

Canada: Thousands demonstrate against war on Iraq

A correspondent
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Thousands of workers and students took to the streets of more than two dozen Canadian cities last weekend to oppose a US invasion of Iraq.

The biggest demonstrations were in the country's three largest cities. On November 16, more than 5,000 marched on the US Consulate in Toronto. The next day, there were demonstrations of at least 3,000 in both Montreal and Vancouver.

The protests drew a large cross-section of people, including youth, teachers and other professionals, and immigrant workers. Many unions, including the Canadian Auto Workers, the Quebec Federation of Nurses (FIIQ) and the Confederation of Quebec Unions (CSQ), formally endorsed the protests, but there were virtually no trade union or worksite delegations. An exception was a contingent of City of Montreal blue-collar workers.

The prevailing sentiment among the demonstrators was that the US's real aim in the current confrontation with Iraq is to seize control of its oils fields and otherwise strengthen the US's global geo-political position.

At the same time, many of the anti-war protesters voiced hope that the Canadian government could act as brake on the Bush administration. Many also wanted the United Nations (UN) to do more to promote a peaceful solution.

These political conceptions were promoted by the demonstration organizers.

Elected New Democratic Party (NDP) representatives spoke at the Vancouver and Toronto protests. For months, the social-democratic NDP has championed UN intervention to determine whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, claiming that this was the only means to prevent unilateral US action. Now that the US has succeeded in bullying and bribing the other

great powers on the UN Security Council to provide it with anti-Iraq resolution designed to provide it with a pretext for launching war, the NDP is holding fast to this position: Workers and youth should rely on UN diplomacy to check rampant imperialism.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* intervened at several of the demonstrations, distributing copies of a statement that argued that the struggle against war can only be successfully waged through the mobilization of the working class as an independent and international political force. The statement explicitly warned against those like the NDP who would channel the anti-war movement behind the Canadian government, the other imperialist powers, or the treacherous bourgeois national leaders in the Middle East and other Third World countries.

Canada's Liberal government is well aware of the widespread public opposition to the war and fears the socially incendiary consequences of a US invasion of Iraq both on the Middle East and class relations in Canada. But it fears still more jeopardizing the Canadian ruling elite's special relationship with Wall Street and Washington. While publicly expressing hope war can be avoided, behind the scenes Canada is already organizing to make a substantial contribution of troops and weaponry to a US-led assault on Iraq.

If there was any doubt that the US would request such Canadian military assistance it was dispelled last week, when US Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Ottawa and publicly said that should Washington find the Iraqis were in non-compliance of the recent UN Security Council Resolution, Canada would be asked to participate in US military action against Baghdad. "At the appropriate time," said Powell, "we would talk to Canada about it."

For his part, Canadian External Affairs Minister Bill

Graham reiterated Canada's support for the US-crafted Security Council Resolution. "I am convinced that if there are violations in Iraq, that the Security Council... will be obliged morally to take the steps necessary to enforce" compliance—in other words, endorse a US war on Iraq.



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