

Antiwar protests in southern India

Ganesh Dev, Arun Kumar
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As part of the worldwide opposition to a US war on Iraq, protests are growing in India. Two rallies took place last week in the south of India—in Madras, the state capital of Tamil Nadu, and Bangalore, a major industrial city in Karnataka.

More than 2,000 people took part in an antiwar meeting last Thursday at the Radha Memorial Hall in Madras—just one of a number of protests that have taken place recently in the city. Youth, students, workers, women and intellectuals packed the hall to overflowing.

Prior to the meeting, *World Socialist Web Site* correspondents spoke to a number of the protestors who expressed their opposition to the war and to the Indian government's tacit support for a US invasion of Iraq. A number of copies of the February 12 WSWS Editorial Board statement "The tasks facing the anti-war movement" were distributed.

Vishal Vijay Sing, a third-year university student studying education, handed us a copy of a poem he had written entitled "Never wage a war again". He explained: "Ultimately they want power in the oil market. They have piled up such a mountain of weapons while thousands are dying without food. They are going to wage a war to kill thousands of innocent people and plunder their oil in Iraq. We must stop this war."

J. Francis, an economics student from Cochin in Kerala expressed his opposition to the war, saying: "After September 11, the US is calling all Muslims terrorists. It is even trying to link Al Qaeda with Saddam Hussein in order to get direct control of Iraq's oil." He expressed his distrust of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), which formerly held office in Kerala and has been prominent in anti-war protests in India.

The Madras meeting was organised by the Committee Against US War On Iraq and featured CPI-M speakers,

including Prakash Karat, a leading member of the party's Political Bureau. Karat promoted the illusion that the war could be stopped by relying on the UN or America's rivals—France and Germany.

Even though the Bush administration has made clear that it will proceed with or without UN approval, Karat declared: "The UN has become a crucial arena of struggle against war. The US interprets resolution 1441 as a resolution that empowers it to go to war, whereas countries like Germany and France hold a different position. The UN is no more a rubberstamp for the US."

However, as Professor C.T. Kurien, a leading Indian economist, pointed out to the meeting: "Bush has described the UN as a debating society and will not wait for a UN or Security Council decision to invade Iraq.

Kurien went on to explain: "Saddam Hussein, who is now being demonised by the US, was American imperialism's darling in the Middle East when he was waging a war against the Iranian revolution, which overthrew the Shah—American imperialism's open puppet... The US has no convincing evidence against Iraq and it is now bringing pressure on the inspectors' team to produce the 'evidence'."

Joan Pinkam, an American faculty member of the Asian College of Journalism, expressed her solidarity with the meeting and pointed to the international scope of the opposition. "I stand before you not as a representative of any group or organisation but as the representative of the thousands and thousands of ordinary Americans who have come onto the streets of New York and other cities of America to protest against American imperialism's war against Iraq.

"There is going to be a war between two super powers—between US imperialism and the millions of ordinary people globally, who have come onto the streets to oppose the imperialist war against Iraq."

More than 400 workers, intellectuals, youth and students took part in a rally and march in the centre of Bangalore last Thursday. Protestors shouted slogans denouncing the war and carried banners and placards declaring “No to war on Iraq”, “Read between pipelines”, “Down with Hitler Bush” and “Iraq today—India tomorrow”.

The protest was organised by the Bangalore Initiative For Peace, which includes the CPI-M, trade unions, the Islamic fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and various non-government organisations. A leaflet produced by the organisation criticised the US for failing to recognise the UN’s authority. “The role that the US has assumed of international ‘policeman’ will threaten world peace. After dealing with Iraq, the USA has threatened to go after nations like North Korea and Iran. We cannot remain silent spectators,” it stated.

WSWS supporters distributed more than 300 copies of the editorial board statement. Many people came back after reading the statement and asked for copies to give to their friends. They also asked for more information about the WSWS and the Fourth International.

Alex Henry, a commerce student, said: “Americans are business-minded and they want oil there... However there are divisions among the American people. The ruling elite wants to divert the opinion of the people... They waged war against Afghanistan to test their advanced missiles. Iraq is not fighting but the US wants the oil there.”

Commenting on the Indian government, Henry said: “They would not be reluctant to provide facilities in India for the US to go to war against Iraq. It is a fake opposition because the Indian government is very much dependent on the US for investments in India as they go all out to privatise industries. Therefore there cannot be a serious Indian [government] opposition to US war on Iraq.”

Tayib, an engineering student, told the WSWS: “I am opposed to Bush’s double standards—one for the allies and one for the enemies. The US supplies very destructive weapons to Israel... If the US is really serious about disarmament then the US should be the first country to be disarmed. The US argument that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction is hypocritical because America is the only country in the world which possesses massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons.”

Two young American tourists also participated in the rally to express their solidarity. Alma Lamberg from Seattle and Amanda Bradley from Boston told the WSWS that they, like many of their friends in the US, were very much opposed to a US war on Iraq. “It is going to be a terrible time for the world,” Bradley said. “However we have been traveling a lot and have seen communities coming together against war. It’s very heartening to see them come together.”

Lamberg added: “In every area that we have gone there has been protests. Something has to come out of this... The American people were shattered after the September 11 attack. But what Bush is doing now has got nothing to do with fighting Al Qaeda. He (Bush) is after governments and people... People are passionately opposed to the war.”



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