

New York City: thousands of high school students walk out to protest Iraq war

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6 March 2003

Thousands of high school and college students joined demonstrations in several different parts of New York City on March 5 to protest the Bush administration's plans for war against Iraq.

At high schools throughout the city, students staged walkouts in defiance of school administrators, who were instructed by the city's Education Department to suppress participation in the demonstrations. At one Brooklyn high school, school authorities reportedly locked students in to prevent their joining the protests. At others, suspensions were threatened.

Over 100 students walked out at Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan and marched nearly two miles up Broadway to a mass rally in Union Square. The school, which draws students from throughout the city based on competitive academic admissions, is just a few blocks from the World Trade Center site and had to be evacuated on September 11, 2001.

Groups of students ranging from scores to hundreds came from a wide spectrum of schools scattered throughout the city. Walkouts were reported at Washington Irving High School and other schools in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn. Students also walked out at the Bronx High School of Science and other schools in the Bronx. The youth converged on Union Square, the center of labor protests in New York City in an earlier period.

Many carried hand-lettered signs bearing slogans that included "Books not Bombs," "Defend rights of all immigrants," and "Declare war on corporate greed, not Iraq."

"We kind of felt like making a statement on war," said Hudson, a Stuyvesant sophomore. "I think it's amazing that so many people from throughout the city have come here to take a stand against the war. This war is unjust and immoral. I think we are doing it just

because we want to get their oil. I don't know how we can be down on Iraq when the countries that are responsible for violating the most UN resolutions are the US and Israel."

Hudson said that anti-war sentiment was widespread at his school: "For every kid who walked out, there are 10 who feel the same way but didn't want to miss class or were scared they would be suspended."

Karl, a senior at Washington Irving High School, came with a group that had walked out of the school, located just a few blocks east of Union Square. "I'm with peace," he said. "I don't think you can just go in there and take what's not ours in that way—the oil I mean." Referring to the events of September 11, 2001, Karl added, "It brought a lot of people in the city together, but not behind war. The way I see it, if we bomb them first, they're going to look for a way to bomb us."

The crowd of students, some of whom banged drums and danced, drew numbers of workers on their lunch hour into the square to join the protest. A number of students spoke from the platform, calling attention to problems ranging from growing homelessness in New York to the lack of proper supplies and deteriorating conditions in their school. Others spoke of siblings and relatives who had been sent to the Persian Gulf in preparation for war on Iraq. The rally's organizers, however, put forward no perspective for carrying forward the students' struggle. Their speeches essentially glorified militant protest, while several presented themselves as veterans of the Vietnam era anti-war movement.

Simultaneous with the demonstration in Union Square, a separate rally of several hundred people, most of them college students, took place at Washington Square, about 10 blocks south. After a few speakers, a

rap performance and the reading of some poetry, most of the demonstrators carried their protest inside the New York University library before marching north to Union Square.

Borough of Manhattan Community College student Felix Nunez was among those rallying in Washington Square. "I came out to support the students against the war and to create a better world for future generations," he said. "I don't like the way the US government is treating people all over the world, oppressing other countries, including my country, the Dominican Republic, which they invaded twice.

"Now people are starting to realize that we are all brothers and sisters, even though they live far away from us. The movement against the war is growing very rapidly, but one of the main problems facing us is that we cannot identify with any party, either Democrat or Republican. Millions of people called their representatives, but they didn't listen to us. I think we need to create a new party. The ones we have now are representing the multinational corporations, who are the ones taking us to war and the ones who selected Bush."

Later in the afternoon, both City University of New York (CUNY) students and high school students gathered at Hunter College for a protest. Speakers and demonstrators drew a connection between the impending war and proposed budget cuts and tuition hikes in both the state and city university systems.

Lisa Ross, a junior at Hunter, carried a hand-lettered sign reading, "Fight for CUNY, not for oil." The proposed hikes, which would raise the annual cost of tuition by \$1,200, would threaten the right of many students to an education, she said.

"We have students here who are commuters, working full-time jobs, single mothers," she said. "They cannot afford that kind of increase. This government is spending \$400 billion a year on the military budget while it is sucking money from out of the states, causing the budget crises. That money could go for education, for health care, for childcare and a lot of other things. It shouldn't be used to conquer and oppress other countries."

After the rally at Hunter, students began marching south to a demonstration outside the midtown offices of New York's Democratic Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton, both of whom voted in favor of the resolution granting Bush authority to invade Iraq. At

one point, police attacked those in the front of the march, arresting several students.



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