Ann Arbor, Michigan high school students speak out against war

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One of the most striking aspects of the recent global protests against war is the extraordinary breadth of participation of different age groups, and in particular the participation of the youth. Not only a growing number of university students, but also high school students have taken a stand in opposition to the policies of the American government. Several hundred high school students participated in a rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan on March 20, many demonstrating a remarkable level of political consciousness. After the rally, the World Socialist Web Site *spoke to two of them.*

Jamie is a junior from Ann Arbor Community High School.

WSWS: Could you first of all just tell me why you have come out here today, why you oppose this war.

J: I have been reading more and more about it, and I have the moral conviction that we cannot be cut off from the death of these people who live on the other side of the world, deaths that our money and our society is funding. The history of the actions of our government and our military is atrocious, this system of domination that has been set up across the world. This war is a clear example that the US government is willing to put the interests of a wealthy sector of society ahead of human life. It's criminal.

WSWS: Why are they pushing this war? What are the real interests behind it?

J: To say that this is a war for oil is not entirely true. There are also political motives. When you have a president with such an atrocious domestic policy, with the schools falling apart, with Medicare falling apart, the war is a way to deflect criticism. If anyone sets himself up against "evil incarnate," which in this case is Saddam Hussein, they are bound to look good by comparison. This has been US state policy since the Cold War, making the public scared of enemies oversees in order to entrench and support the political leaders at home. It really works off the fear of people. We are tricked into going against our rational minds and those parts of us that seek peace and love and justice, being overwhelmed by our sense of fear for our own lives.

WSWS: So you think that this is a way for Bush to gain support that he otherwise would not have, because of the overwhelming opposition to his domestic policies?

J: If we were to focus on, say, what Bush is doing on the environment, his disastrous handling of the economy, his domestic mismanagement of America, he would surely be thrown out of office. But if we set him against the "awesome threat" of Saddam Hussein—which has dominated the news—he is bound to look like the savior, instead of the dope that he is, the irresponsible, corporate puppet that he is.

WSWS: What do you think of the Democratic Party?

J: I think that they are very timid. In some ways they are ashamed that they are not more Republican. They support many of the same things. The Clinton administration bombed Iraq as well, and has supported corporate exploitation of people across the world. They are still locked into a system where they are subordinate to the powerful international banking organizations and big corporations.

The way this democracy is run you have to have money to be heard. The mass media is so centralized, and it costs millions of dollars to have a spot to address people about the concerns of the country. Truth and reality and details are not really in the interests of people who want to make money, despite the exploitation and death that might result from their actions.

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WSWS: So what way forward do you see for the antiwar movement?

J: I think there is no way for the war to be stopped now. But I think we have a duty to show the rest of the world that there are Americans who oppose what is going on and are fighting it. During the Second World War, there were Germans who knew that perhaps they could not take down the German government, but tried to do so anyway. It's unethical to be silent and capitulate in front of power, when your society is supportive of some of the worst killing that is going on. It's criminal to be silent.

We can't just rely on the adrenaline of the moment. It needs to be persistent resistance to what is going on. It is also very important to educate people and reach out. There can be an ugly side to protests, when it becomes consumed with hatred for George Bush. It is important to be angry at what is going on, but you can't let that turn into bitterness, resentment and nihilistic anger. That won't accomplish anything. What is the most important thing is to be moved by love for people and to not do this out of resentment and bitterness. That is how over the course of history social progress has come about: people with pure motivations attempting to resist the evil that is done by people in power.

O., a senior from Huron High School who asked not to be named, has parents who were born in Iraq.

WSWS: Why do you think this war is taking place?

O: I don't like to make any speculations. What I like to do is look at the past and the history of what has happened, and from that extrapolate what I think will happen. In the document that I spoke about [in my remarks at the rally], the National Security Strategy of last September, the US itself was talking about basically global domination. That is, more than oil, I think the major reason they are pursuing this war.

WSWS: You mentioned during your remarks that you uncle is in Iraq right now.

O: Yes I have relatives in Iraq still. Obviously all of them are going to be affected; they are living in Baghdad.

WSWS: They are opposed to this war?

O: Obviously.

WSWS: Well, the Bush administration would have us believe that the people of Iraq are looking at the American troops as liberators.

O: They dislike Saddam; they dislike Bush. They want something to change. But they don't want to be overrun by Americans. They remember what happened with the British a long time ago, under the old colonial regime.

WSWS: What do you see as coming after this war, after the invasion?

O: If it ends up that the US is going to take over Iraq, I don't think the Iraqi people will allow themselves to be taken over. Right now they have been quiet. But once the Americans come in, they will revolt. They are a proud people.

WSWS: What do you think the sentiment amongst high school students is with regard to this war?

O: Generally, especially in Ann Arbor, people are opposed to it. A few of my friends support it, in part I think because they haven't read as much as I have. I would probably have felt the same way, especially after I saw how stupidly sincere Bush looked on TV. But I researched this, and have come to be opposed to the war.

WSWS: Where do you do your research? Where do you get your information?

O: I try to go to firsthand resources, from the Pentagon and White House web sites.

WSWS: From the Internet?

O: Yes.

The police presence at the Ann Arbor protests was larger than it has been in the past, and some participants reported the presence of FBI agents. Earlier on Thursday, 19 were arrested for disorderly conduct during a planned act of civil disobedience at the federal building.

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