

International protests continue against US war in Iraq

27 March 2003

Below are reports sent by correspondents in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Reno, Nevada; and Austin, Texas on protests against the US on Iraq. We urge readers to send in further reports on protests in their areas.

Buenos Aires: Massive march against war and in memory of the “disappeared”

More than 100,000 people poured into the main streets of Buenos Aires on March 24 with two main objectives: to demand justice for the 30,000 “disappeared” and to repudiate the invasion of Iraq. This massive rally to commemorate the twenty-seventh anniversary of the military coup of 1976 was also the first demonstration in which Argentines condemned the criminal US attack on the Iraqi people. “No more impunity, hunger and repression. No to the imperialist war against Iraq,” were the principal slogans of the protest.

It was without a doubt the strongest demonstration in recent years, and was joined by many other mobilizations in different cities of Argentina. In Buenos Aires, the march was headed by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who carried a 40-meter banner covered with the photographs of loved-ones who disappeared under the military dictatorship. All of the political parties of the left were present, as well as unions, student and professional organizations, groupings of the unemployed and the “picketers,” non-governmental organizations, neighborhood associations, representatives of sexual minorities, as well as many workers and independent demonstrators.

As happens on every anniversary of the coup, banners and posters demanded justice for the 30,000 who were detained and disappeared during the repression. But on this occasion, it was not only the murderous military and their political accomplices who were targeted for repudiation, as now there is another very well identified enemy: the government of the United States.

“No more hunger, war and plunder, Yankees out of Iraq!” was the chant heard most frequently during the demonstration, which went on for several hours as the different columns passed by the National Congress toward the historic Plaza de Mayo. There were no speeches by the political parties, but rather a general rally in which a series of slogans were read out in defense of human rights. Among them were the following: “No to the installation of military bases in the country and to any foreign military intervention. No to any collaboration by the Argentine government with the imperialist war in Iraq. No to imperialist aggression against the oppressed peoples. Solidarity with the resistance of the Palestinian people. Solidarity with Venezuela against the coup attempts.”

Keeping with the tone of recent demonstrations, there were also chants against the political class and statements of complete rejection of the coming national elections, set for the end of April. With the aim of encouraging the convening of a constituent assembly of all the popular sectors, many of the parties of the left have proposed not

voting in these elections, which are considered a fraud that will only favor the old and corrupt political class.

Juan, an 80-year-old retiree and member of the Communist Party, said as he marched: “This advance of imperialism in Asia can end up continuing into Latin America. But I believe that it can also create the opportunity for the people of North America to open their eyes to the massacre.”

Among the largest contingents in the march were the MST (Socialist Movement of Workers), HIJOS (Children of the Disappeared), the CTA (Argentine Workers Central), the MTL (Territorial Liberation Movement), PO (Workers Pole), the CCC (Combative Class Current), and the CTERA (Federation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic). During the rally in the Plaza de Mayo, one group of demonstrators burned US flags.

“Peace presence” in Reno, Nevada

Protesters gathered in front of the Bruce R. Thompson Federal Building in downtown Reno, Nevada on Saturday, March 22. The Reno Anti-War Coalition sponsored a 24-hour “peace presence,” starting at noon on March 21.

Afterwards, the group sponsored a “Funeral for the Loss of Human Life and American Ideals”—complete with black caskets—to be followed by a march. The group requested attendees to show support for bringing home US troops. People distributed carnations, and a local florist supplied yellow ribbons for people to wear in support of the troops coming home safely.

Attendees included people of all age groups, several students, some people with canes and/or wheelchairs, and entire families. This WSWS reporting team estimates attendance at 75-100 participants. Protestors held signs up towards traffic on Virginia Street, a major thoroughfare. Some of the signs read, “Today I weep for my country,” “One Earth, indivisible” and “Illegitimate President. Illegitimate war.”

At the organizers’ table, a sign read “Food Not Bombs!” Some people dressed up their dogs with antiwar signs. One read: “Pomeranians for Peace.”

Several drivers honked and signaled their solidarity with the protestors. Other drivers shouted phrases like “Move to Iraq” and “Traitors of the USA.” at protestors. Two men on motorcycles indicated their disapproval, one making a thumbs-down sign, and the other revving his motorcycle’s engine, temporarily drowning out the current speaker.

The loudspeaker system provided little amplification, making it difficult to hear the speakers. Two speakers, Nathan Gove and Chris Good, were scheduled to give a “eulogy” for American lives lost in Iraq. No mention was made of Iraqi lives lost.

Shortly after the speeches began, a lone heckler across the street,

repeatedly shouting “yellow-bellied cowards” until a group of counter-demonstrators arrived with repeated shouts of “USA.” The counter-demonstrators, apparently organized in marching fashion, attempted to drown out the speakers. Signs carried by counter-demonstrators indicated such sentiments as “protests support terrorism” and “support our troops.”

Referring to the two demonstrations, a local NBC news reporter, Emily Wofford, noted “The scene at the federal building was nonviolent, but at times tensions were strained.” According to Ms. Wofford, “These rallies were to take place in two separate locations. Instead, they converged.” She later indicated that only the Anti-War Coalition had a permit to demonstrate at the federal building.

A WWSW reporting team distributed copies of the leaflet “Build an international working class movement against imperialist war.” Organizers distributed copies of the program of scheduled events, nonviolence guidelines, and an appeal to picket Richard Perle’s Washington DC office to demand his resignation.

Stewart, a protester who had also attended the student protest on March 5 at the University of Nevada, Reno, commented that he liked the WWSW leaflet handed out at that protest. He said he subsequently visited the *World Socialist Web Site* and has read and enjoyed several articles.

When asked for his opinion of the Bush administration’s war drive, he replied, “I think that they’ve defied the will of the people of the world, the will of a lot of their citizens, and I think they’re reckless.”

Regarding the international movement, Stewart stated, “I think we’ve seen some amazing stuff happen over the last couple of days in bigger cities, in San Francisco.... I think a lot of Americans have shown that they are against this war and that they’re not going to stop speaking out.... I hope this movement will grow, to expand to confront other wars, and other things that the US is doing in Latin America and the Middle East.”

Len, an older gentleman, spoke of the aftereffects of modern warfare, “It [war] is so devastating that it’s far beyond centuries ago when wars were conducted with swords and spears. Now when warfare is conducted, if they hit a chemical plant, it poisons the waterways of the Earth. The land mines that are left behind, as I understand, that are made in this country for three dollars apiece, stay there long after the war is over. So the issue of the spoils of war is really obviated. You can no longer go out on the land and feel safe.”

On the issue of terrorism, Len continued, “The people who worked for 30 years at Enron and lost everything: were they terrorized? The School of the Americas, is funded by taxpayers for, I understand, \$19 million a year. It has been responsible for displacement or the killing of as many as 2 million people. It’s funded by our taxpayers. We pay for that.”

Len commented on the Bush administration, “In the ’30s there was a man elected in Germany, or got into office by default. We know the present president more or less got into office by default. The economy was going into the tank in Germany in the ’30s. Today is not much different.”

When asked about his assessment of the world-wide antiwar movement, Len stated, “The voice of the people is still powerful. I noticed this morning on TV that in England there [were] 750,000 [people] in a peace demonstration. That’s saying something!”

Police brutality against Austin, Texas protesters

All day today [March 20] nearly 2,000 people expressed their opposition to the war on Iraq by blocking traffic on the main drag near the University of Texas, then beginning at rush hour marched very

slowly with die-ins in the intersections from the Capitol to the main tourist bridge. There were signs that read, “‘Iraq’ is Arabic for ‘Poland’” and “Iraqi lives are sacred too” and “Draft the twins” (a reference to Bush’s daughters) and “Not in my name,” and so on.

Dozens of riot police with no names, no badge numbers (unaccountable and anonymous) waited for night to fall and then began “clearing” the street of protesters. About 20 or so people committed to sit in the street in an act of peaceful civil disobedience and be arrested and the rest of us stayed on the sidewalks as witnesses.

With absolutely no cause a policeman approached those of us on the sidewalk and sprayed us in the face with pepper spray. When we complained that it was uncalled for and that the sidewalk is public property, we were told, “Tonight it’s not” and “We’re about to spray you again if you don’t leave.” We began walking with the police walking behind us and they started to walk faster and hitting us in the back with their batons, screaming, “Move.” We screamed that we *were* walking and they had no cause or right to hit us in the back, but they kept doing it.

As soon we were pushed far enough away so as to block our view of those who were sitting in the street, they began the arrests. The chants of “This is what democracy looks like,” quickly turned into “This is what a police-state looks like.” As we were pushed along off the sidewalk and into an intersection, one of the riot police grabbed a young man (right in front of me) who was chanting peacefully, just like the hundreds of us who remained, and slammed him onto the concrete. At the same time another cop sprayed a woman at close range directly in the eyes with pepper spray. The rest started running toward us to push us far away so as not to see what was happening with the young man who was on the ground.

All of this was completely, utterly, unprovoked. It actually seemed as if they were trying to provoke a riot so that they could become even more violent. It was clear that this group of riot police had a sense that it was accountable to no one and/or that they could do absolutely anything and that they would be protected/absolved at a higher (federal?) level.

I am a composer and human rights activist. I was there with my partner, a vocalist/songwriter and activist. Also with us was a representative of the Palestinian Children’s Welfare Fund. Both of them were also pepper-sprayed in the face. There were many other witnesses to what I wrote above. There were several television cameras, but to our knowledge nothing was shown on the 10 p.m. news. We are meeting tomorrow with Latino community leaders, City Council people and the mayor about these deplorable actions against peaceful people. There are actions planned every day while there is war. Please let the rest of the world know that Austin is overwhelmingly against war and the only reason you don’t hear about it is because it is not being reported.



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