

A massive march against war in heart of New York City

A reporting team
24 March 2003

A massive crowd of over a quarter of a million people streamed down Broadway through the heart of New York City March 22 in protest against the Bush administration's war of aggression against Iraq.

The marchers kept coming 20 abreast for over three hours, pouring down from Times Square nearly 40 blocks to Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village.

Entire families marched, pushing baby carriages and holding their young children's hands. There were large groups of high school and college students, including a particularly loud and boisterous contingent from the City University of New York, which joined their protest against the war to the fight against planned tuition hikes and budget cuts at home. Scattered in the crowd were veterans wearing the remnants of military uniforms from Vietnam and even World War II.

The great majority of the marchers carried hand lettered signs and in some cases elaborately painted posters. One group carried placards bearing the images of Picasso's famous painting protesting the Nazi regime's bombing during the Spanish Civil War, "Guernica," while another young man held aloft a paper mache model of the horse depicted in the same work of art.

There were also sizable contingents of immigrants marching together under their own banners, including Korean-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Latinos and Palestinians.

The slogans on the protest signs expressed both the anger of the demonstrators as well as a good deal of wit and imagination. "Shock and awe began on Election Day," read one. Another woman carried a sign with a painting of Bush in a court jester's cap reading, "Somewhere in Texas a village is missing its idiot." Another poster asked, "Who's pro-life now, George?"

Other signs said: "Liberation begins at home," and "Regime change begins at home." Some called attention to the criminal character of the Bush administration's use of aggression: "Poland 1939/Iraq 2003," and "Aggressive war is a crime/UN Charter, Art. 2 (4)."

There were also a number of demonstrators carrying signs and banners explicitly rejecting the Bush administration's attempt to use the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City as a pretext for invading Iraq. A group of relatives of people killed in the World Trade Center attacks marched under their own banner. "It is 9/11 in Baghdad" read one sign; "New Yorkers remember our own shock and awe," said another.

The city had refused to issue a march permit for the February 15

protest, instead attempting to herd protesters into pens made of metal anti-riot barricades and sealing off dozens of blocks, making it impossible for demonstrators to reach the rally site on Manhattan's East Side. The result was hundreds of thousands of people pushing through other avenues, effectively paralyzing much of the city.

Apparently having thought better of it after this tactic backfired, the city allowed the march this time, but police commanders were nervous from the outset over the unexpected size of the protest. Their greatest fear was that the huge crowd could never fit into Washington Square Park, and that the protest would spill over into the rest of the city.

Thousands of police were mobilized for the march, including mounted police, helmeted riot cops and "anti-terrorist" units equipped with chemical and radiation detection devices. On one side street, police from the paramilitary Emergency Service Unit stood by with a bulletproof armored personnel carrier. Federal police were also in evidence, and National Guard troops armed with M-16s patrolled nearby blocks.

At the entrance to the park, the NYPD had set up a sound truck that continuously blared out a recorded message: "The march is over. Please leave the area in an orderly fashion."

As the number of demonstrators in the park swelled, students and others began chanting back mockingly, "The war is over, please leave Iraq immediately."

By the time the last marchers arrived, police began trying to push the crowd out of the streets. Plainclothes cops in the park scuffled with demonstrators leading to several arrests. Helmeted riot cops were brought in to try to clear the streets, but then withdrawn after the thousands of protesters failed to budge. A police wagon was also sent down the street with sirens wailing into the crowd, which again failed to move. Commanders on the scene ordered a tactical retreat.

When demonstrators launched a spontaneous attempt to march back uptown, however, they were met by riot police and mounted cops who charged horses into the crowds. Cops struck several protesters with batons and used pepper spray on others. By the end of the day, nearly 100 people were under arrest.

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed a number of those who participated in the New York City demonstration.

David, a music professor from City University of New York on Staten Island, marched with a large contingent of Staten Islanders who had ridden the ferry over for the protest. While the borough is

considered New York's most conservative, he said that many residents had opposed the drive to war and were outraged at the destruction being carried out against Baghdad.

"I guess some of us had hoped that the worldwide opposition to the war would put the brakes on war, but it obviously hasn't," he said. "I guess to some extent we have to regroup and figure out how to address this war and the group in Washington that is carrying it out. Some people talk about appealing to the Supreme Court or impeachment, but it seems to me that those ideas are dead in the water."

Attacks on working people at home were likely to increase opposition to the government, David said. "Civil liberties are threatened as never before, and most people still don't even know it," he said. "People are going to feel the pinch and they're going to start asking questions. They cannot run this country on both guns and butter."

He added that his brother is a career soldier who has been sent into the Iraq war. "He's in the Rangers and has been in just about everything from Grenada to Bosnia and Afghanistan, and he's opposed to the war," he said. "He doesn't think we should be there."

Lisa, 39, a consultant, came down from Rosendale, New York, about two hours north of New York City. "I think this war is horrible," she said. "It's completely based on lies. The biggest thing is not even oil, but it's about power. The folks who are in power want to keep it and expand it. They are making a mockery of democracy."

"My concern is that thousands of innocent Iraqis are going to die, but, beyond that, Bush and his cronies are out of control. After Iraq, they're just going to keep on going. Next is Iran, then Saudi Arabia is going to fall apart and they're going to go into Saudi Arabia."

"The war is also a diversion from the fact that our economy is really in bad shape. These drumbeats of fear make it easier for them to infringe on our civil liberties. But this war is not going to make us any safer. The US should stop participating in terrorism against other countries."

She added that the antiwar demonstrations were growing in scope and were fueled by broader issues than Iraq. "A lot of people are waking up," she said. "They are sensing the connections with what the corporations are doing. We need to put the antiwar movement in the larger context of what the Bush administration is trying to do."

José, 30, a biomedical researcher in New Haven, Connecticut, came with a group of Spaniards to protest the Spanish government's support for the war. He carried a sign saying "It's SPAINful to Have You as President, Sr. Aznar. You Say War, Spain Says No!"

"We came out just to say no to this war and to support the Iraqi people who have been suffering a lot with the shock and awe bombing theory," said José. "We have heard that everybody in Spain is out in the streets. It is shameful the role that Spain is playing."

Marta, 41, also came to the US from Spain, spending the last eight years in New York working in advertising. "I'm overwhelmed about how everything is twisted and corrupted and

the way governments use their power," she said. "The protest movement is great, but at the same time there is no representation in politics. Here in the US, the Democrats are not doing anything; and in Spain, the president is not representing the Spanish people."

George, a writer from New York City, marched wearing a stars and stripes suit and a George Bush mask, carrying a sign in front of him saying "War Criminal". He said: "The invasion of Iraq is a war crime. It is a violation of the UN charter that we signed. The fact that the [US] regime is illegal and that Bush wraps himself in the flag only makes it worse. These demonstrations make me very hopeful. They are the most hopeful thing I've seen in my lifetime, and I'm 44 years old."

Ruth, a graduate student in education at New York University, said: "I came here to voice my resistance against this war. This war is a stepping stone to attack other countries that the Bush administration is targeting, like Iran and Syria. The government now through the media is trying to pacify the masses by expecting them to rally around the flag and to support the troops. But the way to support the troops is to bring them home."

"The Latino community is very strong against the war. This war is going to affect our community too because we become targets with the xenophobic immigrant policies which have come into being in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 'war on terror.'"

Stephen, 33, an unemployed toy designer from Manhattan, said: "The war on Iraq is about owning the world. The US wants to put a puppet government in Iraq. If they could, they would do it everywhere. What they care about is the oil. The bombing of Baghdad is heinous. There are world treasures there, and they don't even care."

"If the UN inspectors couldn't find any chemical or biological weapons in Iraq, there can't be much there. It's not that big of a country. We've got biological weapons in the US, in fact we're still doing research on them, and nobody is sanctioning us."

"My parents are from Africa. The US spends less on all of sub-Saharan Africa in one year than they do on Israel."

"Things here are ridiculous. You can walk into a hospital emergency room with your head falling off, and they have to check your bankbook before they will look at you. They violate rights here every day. It is becoming a police state."

"The people in power all have to be removed. I am in favor of socialism but it must be mixed with democracy."

Al, a lawyer, was one of many people at the rally who said that they regularly visit the WSWWS for news and commentary on the Iraq war.

"The writing on the *World Socialist Web Site* is good, thoughtful analysis," he said. "I think the cause of the war is the policy of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Perle to impose war as the primary vehicle of US interests. Their attitude is we are doing it because we can do it. It used to be considered a bad thing to terrorize the world through war. Now they consider it acceptable."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact