

London: antiwar protesters denounce Blair's support for Bush

A WSWs reporting team
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The World Socialist Web Site is continuing its coverage of the historic international demonstrations held last weekend to protest the US war drive against Iraq. Today we are posting a further report, with interviews, on the massive London march, as well as an on-the-spot report on the rally held in Cape Town, South Africa. We encourage our readers to send in further reports from last weekend's rallies, as well as comments on the demonstrations and the statement that was distributed in six languages from the World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board entitled, "The tasks facing the antiwar movement".

We invite readers to access the full coverage of last weekend's rallies.

A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to participants in the mass antiwar demonstration in London on Saturday, February 16. They found an intensifying level of anger at how Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Labour government are defying the democratic will of the British people by supporting a US-led war against Iraq.

Beth, a 15-year-old student at a Sheffield comprehensive school, organised school students to go to the demonstration. She said students aged 13 to 16 were attending:

"I think that one innocent death is one too many. The idea of dismissing the Iraqi people's deaths as a statistic is sick. The US wants to install their own people in Iraq like they did in Afghanistan, because they want control over the oil. You get the impression Bush enjoys going to war.

"The way the Blair government is responding to the public, where there's an incredible amount of opposition, is disgusting. They are not paying any attention to it at all. They come out with all these lying stories, like the British dossier on Iraq, which they lifted from old documents. They are supposedly a legitimate government and people don't expect these kinds of fabrications from people who are running our country.

"Blair and Bush want to persuade people they are respecting the United Nations, but really they don't give a damn. I remember last year when they were bombing Afghanistan and were talking about targeted weapons. This was rubbish because they killed 3,000 civilians. They've also been bombing Iraq for some time. I don't understand the mentality of being able to do that. How would people react if as a result of a terrorist attack I

died? It would be all over the papers, yet we can kill 500 children in Iraq and it's not significant."

Patricia, an older student, said, "I have never been on a demonstration before in my life. Unless you are physically attacked there is no reason to go to war. You cannot wage war to sort out Iraq's social problems. That's for the people to sort out.

"I think that Mr. Bush is just a warmonger. My biggest reason for being here is that I have three sons of my own. I have also fostered a lot of children over the years, all boys. They are all now all grown up with no problems at all, but when I took them on they were boys that no one else wanted because they were in trouble with the police and other things. The last thing I want is for them to get out of trouble, get jobs and then end up with Mr. Blair putting them into a war.

"I am not a political person. I am disgusted with myself to say that when it comes to election day, I stand outside the polling station and I really don't know whom to elect. As for this 'New Labour' business, that's a load of tosh, isn't it? Where does going to war make any sense? The only reason I can think of for Blair to go to war is to cover up all the rest of the old crap that is going on in the country that he doesn't want to face."

Louise, 17, also said this was her first demonstration: "Blair is following America because they are more powerful. I think they are starting a war for the wrong reasons, and trying to convince people through propaganda. I think they are making a big deal of terrorists. They should let the UN inspectors get on and do their jobs. But I don't think there is any threat to Britain."

Seventeen-year-old Naomi and her sister asked if they could help distribute the *World Socialist Web Site* statement, "The tasks facing the antiwar movement." Naomi is a high school student studying politics. She said this was the second demonstration against war she had been on. The first was in October last year: "I think there are a number of things behind Bush's determination to go to war. Firstly, I think it is about oil. And secondly, after September 11, they have been looking for scapegoats.

"At the moment, Blair is acting like the foreign secretary of the US, running around the world when he should be focusing

on the views of the British people. He should address the key issues people are talking about and explain in the clearest arguments his own reasons for going to war. I think that if they have evidence, they should show it. At the moment people are very suspicious of politicians.”

A group of friends from Forest Gate in London, Riaz, Tariq, Javid and Dhuli, attended the demonstration together. They had also participated in the antiwar march last October. Riaz said, “Oil is behind the drive to war, but we also think there are bigger issues that are not being discussed. They say Blair is a poodle, but we can’t see how the public can swallow his lies. The public has to take action. To be honest, the march won’t do much, but it does give a clear message that there are a lot of people opposed to this war.”

Basir is an ex-soldier in the Iraqi military who witnessed the bombing of Basra in 1991. He said, “I am on this demonstration because I don’t want a war to start against the Iraqi people. I am not a supporter of the Iraqi government, but that is not their real agenda. In the last war they killed too many people. I was there in Iraq in 1991 when the bombing started and I saw too many people die. If the war starts again they will kill even more people.

“Previously, Iraqis had food and medicine, now they have nothing. If the war starts again, Iraq is now very poor. Today there are 100,000 children dying with no food or medicine. This is the same war as in 1991. They bombed us, then years of sanctions, and now they bomb us again.

“The war is only about oil. It is not about getting Saddam Hussein. If they had just wanted to get Saddam Hussein they could have done so by now. Saddam Hussein was with America in the past, then fell out of favour. Now they want a new leader who will give the oil to America. They will find a new president to give America all they want. If it was left to the Iraqi people we could find a better alternative to Saddam, but anyone imposed by America will only be worse for us.”

Eli, aged 13, said, “I really wanted to come today. Before I had just been sitting back and watching. Mum was a bit worried because of all the army and police at Heathrow airport. I really wanted to demonstrate because Blair is not listening to us. He is like a dictator, putting himself before people he is supposed to represent. Some of my school friends wanted to come, but their parents wouldn’t let them. One of them told her dad that what she believed was nothing to do with him. She even went on hunger strike in protest.”

Peter and Valerie are a retired couple from Maidstone. Peter said, “This is only the second demonstration we have ever been on. The last one was in 1956 over the Suez crisis.

“We have come today because we are sick of the hypocrisy of the whole thing and fed up of being taken for granted by our government. We are totally against this war, with or without a UN resolution, which, if it were passed, would have been dictated by the US.

“There is an elite at the top of American society that is

motivated to defend their extravagant life style at the expense of the rest of the planet. And that includes the ordinary American people who are really suffering, as are people in other parts of the world.

“We are certainly not anti-American, but definitely anti the American government. We have been to the US and we found people there very warm and friendly, but also very insulated from what is happening in the rest of the world. When they wake up and educate themselves to know what is really going on, they will take a lot of stopping.

“There is no doubt that this war is about oil. Bush is looking after his own interests. He wants to finish what his father started. But another important aspect is that the war is being used to distract the American people from the economic problems they face. People in power always need an external enemy to distract attention. It was the same during the Cold War. Every time there were economic problems, the Cold War hotted up. If we lived in a rational society, everybody would be working less hours and enjoying a better standard of living. But society is not rational.

“And now the government is attacking our democratic rights. We have got to be vigilant. I started off as an ardent supporter of Labour. The day this government was elected was one of the happiest days of my life. I am totally disillusioned now. Blair may even believe that what he is doing is right. He thinks he can balance the interests of big business against reasonable social policies. But social policies are suffering in the interests of big business.

“In the past I have supported the United Nations. When I came out of the forces in the late 1950s, I swore I would only ever go back under a UN banner. I consider myself very definitely to be an internationalist. Now the UN is being employed by the big powers. The UN representatives will eventually be brought into line under pressure from the US.

“I hope that this situation gives people food for thought and leads to a radicalisation of political ideas. I agree right down the line that the fight against war has to be linked to the fight for fairness and social justice.”



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