

Thousands march in Detroit

Shannon Jones, Lawrence Porter
17 February 2003

Braving sub-freezing temperatures, close to 5,000 demonstrators marched through downtown Detroit on Saturday to oppose the threatened war against Iraq. The protest was sponsored by the Michigan Emergency Coalition against War on Iraq, and culminated in a rally at the Cobo Hall convention center.

The demonstrators filled Washington Avenue outside Cobo Hall with a sea of signs and placards. There were a wide variety of ages represented, from high school students to working adults and retirees, and included considerable numbers of teachers, health care workers and immigrant workers. Signs carried by demonstrators drew the connection between the economic interests motivating the US drive to war—“Don’t trade lives for oil”; “How did our oil get under their sand?” and “Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Axis of Oil.” Others drew attention to the ongoing assault on social programs—“Schools not bombs” read one placard.

The WSWS spoke to a Pakistani immigrant who is employed as a medical technician in Detroit. “We don’t need a war, innocent people will die,” he said. “If we think Iraq is such a big threat, why don’t we think North Korea is such a big threat? They say Iraq is complying with the weapons inspectors. We should be looking for a way to solve this peacefully. I think if the US goes to war it will lose trust and respect.”

He was outraged by the harassment of immigrants: “Yesterday I received a notice from AT&T saying they would disconnect my phone because I had been calling Pakistan. I have to give them a letter explaining why I was calling. My kids were born here, they’re Americans; to them this is their country. It is the same with me. If it is supposed to be a free country, then it should really be free.”

Most demonstrators were not able to get into the concluding rally held in Cobo Hall because march organizers had only reserved a conference room seating 1,200. Thousands of marchers were left to mill outside

in the convention center lobby.

A number of speakers at the rally made impassioned pleas against the threatened war. The Detroit area is home to a large community of Iraqi-Chaldean immigrants. A spokesman from the Chaldean Federation of America spoke of the conditions he witnessed in Iraq following the Gulf War: “In 1991 I visited Iraq as part of a delegation with the Red Cross. I witnessed damage to infrastructure that left the country in paralysis and chaos. I saw people dying of hunger in the streets of Baghdad. The images of Iraqi children in hospitals still haunt me. I would like to bring to the attention of the US State Department that there are 50,000 Chaldean refugees all over the world, stranded. This is one of the tragic consequences of the war.”

Another speaker noted that over 40,000 homes in Detroit had their water shut off and thousands more had gas and electricity cut off. “We don’t hear anything from Washington about these problems,” the speaker stated.

UAW Secretary-Treasurer Elizabeth Bunn declared, “It is our duty to protest this war.” However, she did not explain why the UAW did not mobilize even a token delegation of auto workers to attend the protest. The only reason Bunn and other UAW officials were at Cobo Hall in the first place was to attend the state Democratic Party convention going on downstairs. While thousands marched in the cold, UAW leaders were busy hailing newly elected Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm, who has outlined a program of massive cuts in education and social programs.

The only Democratic politician to address the rally was Congressman John Conyers of Detroit. He had no policy to offer except more protests. He made the fraudulent claim that the drive to war could be halted by exerting sufficient pressure on the Democratic Party and the ruling establishment in Washington.

Lansing, Michigan



Rally at the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing

Several thousand protesters also marched and rallied in Lansing—Michigan’s capital and home to the 40,000-student campus of Michigan State University. The march began at MSU in East Lansing and continued for more than three miles in below freezing temperatures to the State Capitol building in downtown Lansing.

The spirited march spread out for close to a mile, and included peace activists, students from MSU and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Muslim students opposed to the war, veterans and others.

Local Democratic Party officials addressed the crowd at the concluding rally. When Lansing Mayor Tony Benavides made a gesture of appreciation for American soldiers going to the Persian Gulf, the crowd let him know that rather than sending them good wishes he should call for the troops to be brought back home.



Christopher: "I decided to do this because of the cover up of 'Guernica' at the Powell speech"

The WSWS spoke to Christopher, a graduate student at MSU, who made a sign against the war with a poster of the “Guernica” painting by Picasso. He said he had read the WSWS article on the decision of the Bush administration to cover up the Guernica tapestry at the United Nations when Colin Powell gave his February 5 report.

“I decided to do this because of the cover up of ‘Guernica’ at the Powell speech,” Christopher said. “I felt it was important for people to see that if this administration is so fearful of a painting, it indicates

what they are saying about their cause. If they are afraid of speaking before this painting it testifies to the power of art and the fragility of their arguments. The cover up of the painting is an indictment of the policies of the government itself.”

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party, including college and high school students, handed out thousands of copies of the WSWS statement “The tasks facing the antiwar movement” at the Michigan protests.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact