

Giant antiwar protest in Montreal

Keith Jones
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Montreal was again the scene of a massive antiwar protest Saturday. March organizers put the crowd at 200,000. Media estimates of the protest's size varied wildly. Some reports numbered the demonstrators at a hundred thousand. Others said the crowd was comparable to that on March 15, when a quarter-million people marched through downtown Montreal.

The mood of the demonstrators was one of outrage and revulsion: outrage at the brazenly illegal character of the US-British invasion of Iraq; revulsion at the unleashing of weapons of mass destruction against an impoverished country and at the spectacle that the television networks are making of the carnage.

The crowd frequently took up the chant “Non à la bush-erie” a play on the French-word for butchery—*boucherie*. Another popular chant was “Bush assassin, de père à fils”—“Bush murderer, the son like the father.” Many of the demonstrators bore hand-made placards that alluded to previous crimes committed by Washington. “One more act of savagery by the US government” read one.

Massive applause greeted the official speakers whenever they charged Bush and Blair with being war criminals or mocked the US and British governments' claim that the invasion of Iraq is a war of liberation. “This is not a war of liberation, but a war of aggression,” said the actor Luc Picard. “What the US administration is proposing is not a new world order. But a made in the USA order in which they will decide which dictatorships to overthrow and which they will continue to support according to their interests.”

Ali, a Lebanese immigrant, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “This is a not a war for the liberation of the Iraqi people, but for oil and to protect Israel. How can Bush speak of democracy, when he himself wasn't democratically elected?”

A roar also went up from the crowd when speakers denounced the Canadian government's collusion in the

invasion of Iraq. Two days before the US officially began its bombardment of Iraq; Canada's Prime Minister Jean Chrétien told Parliament that Canada would not participate in an invasion of Iraq unless sanctioned by the United Nations. Yet he has voiced support for a quick US victory and refused to re-call Canadian military personnel and ships that are assisting the US military in its invasion. And as Raymond Légault of the *Collectif Échec à la Guerre* noted, Canada has played a major role over the past twelve years in enforcing the sanctions against Iraq that are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children.

At the conclusion of the march, a much larger portion of the crowd stayed to listen to the speeches than on previous occasions. Weather may have been a factor. But clearly many stayed because they are searching for a perspective equal to the breadth and scope of the crime unfolding before their eyes.

In this respect, they were sorely disappointed. All most of the speakers had to offer was the hope that the antiwar protests would ultimately be heard by the political establishment. Légault called on Kofi Annan to convene the UN General Assembly to put an end to the war.

Luc Picard ended a tirade against the crimes of US imperialism by seeking to breathe life into the discredited perspective of Quebec independence. Several prominent leaders of the big business Parti Québécois and Bloc Québécois joined the march, but remained in the background. No doubt they feared that if they tried to take a more prominent role, they would be criticized for seeking to capitalize on a movement that developed almost entirely outside the official political establishment, including the trade unions.

While workers comprised much of the audience—and many of these were trade unionists—the union officialdom was once again conspicuous in its absence.

No trade union representative addressed the demonstration.

Although united in their opposition to the war, the crowd was politically very heterogeneous. Nonetheless all were conscious of the international and global character of the antiwar movement and the isolation of the Bush administration.

Most also recognize that the war in Iraq will—in the absence of intervention from below—prove only to be the first in a series of wars aimed at reorganizing the world in the interests of Washington and Wall Street.

Some shared the perspective of the platform speakers that war can be opposed through the UN and the governments of Canada and other capitalist states. Others were receptive to the perspective of the *World Socialist Web Site* that the struggle against war requires the development of an international anti-capitalist movement.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed well over a thousand copies of the statement, “Build an international working class movement against imperialist war.” Among those they met was an immigrant from southeast Asia who on his own initiative had photocopied the WSWS statement and was likewise distributing it en masse.



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