

Tens of thousands march in South Africa against Iraq war

Eric Graham
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On Saturday, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets across South Africa to voice their opposition to the US drive for war against Iraq. Demonstrations were held in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Bloemfontein.

The protests were organised by the South African Antiwar Coalition, comprising more than 50 organisations. Amongst the groups involved in the protests were the African National Congress, the Azanian People's Organisation, the Pan Africanist Congress, the United Democratic Movement, the South African Communist Party, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the South African National Civics Organisation, the South African Council of Churches, Lawyers for Human Rights and the Muslim Judicial Council. Not in My Name, an organisation of South African Jews opposed to the Zionist occupation of Palestine, also participated in the demonstrations.

This correspondent attended the demonstration held in Cape Town. At 10 a.m. a procession comprising some 20,000 demonstrators departed from Keizersgracht Road and proceeded through the city centre to the US Embassy on the foreshore. The demonstrators spanned all creeds, colours and ages. Whole families, some with infants in pushchairs, participated in the protest. A number of American citizens, some on vacation and some resident in South Africa, were also present.

Protesters carried posters and banners condemning Bush's war plans. One group of protesters had daubed themselves with red paint and were carrying a banner reading, "The United States of Aggression." It was evident from the banners and posters that many participants saw a strong connection between the Bush administration's drive for war and Iraq's oil resources.

Outside the American embassy, surrounded by razor-

wire and guarded by armed riot police, representatives of the various organisations made speeches condemning American aggression. Statements of support from the antiwar coalitions in the US, the UK and the Netherlands were also read out.

Several protesters spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*. Paul, a student at the University of Cape Town, maintained that the reason for war was America's desire to seize Iraq's oil resources. He placed little confidence in the UN, stating, "The UN is controlled by America, and serves American interests."

Reduwaan, a shop manager and a regular participant in demonstrations from the days of apartheid, stated that the factor underlying Bush's determination to go to war was self-interest, particularly with respect to Iraqi oil. He also maintained that "America wants to destabilise the Middle East and protect Israel." He expressed concern that the Sharon government would use this war as a pretext to launch further attacks against the Palestinian population, possibly leading to their expulsion from the occupied territories.

Patrick, currently unemployed, strongly maintained that the youth have an obligation to make themselves heard: "People should speak for themselves, and not allow their governments to speak for them. This talk about terrorism is rubbish. Bush does not care how many people will be killed."

He was also sceptical about the role of the UN, and maintained that they are intimidated by the United States: "We should not support the UN resolution. It's not about the Iraqi people. The US government is like a corrupt business. I don't think anyone wants this war."

Nqaba, a conflict mediator, said, "Citizens of the world need to stand up against the militarisation of society and speak up against the United States' attempts to militarise the world. This unilateral attack

on Iraq is the beginning of an era when democratic rights will be eroded. We will no longer have the rights to which we are entitled. Military might and economic interest will be the only determining factors in international relations.” He stated that he was opposed to the war, whether or not the UN passes a resolution authorising the use of force.

Ilana, an American citizen on holiday in South Africa, said that shortly before leaving the US she saw thousands of young people being shipped off “to die in the Gulf.” She opposes the war because “many more people are going to die.”

Most of those interviewed agreed with the stance taken by President Thabo M’beki and Nelson Mandela, who have both criticised the Bush administration’s war plans, but were unsure whether this opposition would be maintained if the UN passed a resolution authorising a military attack on Iraq.



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