

Students walk out and rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan

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Protests were held in Ann Arbor, Michigan throughout the afternoon on Thursday, March 20, in spite of intermittent rain. Several hundred area high school students led the day's activities with a student walkout followed by a rally at the Ann Arbor federal building. Despite police presence at the rally, a number of students spoke out forcefully against the war as a criminal endeavor.

Jamie, a junior at Community High, denounced claims that the war was being waged to free the Iraqi people, pointing out that the US has plans to install a military government after the invasion. Rather, he said, "The goal of the American government is to line the pockets of a few with more money, and feed the CEO's who are already rich." He pointed out that the American government and its allies supplied whatever chemical weapons Hussein might have.

A senior from Huron High, whose parents are from Iraq, also refuted claims that the war would benefit the Iraqi people. He spoke about how the sanctions and bombings over the past decades have had a horrendous impact on the population of Iraq, including his own family. He cited government documents—including the National Security Strategy of the US published in September of last year—which detail the global imperial ambitions of the American government. Moreover, he said, "we have a war going on in our country" that must be opposed, and told of how his teacher, like many immigrants, had been arrested as part of the general attack on democratic rights in the country.

Sarah, another student at Community, was one of the organizers of the demonstration. After the rally she told the WSWWS that the overwhelming majority of students at her school were opposed to the war. "A lot of Americans oppose this war. America is supposed to be a democracy which should be run by the people, but

that is not the way it looks today." She said that part of the rationale for the ceaseless warmongering was that there was no other way for Bush to garner support for his government.

Later in the afternoon, some 1,500 University of Michigan students gathered at a rally to oppose the war. Monique Luse, a university student, opened the list of speakers by saying that those who had gathered and millions of others around the world were saying, "No, I will not fight for oil. I will not fight for money. I will not fight for colonialism and imperialism."

Also speaking was Joe Tanniru, the president of the Students for Social Equality at UM, the student organization of the Socialist Equality Party and the WSWWS. After arguing that the war was an imperialist war for oil and domination of the Middle East, Tanniru went on to explain that the war was being waged by a corporate elite that did not represent the American people. "We who have gathered here feel this war, not only in the bombs falling in Iraq, but in the bombs this corporate elite is dropping on the United States." The war, he argued, was intimately connected with a growing attack on democratic rights, social services, jobs and the educational system.

"We stand in opposition to this war not only because our hearts go out to our brothers and sisters in Iraq, but also because we know that our interests in stopping this war are intimately bound up with theirs." He went on to argue that the war was an organic product of a social system based upon the exploitation of the majority of the population by a few, and ended with a call to turn to the working class and build a socialist movement against war. These comments were met with enthusiasm from those who had gathered.

UM student Jenny Lee spoke about the enormous opposition that exists within the working class

internationally. “Working people,” she said, “recognize that this war is a distraction from the antiunion, anti-worker agenda that Bush is pushing at home.” She spoke about the numerous actions that have been taken by workers around the world to protest the war or attempt to hinder its progress. These include a call for a general strike in Italy and work stoppages in Europe and Latin America. “It is clear that it is workers—from train conductors refusing to transfer arms, to dock workers refusing to load ships, to teachers refusing to spread propaganda—that it is these workers who with enough international organization and solidarity can stop this war.”

Also speaking was Fadi Kiblawi, UM senior and leader of the Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), an organization that protests the occupation of Palestine. He drew connections between the war in Iraq and the continued oppression of Palestinians and the Middle East. After a number of other speakers, the rally concluded with a statement by Hiba, an Iraqi-American student who appealed for an end to war and the tragic conditions facing the Iraqi people.

After the rally, students marched to the Ann Arbor federal building to join several hundred area residents in further protests amidst a steady rain. Demonstrators marched around the building and held a rally with more speakers. Supporters of the WSWs handed out several hundred leaflets of the statement, “The tasks facing the anti-war movement.”



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