its political representatives in the ostensibly liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

The WWP's orientation is revealed in its gushing praise for the California Democratic congresswoman who voted against ceding more power to Bush to wage war. "Only Barbara Lee, a Black woman representing the district that includes Oakland, Calif., cast a heroic 'no' vote in Congress," the group's newspaper, *Workers World*, declared.

The struggle against reactionary forces such as the Taliban, bin Laden and other Islamic fundamentalists who combine religious obscurantism, virulent nationalism and contempt for democratic rights cannot be ceded to any section of the American ruling elite, or either of its political parties. Nor can the struggle against imperialist war and attacks on democratic rights be waged on the basis of appeals to the nominally liberal wing of the political establishment.

The only viable perspective for opposing imperialist war is the struggle to unify the working class in the US and the other advanced countries with the workers and oppressed masses in Asia and the Middle East on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. This requires a break with the Democrats and the establishment of an independent political party of the working class.



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