

New York City: Relatives of 9/11 victims march in opposition to US war policies

A WSWS reporting team
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Several dozen family members of people killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks led about 2,000 supporters Wednesday evening in a candlelight procession down lower Broadway from Union Square to the site where the World Trade Center once stood. There they formed a vast ring around the site that they described as a “Circle of Hope” and held an hour-long silent vigil.

The march and vigil were organized by the group September 11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows as an alternative to Thursday’s official commemorations, which were dominated by Republican politicians.

President Bush stayed away from the Thursday ceremony, according to some reports out of White House concerns that his presence could provoke protests. While Vice President Richard Cheney was tapped as a stand-in, he also withdrew from the main event at Ground Zero, ostensibly because the massive security operation that is conducted wherever he goes would have interfered with family members filing down into the World Trade Center site.

Wednesday’s vigil was called both to remember those who died in the attacks and to oppose US military action. While political banners and signs were discouraged, it was clear that the participants came because they opposed US war policies in general and the occupation of Iraq in particular.

The demonstration—organized by those who lost husbands or wives, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters in the September 11 attacks—represented a repudiation of the lies of the Bush administration that invading first Afghanistan and then Iraq was justified by the September 11 attacks.

The dozens of family members who marched on Wednesday represent only the tip of the iceberg in relation to the anger that has been building up among thousands of victims’ relatives. Many see all too clearly that their grief is being manipulated for political and financial gain, while the Bush administration systematically stonewalls any attempt to uncover information about the attacks and who was responsible for allowing them to take place.

Notably, as of late August, some 1,700 families of those eligible for the federal Victims Compensation Fund have failed to sign up. The fund, set up by Congress just weeks after the hijackings, was designed to discourage relatives from suing,

offering a guaranteed payment out of taxpayers’ funds in return for waiving legal action. Payments have ranged from a minimum of \$250,000 to a maximum of \$6.1 million, with average payments of \$1.6 million.

Government officials have expressed growing concern about the failure of so many surviving family members to register. In spite of the uncertainties of monetary recovery from legal action, a number of relatives have decided to sue with the aim of using the courts as an instrument for obtaining the answers that the Bush administration has refused to provide about what happened on September 11 and in the months leading up to it.

Alice Hogle, who lost her son on United Airlines Flight 93, told the *Wall Street Journal* recently, “People say the fund is quick and easy and safe—well, I don’t want that. I want the truth ... and let the chips fall where they may.”

Monica Gabrielle, 51, whose husband Richard died in the collapse of the World Trade Center, told the *New York Times* that she knows she might lose in court, but she was going to sue anyway, adding, “For me, it was always about accountability and responsibility. It’s not about money. It’s about finding answers.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with some of the family members and others who marched to the World Trade Center Wednesday.

John Leinung, 49, works as a trainer for the Metro North commuter railroad. He lost his stepson in the World Trade Center attacks. Paul Battaglia, only 22 at the time, was a safety consultant for Marsh & McLennan, working on the 100th floor of the North Tower when it was hit.

John told the WSWS: “I am concerned that the administration has rolled over Afghanistan and then abandoned it. I never saw the case for war against Iraq either. They never demonstrated any connection between the Iraqi government and Al Qaeda.”

Asked about the investigations into the events of 9/11, John said, “I’m suspicious because the government feels it necessary to keep so much secret. The Saudis have been playing both ends against the middle—militant extremists and the oil companies. The large corporate interests and oil companies don’t want us to see the connections they have in Saudi Arabia. They are making a lot of money with these people.”

The vigil included a sizable contingent from New York

City's Colombian immigrant community. Twenty-seven Colombians, mostly low-paid restaurant workers, security guards and delivery personnel, were killed at the World Trade Center.

Sonia Morron is the widow of Jorge Luis Morron Garcia, who was 38 years old when he lost his life in the collapse of the Twin Towers.

"He was going to become a citizen on September 17, 2001 and he never lived to see that happen," she said of her husband. "I know that Jorge would be very upset to see the war in Iraq, especially being done in his name. He would be against it—he was very much a pacifist. I know that he would be as against Bush as I am.

"The war in Iraq is not right. More innocent lives have been taken than the lives lost here, not only the American soldiers, but all of those Iraqi people. I don't know what Saddam Hussein did against us. The only purpose I can see for this war is oil. They don't even talk about Osama bin Laden any more and he was the one responsible for this.

"The process of recovering from this is unbelievable. It is so hard I can't even describe it," Sonia said. "I was pregnant at the time of the attack and I lost my baby after my husband was killed."

The WWSWS also spoke with Triane, a Colombian immigrant who came with her family from Queens to participate in the commemoration at Union Square and the World Trade Center site. Her husband is a printer and she is a housewife.

"We are here to support the community and the families of those who died at the World Trade Center. There were 27 Colombians who died that day and here today they have 27 *silleteros* (people who carry saddles containing flowers on their shoulders to honor the dead).

"I saw Bush's speech the other night and how many times he mentioned September 11. I think that the war is completely out of hand. I didn't think that there was evidence enough to go to war in the first place and I definitely don't think so now. There is so much information that is being kept from us by the government and the news media.

"I try to get news from as many places as I can to try and understand what is going on. For example, I just heard on the radio how a bunch of these large companies that are friendly with Bush and Cheney have a huge stake in the contracts for rebuilding Iraq. A lot of these people are getting extremely rich from this war and I find that terrible.

"The hatred against this country is fomenting more and more all of the time because of what our government is doing. There is so much anti-Americanism all over. We were just in Colombia and we were afraid to wear anything that had English words on it or anything with an American flag because we

didn't know what might happen to us, since the world is turning so much against the actions of the US."

Jack Hallock, 44, lost his cousin Ryan Kohart, then 26, who worked for bond broker Cantor Fitzgerald. Asked how things have changed in the two years since the World Trade Center attacks, he said: "It's a disaster. Foreign policy is a disaster. The domestic platform is a disaster. The government is using 9/11 to perpetuate war abroad and economic war at home.

"There's no evidence connecting Iraq to 9/11. There's about as much evidence of that as there is that Iraq was developing nuclear arms, or that they had thousands of tons of weapons of mass destruction. Where do you hide thousands of tons?

"The investigation into the Saudi Arabian connection has been thwarted by the Bush administration. Considering that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudis, it's a little strange."

The WWSWS asked Jack about the evidence recently presented by prominent British Labour Party insider Michael Meacher that the US security apparatus may have been ordered to "stand down" and let the terrorist attacks go ahead, in order to provide a suitable pretext to launch long-planned invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Jack responded, "All I know is there has never been a president who needed a war more, nor a president who benefited more."

Andrew Rice, 30, recently moved from New York to Oklahoma City. He lost his older brother David, 31 at the time, who had worked for the investment banking firm Sandler O'Neill.

Asked about Bush's attempts to implicate Iraq in the September 11 attacks, Andrew said: "There's never been any intelligence proof of that. Anybody who's researched it knows that Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime were sworn enemies. Specifically, as to any threat [from Iraq] to citizens here, that was built up in order to justify the war. Polls showed that the American people would not support a war for the liberation of the Iraqi people, but only if they felt there was a threat [to them]."

Andrew said he believed attitudes were changing throughout the country: "You've got military families who supported the war now coming out and demanding that the troops come home."



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