

Chicago: Antiwar demonstrators defy police intimidation

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Thousands of people participated in antiwar marches in Chicago late last week. On March 21, 7,000 people assembled in Federal Plaza in front of the downtown post office to hear speakers from Afghanistan, Palestine and local organizations protest the US invasion of Iraq. Two lines of Chicago police officers in riot gear encircled the crowd; providing only one entrance or exit into the plaza. When the march began estimates put the crowd at least 10,000 people: a mixture of students, professionals and workers of varying age and race.

The night before—in response to the first bombing—an estimated 15,000 people marched along the scenic urban thoroughfare, Lake Shore Drive, on the coast of Lake Michigan. The police were out in force and nearly 600 protesters were arrested.

A group of law students from DePaul University were at the March 21 protest to oppose the war and ensure people were aware of their legal rights. Rima, a law student, said, “I would like to see the government stop the war and stop giving so much aid to tyrannical despotic regimes.” Laura described the war against Iraq as an “unprovoked war, an unjust war. For a country that prides itself on being lovers of freedom, we’re striking preemptively without proof. The American public really has no proof we should be there at all. I think it’s been a very arrogant administration. This war is the pinnacle of that arrogance.”

Michael, who works in information systems and is a veteran of many antiwar protests, said, “Bush’s hegemony, that’s what is taking place around the world. That’s been the issue since the ’50s.” He added, “The framers of this country believed the people should be able to have proper debate. That’s no longer the case. The people who are in power are intent on being the overseers of the working class and the people who struggle day-to-day. That goes beyond just the people

here; it goes on with all the people in the whole world.”

Because of the mass arrests at the first demonstration, many of the speakers at the March 21 rally equated the current Chicago mayor, Richard M. Daley, with his father—Richard J. Daley—who ordered the violent police attacks against anti-Vietnam War protesters during the Democratic National Convention in 1968.

After the organizers led the march from Federal Plaza the police lined the streets and marched up Dearborn Avenue along side the protesters. Captains and other police authorities directed their force from the sidewalk as the protesters filled the street for four to five city blocks. No one was allowed to leave the march across the police lines, nor was anyone allowed to cross the police lines to join the protest.

The police directed the march along the planned route, which took the protesters past Leo Burnett advertising company that produces the United States Army’s ad campaign “An Army of One,” and past the defense contractor Boeing’s headquarters in Chicago. Eventually, the march wound through the city and returned to Federal Plaza without major disruption.

The police and local news attempted to justify the earlier arrests by branding protesters as violent and disruptive. Eyewitness testimony, however, directly contradicts their version of events. Two young architects, who were present at the first march, described what happened

“The cops were there on horses and were blocking Michigan Avenue and not letting the protesters go. There were probably 5,000 of us trapped there; we couldn’t go anywhere and finally the crowd just started getting really nervous and restless. The cops on the east, there were fewer of them, so the crowd pushed through.

“The crowd went around the bend and the cops

herded the protesters toward another police barricade and they came up behind, and literally were squishing us. They were about 20 people deep with batons and pushing. And it was like you were trapped. They kept us there for three hours. We said we just want to leave; they never told us to disperse; they never gave us an opportunity to leave. They just said you're all being arrested. We said, 'Why are we being arrested?' They said, 'We don't know, we're just following orders.' At some point the whole crowd was chanting, 'What do you want us to do?'"

The architects described on how one man wanted to make sure his son got his insulin if arrested. "He stepped off the curb, completely unknowing, to ask an officer what he needed to do. The second he stepped off the curb he was grabbed by the throat, wrestled to the ground. And I could see the look in his eye. He literally said, 'What did I do?' and he looked complete shocked by it. Four or five policeman jumped on him simultaneously and dragged him off. He wasn't even in the protest; he was on the opposite side of the street."

Protests were held in other parts of the state as well. At the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana approximately 500 students, workers and community activists rallied against the Iraq war on March 20. Afterwards, around 200 protesters began a spontaneous march, blocking traffic close to campus.

A mere two or three people showed up in support of the war.

Supporters of the WSWS widely distributed the editorial board statement, "Build an international working class movement against imperialist war."



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