

Thousands join rallies in Pittsburgh and nearby cities

Paul Sherman
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A number of rallies, vigils and demonstrations took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the smaller cities and towns in the surrounding tri-state area. People gathered at county courthouses and in public parks to show their opposition to the impending war in Iraq.



Protesters at one of several vigils and demonstrations throughout Pittsburgh

In Pittsburgh, several hundred people took part in a half dozen vigils and demonstrations throughout the city. One rally was held to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the bombing of the Ameriyah shelter in Iraq in February 1991 during the first Gulf War. This bombing by US war planes killed 317 men, women and children as they slept in an underground bomb shelter.

John, a high school student who took part in the rally, said, “I came because we have to speak out against the war so we are heard above the war drums that are beating. If we are drowned out then they will do what they want. We have to show that we are not for this war.”

Gaggan, a university student at Duquesne University, explained why he took part in today’s rally. “I am against this war. It is unjust. Iraq is no threat to us. There is no real reason that we should go to war.

“This war is really about oil and oil concessions. They want to kill people so that they can get oil. I think the mainstream media is co-opted by the Bush administration. They just say whatever the government wants them to say.

“At least 10,000 people were killed in the last gulf war and many more people will be killed if there is another war. They will bomb Baghdad and many innocent people will be killed. This has to be stopped.”

In addition to Pittsburgh, demonstrations took place in Butler and Meadville, Pennsylvania; Youngstown, Ohio and Spencer, West Virginia, showing that the opposition to war has spread to many small cities and towns throughout the country.

In Butler, Pennsylvania, a small city 35 miles north of Pittsburgh, 250 people gathered to protest the war at a park across from the courthouse. Butler is a city of 35-40,000 people and serves as a bedroom community to Pittsburgh. Most of the industry in the area has been closed. The last remaining steel plant is AK Steel, formally Armco, which employs just 1,500 workers, down from 4,300 at its height.

People came from all walks of life—young and old, workers and retirees. “Ordinary people were focused on wanting to make a statement that they don’t support what our government is doing,” said Bill Neel, one of the organizers of the Butler protest.

One of the speakers was dressed in his military uniform and had served in both the first Gulf War and in Bosnia. Signs read, “Lets bomb taxes, they have oil too,” and “Empty warheads—Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld.”

A group of about 100 rallied in front of the courthouse in Spencer, West Virginia, a town of fewer than 5,000 people, north of Charleston in the mountains of West Virginia. Most of the industry in Spencer consisted of small manufacturing, such as a hub cap plant and a sweater factory, which have closed down.

“I am a total pacifist,” said Sarah, who attended the Spencer rally. “Most people came despite the terrible weather because people are very uneasy about this war.

A friend and I felt we had to do something to show our opposition to this war, so we organized this demonstration. It was our first one, but we will hold more.”

In Meadville, Pennsylvania, a city of 15,000 north of Pittsburgh, 250 people took part in a demonstration. The city is the Crawford County seat and home to Allegheny College. Demonstrators ranged from high school and college students, to grandparents, to babies brought by the parents in strollers. Handmade signs read: “Peace is patriotic,” “No blood for oil” and “Stop mad cowboy disease.”

In Youngstown, Ohio, more than 300 people stood in freezing temperatures and scattered snow to show their opposition to the war at a rally outside the federal courthouse. The demonstrators carried signs and listened to speakers and music.



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