

Thousands of students join Toronto antiwar rally

A correspondent
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Thousands of students from the city's universities and schools marched through downtown Toronto to join a rally outside the US Consulate Thursday evening, amid news of a second round of US bombing in Baghdad. Despite constant rain, the crowd swelled to nearly 10,000, with people determined to express their outrage at the illegal onslaught launched by the Bush and Blair governments.

Some banners and chants were directed against the Chrétien government for participating in the attack on Iraq via the "back door" by sending warships and troops to the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan to support the Bush administration's "war on terrorism."

Among the marchers who spoke to the WSWS were three students from the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD), where students and teachers decided to devote part of the day's classes to discussing the US-led invasion of Iraq. The three friends said they were determined to register their opposition to the war, rather than just "sit around" and allow it to happen.

As often happens in Toronto, the trio had diverse backgrounds—the Philippines, Rumania and Iraq. Mildred, whose family is from the Philippines, denounced President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for joining the Bush administration's so-called "coalition of the willing."

Mildred declared that Washington had bullied the Philippines government, just as it had dominated every administration in Manila for more than a century. "No Philippines government has ever stood up against the US."

Rima, originally from Iraq, ridiculed the notion that the Bush administration wanted to liberate the Iraqi people. "Bush wants to take over Iraq, then the Palestinians, then all Arabic people. The US military will destroy the population in Iraq, where world

civilization started. So many Iraqis were killed in the first Gulf War, and now the rest will be killed.

"It's all about oil and profits. The US is the strongest country in the world and it wants power. The US government gave Saddam Hussein chemical weapons in the first place and now it claims to want to destroy them, without even having proof that any still exist."

Simina, whose family is Rumanian, denounced the Bush administration for going to war after failing to get UN approval. "They are violating the UN Charter and they have no authority for this war."

Also at the rally was Karl, a young bar worker from Birmingham, Britain. Asked why he was demonstrating, he said: "I would be doing the same thing if I were back home. I am against killing innocent people."

He condemned Bush for seeking oil and power, but reserved his most bitter comments for Prime Minister Tony Blair. "I have never liked him. He is groveling to Bush because he doesn't want to offend Washington. He thinks they might target him next."

One of the speakers at the rally was Canadian Broadcasting Corporation personality Jian Ghomeshi, a musician and artist who hosts music and entertainment programs for young people. To loud cheers, Ghomeshi said he had found that artists and entertainers were universally against the war. He had tried to locate pro-war artists to provide balance for a program he had produced, but could not find any.

Ghomeshi also spoke as an Iranian-Canadian, exposing the Bush administration's claims to be aiming to create democracy in Iraq. "Iranians know what US democracy looks like," he said, recounting the US and British-backed coup that overthrew the elected Mossadegh government in 1953 and propped up the Shah of Iran.

After the Shah was finally toppled in 1979, Ghomeshi explained, the US armed Saddam Hussein with chemical and other weapons to fight Iran. “Now Iraq and Iran have been named as the ‘axis of evil,’ along with North Korea.”

Later, the rally marched through city streets to Nathan Phillips Square, where a confrontation with police broke out after officers attempted to arrest a young woman.

Rallies were held in cities and towns across Canada, starting in Vancouver on Wednesday evening, where several thousand people protested outside the US Consulate as soon as news was broadcast of the first bomb strikes on Baghdad.

Longshoremen in Saint John blackbanned military goods destined for Iraq. Patrick Riley, spokesman for International Longshoremen's Association Local 273 said: “We don't want to handle any military cargo that is headed for that war. We believe it is an immoral war.”



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