

Tens of thousands in California denounce war on Iraq

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60,000 protest in San Francisco

Local media estimated that 60,000 demonstrators marched in San Francisco on Saturday. March organizers led the protest through several of San Francisco's middle class and working class neighborhoods, where they were met with the support of many residents; people honked and applauded the marchers.

The march itself reflected the Bay Area's demographics—contingents from wealthy Marin County marched along with immigrant and trade union groups.

San Francisco police in riot gear attacked a group of 1,000 marchers whom they described as anarchists, arresting 157 people, claiming that this breakaway group had attempted to block a major city intersection.

Actor Martin Sheen addressed the crowd at the start of the protest in Jefferson Square, despairing that a war was imminent: "At this point, there is only one thing we can do: fall on our knees and pray. We need help from a higher power."

Students, workers join Los Angeles march

More than 5,000 protesters marched against a US assault on Iraq in downtown Los Angeles while pummeled by a hard rain and wind gusts. The marchers included large groups of trade union members, including a 500-strong contingent of janitors, members of SEIU Local 1877. Students and immigrant groups also joined the protest, including Iraqi exiles.

"I came on my own because the time has come to tell everyone that Bush has to go!" declared an elderly protester, marching for the first time in her life. "The whole government is reckless and with very wrong priorities. Workers are paying, workers will be fighting, and the oil companies will benefit the most."

Socialist Equality Party supporters distributed hundreds of copies of the WSWWS statement "The tasks

facing the antiwar movement" to protesters. Jose, a janitor, said, "I feel really proud to participate in this protest today, because it unites all the workers and immigrants together to reject the policies of Bush. This protest declares our intention that we need to live in a world of peace. It is not just a question that we should all respect the United Nations, although I think that we should, but Bush has to be prevented from taking over all the resources that he is interested in. He thinks of himself as god, taking on the entire world.

"The US policy is already changing the way we live in this country. Every day one can see more racism, more attacks on immigrants. In Los Angeles the police now feel free to pressure people on the basis of the color of their skin. The persecution of undocumented immigrants has intensified. A few weeks ago a van full of immigrants was forced off the road by the border patrol, causing death and injury, but there was no scandal; the border patrol has taken a much harder policy."

Jose added, "A lot of money is being used for the military, but people's lives have become harsher. One becomes aware of more budget cuts; companies are being forced into bankruptcy and are resorting to unjust firings—using 9/11 as a pretext to check and double-check workers' documents, for example. There is less work for everyone."

Amy, a student at the University of California at Irvine, came by herself to the march: "When I got here I saw that many other UCI students had come as a group. I am a psychology student who feels that this war is totally unjustified. There is no evidence that Iraq is a threat to anyone. By participating in demonstrations like this one that are part of a bigger movement, we can inform other people and help them to understand that Bush has to go. I believe that many people are not

aware of the facts of this war. It is important to educate and develop consciousness among all Americans.”

Among the marchers was a group calling itself the “Peacemakers” from Bakersfield, California, about 100 miles north of Los Angeles. David, a young member of the group, asked about socialism and what the Socialist Equality Party stands for. “Even though Bakersfield is a large city of over 300,000 people, it is isolated from these movements,” he said. “Our group rallies every week in opposition to the war; yesterday more than 60 people came. To us that is important because Bakersfield is a very conservative city. It is the oil capital of California. Halliburton and Chevron have regional headquarters there; that is what makes the place so conservative. Anyhow, Bush has to go.”

Also participating in the march were high school students who had been involved in antiwar walkouts 10 days ago, many of whom are fighting attempts by school authorities to suspend them. A group of Highland Park high school students organized a cheerleading squad that motivated the marchers with high-energy routines and antiwar cheers. A student reported that teach-ins are taking place at California State University Los Angeles as well as at area community colleges. “The whole school is mobilized and discussing the war in many of the classes,” said Daniel, a Los Angeles City College student.

Reverend Jesse Jackson led the march and spoke at the concluding rally at the Ronald Reagan Federal Building. His speech was largely unintelligible to the protesters, who were being buffeted by the storm.

San Diego protests

San Diego, on the Mexican border, was the scene of several protests throughout the day. Downtown the Sacramento Bee described the protest as the largest since the eve of the Persian Gulf War, 12 years ago. Many marchers declared that this was their first protest. Some 10,000 demonstrators rallied around the Federal Building in San Diego. Another column of 1,000 demonstrators marched on the San Diego Naval Station. In nearby Carlsbad, two rallies took place involving 800 people.

The protest crossed the border into Tijuana, Mexico, where about 100 demonstrators waved a Mexican flag and carried antiwar signs.

The San Diego rally included groups representing Vietnam and Korean era veterans—San Diego

concentrates a relatively large number of active duty and retired military personnel. Also represented at the rally were groups from the University of California and Arab-American organizations.



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