

# Toronto antiwar march exceeds organizers' expectations

Our correspondents

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What began at noon as an antiwar rally by several thousand people became a march by up to 25,000 through Toronto on Saturday. Young people, particularly university and college students, immigrant families and working people, young and old, joined the march as it proceeded through downtown streets, underscoring the broad sentiment against the impending invasion.

The turnout surprised the organizers, the Coalition to Stop the War, whose spokesman Ritch Whyman told the *Toronto Star* there had not been as much planning for the protest as there was for the February 15 demonstration, in which an estimated 80,000 people participated. Little advertising and campaigning was done and the rally's stage and loudspeaking system were designed to cater to only a small crowd.

The line-up of speakers was also low-key, featuring local student, trade union, church and community organizations. Noticeably absent was the New Democratic Party, whose leader Jack Layton addressed the previous demonstration.

After commencing outside the US Consulate, the march ended at the Moss Park Armoury, a military training facility in the heart of Toronto. Protesters encircled the Armoury and demanded that the armed forces vacate the premises and hand it over to the city for use as a badly needed homeless shelter.

Among many participants, a more militant mood could be felt, with the greatest cheers and applause erupting at the end of the rally when the chairman spoke of organizing larger demonstrations, civil disobedience and a general strike against the war.

A wide array of placards and banners denounced the Bush administration and the Chrétien government, which has authorized Canadian military personnel to join the attack on Iraq. Several signs drew attention to

the long record of US military interventions against civilian populations. "Remember the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Grenada, Desert Storm, Afghanistan," one stated. "Rich man's war, poor man's blood," another declared.

Handwritten slogans also drew connections between the war and the assault on social programs and democratic rights at home. Among them were: "Oppose attacks on civil liberties," "No to criminalization of dissent" and "Homes not bombs."

Compared to previous antiwar marches, a heavy police presence was noticeable, with helmeted mounted police and riot squad units on hand at both the Consulate and the Armoury.

Hundreds of copies of the WSWWS statement, "The tasks facing the antiwar movement," [<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/feb2003/demo-f12.shtml>] were distributed.

Students who spoke to the WSWWS revealed considerable reflection on the root causes of the war and how to combat it. They spoke of the fact that the world was on the brink of a barbaric conflict despite antiwar protests by tens of millions of people around the globe.

Sammy, a York University student, said the Bush administration was going to war in part to settle an old score against Saddam Hussein, following the failure of George Bush senior to overturn the Iraqi regime.

But the drive to war was deeper than that, Sammy said. "The US wants global hegemony. It is also in recession after September 11 and the oil companies and automakers want cheap oil. They are among the biggest influences on the White House. The whole US economy relies on oil."

Asked why other governments, notably France and Germany, were opposing the Bush administration, he

said: “Everybody’s afraid, now that the US is the one superpower. Who will be next for regime change? The Allies may be the next targets.

“It is becoming the US versus all the other first world countries,” Sammy said. “They may not be afraid of being invaded yet, but they have a lot of investments at stake. They have their own agendas, to do with oil and contracts in Iraq.”

Sammy stated that demonstrations by themselves would not stop the war, but thought that putting pressure on other governments to oppose US policy might eventually succeed. He was initially skeptical of the prospects of advancing a socialist alternative:

“Socialism is seen by so many people as a dying cause after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is a cause that so many people have sacrificed for. Although, it is encouraging to see many more people in recent years protesting against global capitalism.”

A group of school and family friends stopped to speak to the WSWS, including Ruhee, a York University student. “We are here to show our support for the world antiwar movement,” she said. “We don’t agree with the politicians, and our voices should count.

“The US government sees everything as an oil pipeline. Bush is also trying to cover up the domestic issues, such as corporate corruption, recession, an illegitimate presidency and the decay of health care, education and social services. The American political system is breaking down.

“This war is completely illegitimate and immoral. We will use civil disobedience if need be to show our representatives what we want. It is a class struggle. The economic system perpetuates an elite. This war is an imperial war for the corporations and politicians to gain more profit. It may be a long struggle, but people’s everyday resistance will eventually culminate and the governments will face an uprising.”



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