

Protest in Colombo against the US war on Iraq

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More than 1,000 people rallied in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, on March 21 against the US-led invasion of Iraq. The demonstration, which included Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, began at the Colombo Town Hall after Muslim prayers and marched through the city to Maligakanda.

Protestors carried placards and banners and shouted antiwar slogans including: “No blood for war”, “Stop war now!” and “Down with Bush, Blair, Sharon, Bush Blair, United Nations or Useless Nations”. Thousands came onto the streets to express their solidarity with the demonstrators, with some deciding to join the march.

Arranged by the Joint Organisation Against the American Invasion of Iraq, the protest was also attended by the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Sri Lankan Communist Party, Muslim Congress, People’s United Front (MEP) and the Ceylon Trade Union Federation. Most of those who marched, however, were not members of these organisations but came to vent their anger over the US-led war.

At the end of the march, demonstrators were addressed by a number of speakers who simply called for more protests to pressure the government and the president to oppose the war. The United National Front (UNF) government has already declared its backing for the US invasion of Iraq and President Chandrika Kumaratunga has remained silent.

The most demagogic speech was delivered by Wimal Weerawansa, propaganda secretary to the Sinhala chauvinist JVP. He denounced the US for its “imperialist war” then promptly promoted the illusion that America’s great power rivals, France and Germany, offered an alternative. He concluded with a chant lauding the Baghdad dictatorship: “Victory to the heroism of Saddam Hussein, Victory to the power of

determination of Saddam Hussein”.

The common thread throughout Weerawansa’s entire speech was the JVP’s hostility to an independent movement of the working class, fighting for its own historic interests both against imperialism and bourgeois nationalists like Hussein.

Socialist Equality Party members distributed several hundreds of copies of the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board statements opposing the war and interviewed some of the protestors.

M. A. F. Hameed, a 47-year-old dockworker, told the WSWs: “This war is very unjust. George Bush can keep any kind of weapon but other countries are not allowed to. In reality it is not a question of weapons, it is the question of oil.”

Jeffrey, 45, said: “The human rights people and the UN are keeping quiet now. If they cannot get a decision, the UN should be dissolved. I will read the WSWs statement. I want to join the fight against imperialism.”

Samanthi, a 20-year-old student from the University of Sri Jayawardenapura, declared that the US was acting as a “world policeman” and threatening to “conquer any country that is not in line with it”.

“By capturing oil resources, America is attempting to rebuild their shambling economy,” he said. “If Bush wants to destroy weapons of mass destruction why he is not turning to North Korea or Israel? Why is the US not destroying its own weapons?”

M. L. M. Ahiyar, a retired engineer, said: “None of the UN resolutions passed against Israel over the last decades have been implemented because the US used its veto. Israel invaded Palestinian areas and massacred women and children. What did UK and US do against these crimes?”

Shan Mohammad commented: “Israel’s Sharon—the

closest companion of US—has been charged with war crimes in Belgium. What punishment did America give to him?” Commenting on the reasons for the war, he said: “The Bush administration is attempting to avoid the crisis of the American economy. They want to grab the resources of Iraq and the entire world over the dead bodies of oppressed masses. They need to protect the system of social inequality.”



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