

Thousands of San Francisco antiwar protesters march in rainstorm

A WSWWS reporting team
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Despite pouring rain, over 5,000 demonstrators assembled in San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza for a two-and-a-half-mile march to Mission Dolores Park. The crowd was far smaller than the hundreds of thousands who assembled before the war, and the demonstrators appeared much more somber as well.

While the weather played a role, the change appeared more the result of the recognition that the massive protests had not stopped the US military from massacring tens of thousands of Iraqis. At the same time, the willingness of protesters to stand in the freezing rain for hours on end to make themselves heard showed that the antiwar sentiment is far from dissipated.

By about 11:15 a.m. the crowd began to grow. There was a group called Progressive Junta with a small statue of George W. Bush that they were preparing to pull down with ropes in a bit of street theatre mocking the staged felling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. The wind picked up and threatened to blow over many of the kiosks set up by the various protest groups, and people pitched in to hold the tent poles while they roped them to the trees in the plaza.

Among the groups present were: International ANSWER, Direct Action Against the War, South Asians Against the War and Filipino Americans Against the War, among others.

At about 11:30 the skies darkened and the continuous rain started to come down with a vengeance, accompanied by thunder, lightning and even hail. A large number of people took shelter in the doorways of buildings surrounding Civic Center Plaza, out of fear of being struck by lightning. Under the shelter of the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, a group called Musicians for Peace played music, and there was a Filipino group with drummers and microphones, chanting against war.

Then the march began to Dolores Park, leading through a district of housing projects and a neighborhood of the working poor. Many people on the street joined in. The marchers proceeded, chanting, "Money for Schools, Not for War" and "US Out of the Middle East." People in cars at the intersections honked their horns and many gave the peace sign.

When the march reached Dolores Park, the protesters exploded from the confines of the streets into the park. People were waiting who had gone directly to the park, and the protest now numbered several thousand.

The principal demand was to end the occupation of Iraq immediately. Both among the marchers and the speakers, pacifism and nationalism seemed to dominate. Although they clearly labeled the US foreign policy as imperialist, none of the speakers attempted to articulate the connection between the war and attacks on the working class domestically.

A particularly moving moment occurred when greetings were read to the demonstration from the family of Rachel Corrie, the 23-year-old peace activist from Olympia, Washington murdered last month by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza. Mention was also made of Thomas Hurndall, the 21-year-old British man shot by Israeli troops and declared brain dead just one day before the demonstration, and a third activist, Bryan Avery, 24, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, whom Israelis shot in the face earlier this month.

Although the speakers seemed intent on avoiding the subject, there was widespread disgust among the demonstrators for the role of Nancy Pelosi, the local congressperson who has become the leader of the Democrats in the House of Representatives. Pelosi supported the resolution honoring President Bush for initiating the war against Iraq, and voted to approve \$79 billion to pay for its initial cost. After the

demonstration, a smaller protest was staged outside the Fremont Hotel on Nob Hill, where Pelosi was receiving the “Alan Cranston Peace Award,” named after the former California senator.

Supporters of the WSWS distributed about 1,000 copies of the statement “The way forward in the struggle against imperialist war,” which was warmly received by many in the crowd.



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