

Antiwar actions at the University of Michigan include rallies and teach-ins

Our correspondent
6 March 2003

As part of national and international student actions against the impending war in Iraq, students organized a series of actions March 5 at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. A noon-time rally was followed by debates, teach-ins and panel discussions that lasted the entire afternoon. The day of protest was organized by a university antiwar group called Anti-war Action.

Several hundred students participated in the rally, which featured poetry and literature readings as well as a presentation by actors from the British Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), which is currently in residency at the university. Many of the company's actors signed a letter to the student paper, the *Michigan Daily*, denouncing the war policy of the Bush administration and the Blair government of Britain. Several actors read an antiwar poem by British poet Tony Harrison, as well as poems by Wilfred Owen and William Butler Yeats.

A team from the Socialist Equality Party spoke to several of those attending. Elizabeth, a senior, said she thought the US was going to war in order to exploit the entire region. "A lot of innocent people will be killed. I see the US right now as an empire. The main motive for the war is for the region's resources." She considered the pretense of the American government to be fighting for democracy to be unbelievable and hypocritical, citing American intervention to overthrow Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 and American support for Israel today.

Dan, a senior, said he thought the war had "a lot to do with business interests." He added, "It has a lot to do with having power in the world, especially in that region."

John, a senior who said he was a regular reader of the *World Socialist Web Site*, said he thought the war was for corporate profit, particularly the defense industry.

"If it wasn't Iraq it would be somewhere else," he said, adding he was in favor of having the university end its contracts with the defense industry.

Other events during the day included a panel discussion on the topic: "The Real Reasons for War: US Hegemony in the Middle East." Tom O'Donnell, a visiting professor of physics at the university, said the war was for American empire and control of the Middle East. He pointed out that the right-wing press and politicians have attempted to accustom the American public to the idea of empire, justifying it on the basis of protecting the population.

The film "Paying the Price: Killing the Children of Iraq" documented the devastating effect that United Nations sanctions have had on the Iraqi people. There was also a debate on the war in Iraq, and panels on the attack on civil liberties and the psychological effects of war.

A panel later in the day was entitled "Political Issues in the Fight Against War." Participating on the panel were representatives of the College Democrats, the Student Greens and the Students for Social Equality, the student organization of the Socialist Equality Party.

Nick Klonoski, the representative of the Democrats, said he opposed the war because it would undermine multilateralism and the United Nations. He said he opposed the Bush administration's policies, arguing against the idea that war would lead to democracy in Iraq and stating no proof had been presented that Saddam Hussein was hoarding weapons of mass destruction. But he offered no political perspective for opposing war. Indeed, he conceded that he was unable to defend the criminal actions taken by the Clinton administration with regard to Iraq.

Juscha Robinson ran Ralph Nader's Green Party campaign in Michigan in the 2000 presidential election.

She spoke at length about the electoral activities of the Green Party, while maintaining that, fundamentally, “change will not occur through the election system.” She advocated further demonstrations and promoted local organization. She also argued that corporate ownership of the media stifles truth and works to prevent the formation of a political alternative to the Democrats and Republicans.

While critical of the Democratic representative, Robinson’s perspective was fundamentally one of pressuring the Democratic Party. She voiced the opinion that the protests were helping to push some Democrats to the left, and went so far as to suggest that the Green Party would dissolve itself into the Democratic Party if the latter chose as a candidate someone like Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

Joseph Tanniru, a representative of the Students for Social Equality, presented a socialist perspective in opposition to war. He began by defining the coming US invasion as an imperialist war of aggression and plunder. “The great Marxists of the last century defined imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism,” he said, “the expression of the interests of monopoly and finance capital on a world stage. This is an imperialist war in the classical sense, and is the foreign policy correlate of a right-wing domestic policy of an unprecedented character.”

Tanniru went on to argue that the antiwar movement had to transcend the manner in which the “debate” on war has been framed by the corporate media and the political establishment, which is limited to tactical differences within ruling circles.

After discussing some of the material and geo-strategic interests driving the war, he said, “But perhaps more significant than these interests, or rather underlying them, is a phenomenon of deep significance that has not received as much attention as it deserves. And this is the enormous level of social inequality...within the United States. Fundamentally, the real source of the war lies in the US itself. The Bush administration represents a social oligarchy that is entirely divorced from the interests and sentiments of the broad majority of the population, and views these interests and concerns with complete contempt.”

Tanniru said the intense level of social inequality was a product of a deep crisis in the capitalist system, and that only on this basis could one explain the frenzied

determination of the Bush administration to go to war. Opposition to war, he continued, had to be grounded on the independent mobilization of the international working class in opposition to capitalism. This required an “irrevocable break with all parties of big business, including, in particular, the Democratic Party in the US,” which, he said, was entirely complicit in the drive for war.

Following the panelists’ remarks, those in attendance were given the opportunity to ask questions or make comments. In the course of the discussion, the representative of the Green Party was confronted by a supporter of the WSWS from Germany, who pointed to the treacherous role of German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, a leader of the German Greens, in supporting German intervention in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Robinson did not attempt to defend Fischer or the German Greens, instead reciting the cliché that “power corrupts.”

A supporter of the WSWS spoke in the discussion, stressing the significance of the international protests that took place on February 15. “These demonstrations strikingly confirm the emphasis placed by Marxists on the significance of internationalism and the international unity of the working class,” he said. He went on to say that the demonstrations, and the fact that the war was being carried out despite such enormous opposition, expressed the deep chasm that exists between a ruling oligarchy and the vast majority of the world’s population.

He warned that while the demonstrations for the most part have not yet been met with state violence, this was by no means excluded in the future. The government had complete contempt for democratic rights, he said, citing the recent arrest of an elderly man for wearing an antiwar T-shirt in a shopping mall.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact