

Canada: Mass protests against war on Iraq

A WSWS reporting team
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Tens of thousands took to the streets in cities across Canada Saturday to voice their opposition to the impending US invasion of Iraq. The anti-war demonstrations also targeted Canada's Liberal government, which, while feigning support for a peaceful resolution of the US-Iraqi conflict, is preparing to mobilize Canadian troops, planes and battleships in support of a US occupation of Iraq.

The largest demonstration was in Montreal, where 25,000 workers and youth endured temperatures of 20 degrees below zero Centigrade to march on the main federal government building. The crowd was five times larger than had been anticipated by march organizers.

In Toronto at least 10,000 marched, also in bitterly cold weather. The crowd in Vancouver was estimated at 7,000, in Ottawa at 3,000, and in Halifax at more than 2,000. There were smaller anti-war protests in other cities, including Quebec City, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton and Calgary.

The demonstrations testify to growing popular opposition among diverse social layers to a war on Iraq. The demonstrators included trade unionists, students, immigrant workers and professionals.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* intervened in the Montreal and Toronto demonstrations, distributing 1,500 copies, in English and French, of the WSWS statement "The Political Issues in the Struggle Against War."

Many responded favorably to the WSWS's call to transform the popular opposition to war into a mass political movement, based on the international working class, to oppose not only the Bush administration and its war policy, but the capitalist system. In Toronto, especially, a significant number said they were already regular WSWS readers. One had just made a \$50 donation to support the site.

The perspective of the march organizers was one of appealing to the federal Liberal government. They also

promoted a nationalist perspective, counterposing so-called Canadian and Québécois values to the war-mongering Bush administration. In fact, the US war drive arises out of the struggle being waged by all sections of big business, including Canadian capital, to increase profits by slashing workers' living standards, gutting public services and securing control of resources and reserves of cheap labor.

The principal speakers at the Montreal demonstration were well-known artists and actors. In Toronto, politicians from Canada's social democratic party, the New Democratic Party, were repeatedly given the platform. These included federal NDP leadership candidates Joe Comartin and Jack Layton, and outgoing federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough.

McDonough touted the United Nations as a means of stopping the war drive of the Bush administration, although the punishing sanctions regime imposed on Iraq for the past 10 years has had UN approval, and the great powers on the Security Council have indicated they are more than willing to give the go-ahead for a US invasion, if Washington only provides them guarantees that their economic and geo-political interests will be looked after.

"What is at stake," declared McDonough, "is 50 years of painstaking work to build international structures to avoid war. We stand on the side of international law. And we stand behind the people around the world who want United Nations weapons inspectors to have the peace they need to complete their job."

Several of the speakers hailed the recent comments by a number of Liberal MPs disassociating themselves from Defence Minister John McCallum's statement signalling that Canada would join a US invasion of Iraq, whether authorized by the UN or not. In fact, the Liberal MPs' disquiet is in keeping with the policy of the Chretien Liberal government.

Chretien is hoping UN sanction for a war on Iraq can be secured, both to give it a cover of international legitimacy and because he hopes to prevent the collapse of the system of multi-lateral alliances and institutions through which Canadian business has traditionally sought to offset US pressure and assert its own interests.

The largest applause at the pre-march rally in Toronto was for an Iraqi student at York University, Mina Sahib, who pointed to the support Washington gave Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s. Sahib denounced the US for seeking to seize hold of Iraq's oil reserves while feigning concern for the Iraqi people. "As I stand here and see all of you here in the cold, I say, let's not leave and return to the comfort of our homes. Let's get colder, let's get louder and tell our governments that we will not live in a world where killing for oil is justified."

The WSWS interviewed several of those attending the Toronto march. Neil, an unemployed computer programmer and an artist, aged 26, said this was the first demonstration he had ever attended. He said, "Canada has basically been toadying to the American viewpoint, expecting that the UN will act as a symbolic fig-leaf before they ride along with the Americans to start the next war. I know how in the last one the Americans managed to get UN Security Council approval and it was through bribing and threatening all the Security Council members. So I think the same thing is going to happen again. I don't think the UN is any safeguard against war because it hasn't been in the past.

"There's stuff going on in the media about the trial of those US pilots that dropped the bomb on the Canadian soldiers [serving in Afghanistan]. The whole nationalistic fervor that arose around that has made me feel a bit queasy. I was sad that those four Canadians died, but the fact that there was this big hullabaloo because it was four Canadians, when that bomb was properly meant for a bunch of Afghan tribespeople—that made me feel really uneasy."

Shaukat, a regular reader of the WSWS, emphasized that the Bush administration's war plans were directed against the American people as well as the Iraqi people. "This war is illegal and immoral. War should be outdated in this day and age.

"What is this war really about? It is not about

weapons of mass destruction. Who has the largest stockpile of them and who has ever used them? The answers are well known: it is the US government.

"This war is about oil and world domination. It is against the American people as well. That has long been the case with US policy."

Shaukat expressed appreciation for the WSWS. "The site is strong and informative," he said.

Mike, a high school student, said he was new to politics and did not know the answers to many questions. Nevertheless, he felt strongly about the looming war. "This war will be totally ridiculous," he said. "It will not solve anything. A lot of people will get killed and injured, for what? There must be a better solution. George Bush is paranoid. He is no better than Saddam Hussein. The US develops more nuclear weapons than anyone else.

"I don't know why the Bush administration is going to war. But Bush is certainly a racist. If Iraq were not a Middle Eastern country, he would not attack it. It is obviously about oil and other economic factors."

An Iraqi student described the planned war as capitalist. "This is a war about oil, driven by capitalism," he said.



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