Antiwar protests grow in India

Our correspondents
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A growing number of antiwar protests are taking place in India—large and small. More than 10,000 marched in the city of Hyderabad, capital of the southern state of Andra Pradesh, on March 9. The following day 3,000 young people, workers, intellectuals and small traders participated in a demonstration and rally in central Madras. On March 17, thousands protested in Calcutta.

WSWS correspondents attended the rally in Madras, the state capital of Tamil Nadu, handing out several hundred copies of WSWS statements in English and Tamil to demonstrators and onlookers. The protest was organised by the "Committee against War on Iraq," which includes trade unions, the Science Forum and political parties such as the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

Among the slogans chanted were, "Iraq today! India tomorrow!", "Stop Bush's war for oil!" and "We the people of India unite and condemn the imperialist invasion of Iraq!".

The state government attempted to clamp down on the protest, refusing permission for a demonstration outside the US Consulate and mobilising large police contingents. Chief Minister J. Jeyalalitha, who is seeking to attract foreign investment, is nervous about the growing antiwar movement. She even went as far as instructing all printers in the city not to print posters for the rally.

The WSWS spoke to a number of demonstrators who were critical of the Indian government. They pointed out that despite its opposition to "regime change" in Iraq, New Delhi was providing tacit support for the Bush administration and an invasion of Iraq.

Ajitha, a young lawyer, marched under the banner of the All India Lawyers Union. She told the WSWS: "The Indian government is not doing anything. It is keeping silent while America has made all the preparations and is about to invade Iraq to conquer it. This is because it is privatising the nationalised industries and services and doing everything in its power to attract foreign investment. The Vajpayee government does not want to displease the Bush government even by criticising it."

Ganga Bhai, a branch president of the Insurance Employees Union, said: "We have to create awareness among the people. We have to mobilise more people. The Indian government has not taken any steps even to protest against the US government's imminent invasion of Iraq. The Vajpayee government is taking a soft line. This should be the first step to mobilise the people in all the states against the American invasion of Iraq."

Solaiyappan, a CPI-M member, had worked in the Middle East and is now a cable operator in Madras. "The BJP Vajpayee government is sitting on the fence. This government can only support the American imperialists and Israel. This is a capitalist government that wants foreign investment and therefore wants to please the imperialists," he said.

Ali Hussain, a CPI-M member, former editor of the paper *Muslaman,* said: "America's allegation that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction and that the national security of the US is at stake, is only a pretext to invade Iraq and capture Iraq's oil fields. Bush is saying that Saddam Hussein is a dictator and that it [the US] is going to bring democracy to Iraq. If that is the intention of US imperialism, then it must first bring democracy in Saudi Arabia and other states in the Middle East, which are ruled by medieval despots—Sheiks and kings."

R. Neelakandan, a CPI-M supporter, commented: "When we hear what American imperialism is doing and that it is going to invade Iraq, my emotions well up. Such a situation should not come to India. We have to stop this war. However the movement against the American invasion has started, even though it is not

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enough. It is Iraq today. It will be India tomorrow. Musharraf has already said that after Iraq it will be Pakistan's turn to get enslaved. American imperialism wants to exploit the whole world."

CPI and CPI-M speakers at the rally sought to confine the protests to appeals to the official political establishment, with which both parties have intimidate ties. CPI trade union leader Dasgupta even called on the Bharatiya Masdoor Sangh (BMS) union grouping, which is controlled by the Hindu extremist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), to "join the movement".

CPI member Veera Pandiyan complained that the national and Tamil Nadu state governments had not passed resolutions against the US war, neglecting to mention that CPI-M state governments in West Bengal and Tripura have not done so either. The CPI and CPI-M both openly court political alliances with capitalist and communalist parties, such as the Tamil Nadu-based Dravida Kazagam, which appeared at the recent protest.

None of the CPI or CPI-M speakers pointed out that the drive to war is a product of the profit system or called for a turn to the international working class as the only force capable of stopping it. Their appeal to the Hindu extremists of the RSS and the Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP)-led government in New Delhi was based on Indian nationalism—that is, that the war was not in the best interests of Indian capitalism.

A WSWS correspondent spoke to students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi who have participated in a number of antiwar protests in recent weeks. The university's students come from virtually every state of the country.

Asif Jamal, a second year arts student, said the US was waging a false propaganda war, trying to link Iraq with Al Qaeda to justify an imperialist war on Iraq. It was the US, he said, which was responsible for the growth of Islamic fundamentalist movements like Al Qaeda. "Iraq has the second largest oil reserve in the world, many politically influential people in US have interests in oil companies. They have their eyes on Iraq oil reserves and they want to capture it by force."

After capturing Iraq, Jamal said, the US would turn next to Iran and then to Pakistan and India. "It is a selective war against terrorism to fulfill its own policy," he commented. Critical of the Indian government, he said: "The US can't be our friend, its policy is to crush every developing country. I am afraid that the US will treat us like Iraq. It is a potential threat... our tradition is to oppose every imperialist war. We have also suffered a lot under imperial colonialism."

Jamal welcomed the WSWS initiatives. "We haven't got means to communicate with the people all over the world ... the idea of making use of the website is good."

Rahul, a post-graduate student in international relations, said the war was a struggle between rich and poor. "Why are they only targeting Iraq if they are serious about disarming destructive weapons? The US intention is to establish world hegemony; they went to Afghanistan with the same aim. Why are they setting a double standard when it comes to Israel? They [the US] want to use money and military power to control the world."

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