

10,000 march and rally in Pittsburgh against Iraq war

Paul Sherman
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Nearly 10,000 people took part in a series of marches, rallies, teach-ins, town hall meetings and vigils in Pittsburgh last weekend to protest the impending war in Iraq. The protests were the largest anti-war demonstrations in the city since the Vietnam War era.

Many people came to express their opposition to the war in the days before UN inspectors were to deliver their report and George Bush was to make his State of the Union address. While most of the protesters came from the Pittsburgh area, many came from neighboring West Virginia and Ohio and some from as far away as Chicago and Boston.

The participants represented a broad cross section of American life. In addition to many college students, working adults, retirees and entire families with their children also took part, including babies in strollers. Veterans of the Vietnam War and World War II also participated.

By far, the two largest of the more than 50 events held over the weekend were a Saturday march down Carson Street on Pittsburgh's south side and a rally on Sunday at the University of Pittsburgh with a march to Carnegie Mellon University's software institute.

The Saturday march drew several thousand people despite single-digit temperatures and a freezing wind. The marchers carried signs and chanted slogans against the war.

Jennifer, who works at the University of Pittsburgh and attended a teach-in Friday evening, explained why she took part: "I am opposed to war in general and especially to this one. The government has lied to us about why they want to start it. It is about money and oil and protecting our economic influence.

"A lot of innocent people in Iraq are going to get killed—people who have never hurt us in any way."

Donna, a professor at the Community College of

Allegheny County, said, "I will do everything I can to not have this war happen. They say it is a war against Saddam Hussein, but in reality tens of thousands of innocent people are going to be killed by American bombs."

Donna expressed the anger felt by many towards the Democratic Party's support for war. "I have voted Democrat all my life. I registered Democrat a month before I turned 18, just so I could vote in the primary that year, but I think the Democratic Party has lost its principles. It no longer stands for what I believe in and what I think it embodies."

The Saturday march set off peacefully, but police on horseback surrounded and pushed a group of about 100 marchers who had decided to walk back to the starting point rather than wait for shuttle buses. Police also used video cameras to record the events, which could be used to identify protesters.

On Sunday, 4,000 people marched and rallied despite a snowstorm in freezing temperatures. At the rally, speakers from the Thomas Merton Center, which organized the events, explained their opposition to the war. The Thomas Merton Center expounds a Buddhist pacifist philosophy, along with advocating nonviolent protests and civil disobedience.

Following the march, many of the marchers participated in a "die-in," in which marchers lay down in the street to symbolize Iraqis targeted by US bombing and Americans dying as a result of cuts in social programs.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed statements from the *World Socialist Web Site* explaining that the fight against the Bush administration's war plans must be linked to the development of an independent socialist movement of the international working class. A number of protesters

stopped to discuss these policies with the WSWs.

Angela, a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, attacked Bush as well as the role of the media in supporting the war. “Bush is a typical charlatan,” she said. “He makes vague statements and stages events to get people moving without thinking. The mainstream media is pumping people with lies. They repeat everything the government says without challenging a single piece of information.”

Gina and Nikki were impressed with the size of the two marches and the cross section of people who attended. “There were doctors, a lot of older people, middle-aged women, housewives, Pittsburgh Steeler fans and workers,” said Gina.

Nikki, who traveled from Akron to the Pittsburgh rallies, said, “Before this I thought I was alone in opposing the war in Iraq. Now I’ve seen many more people my age taking a stand.

“This government is determined to go to war no matter what. It is interesting that Dick Cheney’s former company Halliburton plans to do the work in postwar Iraq. This is not something anybody should die for. I know people who went into ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] to get an education, but now they are the first people being shipped out.”



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