

# Thousands in Los Angeles protest war vs. Iraq

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On Saturday, 10,000 to 15,000 protesters marched through downtown Los Angeles demanding the US government stop its war preparations against Iraq. Demonstrators represented many social layers, including students, health workers, immigrants and middle class suburban residents, indicating widespread opposition to Bush's impending war.

The tightly packed protest formed a line 10 blocks long. Hundreds of demonstrators carried homemade banners denouncing George W. Bush and opposing a war for oil. Health workers, members of SEIU local 660 who are facing layoffs from the elimination of health clinics, marched with signs protesting war and demanding money for health care. Other signs demanded an end to the detention and deportation of Middle Eastern immigrants.

The march began at the edge of Los Angeles's downtown core, an area of mixed industrial and commercial use with many shoppers, and ended in a rally in front of the Federal Building. As the march passed by, workers from sweatshops in the surrounding buildings waved and cheered the protesters on, as did many shoppers on the streets. Immigrant workers from the Middle East, who have been singled out for persecution by the Bush administration, formed a contingent on the demonstration denouncing the war plans and demanding democratic rights.

The rally at the Federal Building included rock music from the 1960s and poetry readings, interspersed with short speeches by actor Martin Sheen, farmworkers leader Dolores Huerta, Democratic Congresswoman Maxine Waters and others.

Speakers at the rally represented various liberal, pacifist and religious views—in general agreeing that the march should be the beginning of a movement to channel popular opposition to the war to pressure

Congress and the White House to stop it. “You have the power” was a catchphrase on a number of speakers' lips.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party warned demonstrators against any illusions that Democratic and Republican politicians could be pressured to change the course for war. The SEP handed out the *World Socialist Web Site* statement titled: “On the eve of US war against Iraq: the political challenge of 2003.” The statement, which was well received by many protesters, argues that the fight against imperialist war must be linked to the development of an independent socialist movement of the international working class.

Yolanda, a community college student, said, “I think that your statement is full of information that I had never learned before. What brings me here is my opposition to an attack on Iraq, and to almost everything else that this government does. Marches like this one send a message to Bush, but we also have to get together and come up with ideas to replace Bush and go back to a government that really is by the people and for the people. I will check out your web site.”

A woman from the San Fernando Valley suburbs commented: “It is true that the Republicans are being very reckless. What concerns me is that Bush could never have gotten this far if most of the Democrats were not giving him all that power. We seem to be rushing to the kind of one-party state that we criticize Saddam Hussein for.”

Demonstrations against a war in Iraq are planned for this Saturday, January 18, in San Francisco, Washington DC and other cities across the country.



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