Montreal antiwar demonstration the largest in Canadian history

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Braving freezing temperatures of -25 Celsius, 150,000 people marched through downtown Montreal Saturday to condemn US-British plans for war on Iraq. The protest was one of the largest political demonstrations in both Montreal and Canadian history, if not the largest.

Six times bigger than the last antiwar protest held in January, it was also quite different in its composition and general mood. While in January the bulk of marchers were students, artists and professional people, those taking part in Saturday's demonstration represented a cross-section of the working population. Quite noticeable was the participation of large numbers of working class families. Trade union banners were also in evidence. As opposed to the vague pacifism which dominated the last protest, one could sense this time a certain political opposition, however confused, to the war drive against Iraq and its far-reaching implications.

This was reflected somewhat in the speeches at the march's end. One of the speakers made reference to a speech by British Prime Minister Tony Blair comparing the danger posed by Saddam Hussein with the growth of Nazism in the 1930s, and said in reply: "Any Martian looking at the planet now would see very clearly who is threatening whom, which country is gathering its troops en masse on the borders of which other country."

Well-known actor Luc Picard and a student advocate both denounced "US imperialism," the latter also taking up the slogan "No blood for oil." There was a passionate intervention from a peace activist, a member of the "Iraq Peace Team," just back from a visit to Baghdad. After drawing attention to the US "shock and awe" plan to rain down 400 cruise missiles on Iraq the very first day of a war, she detailed the catastrophic impact such a war would have on Iraq's men, women and children.

But the political perspective put forward in the official speeches—and shared to a great extent by the marchers themselves—was that the most people could do to express their rejection of a war on Iraq was to pressure the United Nations and Canada's political leaders not to go along with the US-British war plans.

Raymond Legault, spokesman for the *Collectif Échec à la guerre* (Stop the War Collective)*,* which organized the demonstration, said that "we are the majority" and "Tony Blair will be forced to take note of the great opposition in Britain." He then applauded the "clear stand of the Bloc Québécois [the Quebec *indépendantiste* party in the federal parliament]: opposition to any Canadian participation in the war without a United Nations resolution." Noting that "this is the result of our struggle," he urged the marchers to pressure the MPs of the governing Liberals. He concluded, "We demand an emergency meeting with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to deliver a message from the Canadian population: No to war."

A team of supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed over a thousand copies in French and English of the WSWS statement "The tasks facing the anti-war movement" and received a warm response.

Jason, a history student at Rosemont College, told us: "We must stop Bush. The United States wants to attack Iraq saying it must comply with UN resolutions. But Israel has violated them many times. I am not surprised by the global scope of the antiwar demonstrations. But it must not only be against the war, but against everything that is wrong in the world today, including neo-liberal globalization." Jason said he was a regular reader of the WSWS, and while giving this interview helped passed out copies of the WSWS statement.

In addition to the large demonstrations in Montreal and Toronto, antiwar protests were held in some 70 other Canadian towns and cities, including Edmonton, where 12,000 marched and Vancouver, where at least 20,000 participated.

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