

Antiwar protest outside Oscar ceremony

John Andrews
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During the afternoon of March 23 several thousand demonstrators gathered on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, near the Kodak Theater where the Academy Awards ceremony was taking place, to protest against the US invasion of Iraq.

The demonstrators were confronted by 800 riot-clad Los Angeles Police Department officers, augmented by 200 California Highway Patrol officers, who kept them hemmed in a few block area, unable to march to the venue of the awards ceremony itself. Protesting against this blatant denial of their First Amendment right to freedom of speech and assembly, demonstrators yelled, “Shame, shame, shame” at the officers during hours of standoff, as blocks of black limousines carrying people to the Kodak Theater lined up on Highland, right next to the police activity and within sight of clumps of demonstrators.

Frequently, the crowd would erupt in cheers as the tinted rear windows of a limousine would lower and a peace sign emerge, or a sunroof would open for the well-dressed occupant to stand up and wave to the crowd. From the rear window of one limousine, a cardboard sign bearing the now familiar slogan, “No blood for oil” was displayed to the crowd. One particularly supportive passenger in the back seat of a modest car appeared to this reporter to be Salma Hayek, nominated as best actress for her portrayal of Mexican artist and socialist Frida Kahlo.

There were sporadic outbreaks of police violence against the demonstrators. This reporter saw one LAPD officer strike a peaceful protestor repeatedly in the back with a baton as he was moving peacefully in the direction he was ordered by other officers. There were reports that at least one demonstrator was clubbed in the face, a violation of official LAPD policy, and the smell of pepper spray was clearly in the air. At the end of the demonstration, at least 12 people were arrested for failing to disperse.

WSWS supporters distributed over 1,500 copies of the leaflet “Build an international working class movement imperialist war” to demonstrators, many of whom voiced considerable support for its call for a turn to the working class to defeat the Bush administration’s war drive.

One demonstrator who took the leaflet, Matthew, said that for years he had been reading the WSWS daily, and considered it one of his primary sources for information and analysis of current events. A local teacher, Matthew, looked at the line up of police officers and said, “I thought you were overstating matters quite a bit a few years ago when you associated the impeachment drive with a deepening attack on democratic rights, but now I can see you were right.” He described how he frequently prints out WSWS articles and distributes them among his coworkers and students. “As time goes on, they are more and more seeing that you are accurately predicting the course of events.”

Matthew noted that the demonstration was being held “on the fourth anniversary of the commencement of the bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. I mean ‘Yugoslavia,’ because the nation at that time was united, and was, like Iraq, a victim of US aggression.” He agreed strongly that the 1939 Nazi blitzkrieg of Poland is the closest historical analogy for the invasion of Iraq, “particularly in the integration of propaganda with political objectives.”

Matthew praised the WSWS commentary on the Iraq war. “You combine moral outrage with factual material in the manner that defines all good political writing, including that of Trotsky.” He concluded with the hope that the current upsurge in antiwar activity “doesn’t fizzle away like it did after the first Gulf War in 1991.”



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