

Tens of thousands march in Washington against Iraq slaughter

A WSWS reporting team
14 April 2003

A crowd estimated at 30,000 marched through the streets of Washington April 12 to condemn the slaughter of Iraqis by the US military and oppose the Bush administration's plans for protracted occupation of that country and future wars elsewhere.

The demonstration began with a rally in Freedom Plaza followed by a march that headed up Pennsylvania Ave and wound its way through the city to pass near the White House and past several buildings housing headquarters of institutions connected to the war.

Many of the demonstrators brought their own hand-lettered signs. Some carried blown-up photographs of Iraqi children and other civilians killed and horribly wounded by US bombs and shells. "The Iraqis in the hospitals and morgues aren't cheering," read one sign.

A number of protest signs denounced the US intervention as a war crime. "Bush, the Hague awaits you," said one. "I hope they all hang," read another.

Others called attention to the administration's plans for further military aggression. Signs saying "Stop the war in Iraq," were amended to read "Stop the war in Iran" or "Syria."

As they passed the FBI headquarters and the Justice Department building on Pennsylvania Ave, marchers chanted slogans denouncing the attacks on basic democratic rights carried out by the Bush administration under the pretext of a "war on terrorism."

The march also passed the headquarters of Halliburton Co., the energy conglomerate that was headed by Vice President Cheney. Halliburton, which still pays Cheney \$1 million annually in deferred compensation, has received the first lucrative "reconstruction" contracts in Iraq. "Halliburton, war criminals," the protesters shouted.

Protesters also marched past the offices of the *Washington Post* and Fox News, booing and denouncing the media's support for the war.

The demonstrators were met with an overwhelming police presence, with cops from the US Park Police, the District of Columbia Police, the Metropolitan Police, Secret Service, and FBI agents, as well as contingents brought in from suburban Virginia and Maryland. A police helicopter hovered overhead throughout the march.

The march was kept more than a block away from the White House, which appeared prepared for a siege. The area was surrounded by a seven-foot-high fence made of two layers of steel mesh. Behind this barrier stood helmeted paramilitary police carrying riot shields and wearing body armor.

Along the route of the march, motorcycle cops continuously harassed the demonstrators, honking their horns and riding close into the line of the march.

At several points, cops attacked marchers with batons. One group of elderly women who came to the protest with a peace coalition from Orange County, New York were shoved to the ground by policemen who charged into the marchers with their clubs. One woman required medical treatment. "They were attacked for nothing," said one of the organizers of the group, who was outraged over the brutality. "All these women were doing was walking down the street with signs. Will the media even bother to report this?"

Three people were arrested, two of them charged with assaulting a police officer. At least four high school students were also reported injured by police, some with head injuries from baton attacks and, in one case, injuries suffered from being run over with a motorcycle.

While those present for the march expressed outrage over the killing in Iraq, there was nothing from the speakers' platform to orient those seeking to carry forward this struggle outside of exhortations to continue protesting.

Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark was brought forward to give the principal political speech at the rally. While condemning the Bush administration for war crimes, and demanding that government officials be held accountable for the murder of civilians, Clark's only recommendation to the demonstrators was, "We have to proceed to impeachment."

This proposal is founded on an orientation to the Democratic Party, which is not just Clark's, but that of the principal organizers of the protest in the International ANSWER coalition. The perspective of pressuring the Democrats to charge, try and convict Bush is a political deception. The party's Congressional leadership shares the administration's guilt, having given the administration all the support it has needed to prosecute both war abroad and attacks on basic rights at home.

Most of those in the crowd appeared to pay little attention to the speeches from the platform, but had much to say about their own views on the war and the political situation.

Ron from Virginia, who edits an environmental magazine on toxic poisons, said he is a regular reader of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The Bush administration, he said, “is doing today what the leaders of Japan and Germany were charged with after World War II. They have launched a war of aggression against a country that did not attack us.”

“The major reason is oil, not just in Iraq but throughout the whole region. They will give US companies billions in contracts to rebuild the Iraqi oil industry and to pay for it with their oil. They will use Iraq as a military base for invasions of Iran, Saudi Arabia or wherever else they want to go.

“What I like to see is that people are coming out and looking for answers. They want to know why we are at war, what it will mean and what is happening to people. People are looking for alternative views and I think they are starting to find them. More and more people will find those answers. The people at the wsws.org are doing an excellent job of getting out the truth.”

Linda, who traveled up from Durham, North Carolina, participated in the demonstration with a friend from Maryland. “We don’t like this war,” she said. “The administration has embarked upon a colonial war which is very wrong and opposed to our democratic ideals.

“According to Bush, all he has to do is say that a government is a dictatorship or that they have weapons of mass destruction and he can launch a war on his own. He has the weapons, and nobody can stop him.

“Tremendous profits are going to be made by Bush and his cronies in arms and oil and it is wrong.”

“Nobody ever asked me if I am for this war, and nobody I know is for it,” said Veronica Saunders, an elderly woman from Washington, DC. She complained that the opinion polls are manipulated by a media that is promoting the war. “They can phrase any question in such a way to get the answer that they want,” she said.

“There has never been a war that has got next to me like this war,” she added. “I see out here all the problems that we have: young men who don’t have jobs, the schools falling apart and not enough teachers, drugs in the communities. We need so much more that could be done here, but Bush is at war to try and take our minds off these problems.

“And what is going to happen to those young people that are in the war; what is this going to do to their minds when they come back, what is this teaching them?”

Johnny McRavion, a Vietnam veteran who attended the march, said: “I don’t want to see what I saw in Vietnam happening here. We dropped bombs like napalm and white phosphorous in Vietnam. A white phosphorous bomb would explode and drop sharp metal that would cut people, and the white phosphorous would fall to the ground and burn right into

it and burn anything it fell on, flesh and all. The napalm bombs would produce a ball of fire, they would burn everything for 100 yards. It would burn the skin off of children.

“But I am seeing on the TV that women and children and old people are being killed and it shouldn’t be. The bombs they are dropping now are even worse. I don’t want to see Iraqi children being killed. I don’t want to see any more killing; everybody has the right to life.”

Jenny, age 49, an American expatriate now living in Barcelona, Spain, where she and her husband teach English and French, said that she had joined several of the anti-war demonstrations in Spain.

“What is going on in Iraq is unmentionable,” she said. “The handful of people who run the country as an appointed government, not as an elected government, are full of double standards. They never had any intention of *not* waging this war on Iraq. This is part of a series of things the United States wants to do in the Middle East. I don’t know who will be next, Syria or Iran.

“One good thing is that it has mobilized millions of people around the world. People everywhere are sick and tired of being lied to by their governments. We don’t believe any of the reasons they give, whether it’s regime change or weapons of mass destruction.

“It worries me a little bit that the momentum of the anti-war protests will die, but we have to keep getting out there. We should also bring in the national issues—Bush is trying to create an empire, but he is screwing the country on education and health care.

John, age 28, who works loading trucks, came down to the demonstration from Boston. He said he had recently begun reading the *World Socialist Web Site*. “All the money being spent on cluster bombs is stripping people of what they once had,” he said. “The ones on top feel they can get away with it because of the number of people who are complacent. The only way they can be stopped is by getting online and finding out what we can do.

“These imperialists don’t understand the implications of their actions,” John added. “It’s like poking at a hornet’s nest. They are so far removed from the actual people that they don’t know what is going on. They are underestimating the power of the people and the technology of the Internet. I don’t know just how this will go forward—I’m still new at it—but I totally agree that a power structure has to be developed to replace the one we have now.”



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact