

Thousands arrested at US antiwar protests

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Thousands of protesters were arrested across the United States on March 20 as people took to the streets to demonstrate against the war on Iraq. Over 1,300 were arrested in San Francisco and nearly 600 in Chicago. Arrests also took place in Portland, Oregon, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles.

The protest in San Francisco began at 7 a.m. on Thursday morning. Groups of demonstrators fanned out across the city blocking intersections and delaying traffic for hours. By midday the protests had blocked over 30 downtown intersections and surrounded several buildings. The mood of the protesters was more angry and bitter than at previous demonstrations. Many expressed frustration over the Bush administration's contemptuous dismissal of mass antiwar demonstrations in the US and around the world, and the absence of any serious opposition from Congressional Democrats to the assault on Iraq.

While some of the demonstrators belonged to organized civil disobedience groups, thousands of others, the bulk of the protesters, had spontaneously joined the actions to express their revulsion over the unprovoked US invasion.

On Friday, large numbers of San Francisco Police officers took up positions at major intersections, arresting another 400 to 500 demonstrators.

The San Francisco *Chronicle* quoted officer Drew Cohen, who was filming the protests for the police department, as saying, "Our success will come when we arrest so many of them we have depleted their ranks."

In Chicago, over ten thousand protesters marched into the downtown financial district and surrounded the Federal Plaza. As the rally grew, protesters marched down Lakeshore Drive until confronted by baton-swinging cops. Police arrested 550 people.

In Los Angeles, some 7,000 demonstrators, including

Palisades High School students and UCLA college students, shut down a section of Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles on Thursday. A Los Angeles Police Department officer was filmed provocatively swinging his baton at protesters, hitting some in the chest and legs. About 40 demonstrators were arrested.

On Friday Los Angeles police corralled demonstrators away from the Federal Building in West Los Angeles toward a dead end area to prevent further acts of civil disobedience. A similar tactic was used against demonstrators during the Democratic National Convention in 2000, to isolate protesters and leave them vulnerable to police repression.

Protests in Los Angeles and San Francisco continued into Friday night.

In both New York City and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania over 100 demonstrators were arrested on Thursday. Some 35 were arrested in Portland.



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