

Families of soldiers condemn Bush's war

A reporting team
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The October 25 demonstration in Washington was particularly noteworthy for the participation of a number of families that have been directly affected by the deployment of their kinsmen in Iraq.

Families of US troops stationed in Iraq carried signs bearing photographs of their sons, brothers and other relatives together with slogans such as "Support our troops, Stop the abuse, Bring them home now!," "Our son is a Marine, Stop Bush's war for oil and empire!" and "Don't make my brother die because of Bush's lies!"

The stormiest applause at the rally was reserved for Fernando Suarez del Solar, whose 20-year-old son, Jesus Alberto, was among the first US Marines killed in the invasion, the victim of an unexploded US cluster bomb.

"I am here not only in the name of my son, Jesus, but in the names of almost 350 kids who have died in this illegal war," he told the crowd. "We don't need any more deaths."

"President Bush, who is wrongly called president, lied to the American people and to the entire world about this war," he added. "He lied about the weapons of mass destruction. The only weapons of mass destruction that exist are the lack of decent schools for American children. We need to make Mr. Bush understand that he is not the owner of the lives of our children. He's not the owner of America."

In an interview before his speech, Fernando Suarez told the WSWs that he brought his family to the US from Mexico in 1997. His son Jesus, he said, had wanted to be a US Marine from the time he was 14.

"He had this idea that he would join the Marines and get into an elite unit to fight against narcotics," he said. "He never imagined that he was going to be sent into a war in Iraq."

Jesus was killed on March 27. Mr. Suarez told the WSWs: "On the 28th they came to visit us. He had stepped on a US bomb that they hadn't warned them about. They said he was killed by 'friendly fire,' which was a way of not saying that he died because of American stupidity."

Mr. Suarez said he had spoken frequently to friends and co-workers against the war before it began. His son, he said, was also convinced that the war was unnecessary.

After his son's death, he was angered by the refusal of the US military to pay the full cost of the funeral. "We wanted him buried in a civilian cemetery according to our religion, not in a military one," he said. "My wife could not understand how they could do this. 'Children don't have a price,' she said."

Also at the rally were Fred and Marianne D'Amato from Mt. Pocono, Pa. Their son, Chris, 23, has been in Iraq with the Army Reserves since last Easter Sunday.

"He's glad that we're doing this," said Marianne, who said her son decided to join the reserves after a recruiter told him it would pay his expenses at Pennsylvania State University, where he is enrolled. "At first they told him he would be home in October, and that's what kept him going," she said. "He was counting the days, thinking that he would take a month off—go anywhere that there isn't sand—and then go back to school. But once they heard that all of them would have to stay on the ground in Iraq for a whole year, it put them all down."

The couple provoked a controversy in their small east Pennsylvania town by planting a sign in their yard reading, "Support our troops, Impeach Bush." The town's Republican officials sent them a notice that they would be fined \$500 a day over a supposed zoning violation if they did not remove the sign. Once the action was reported in the local newspaper, however, it provoked a storm of protest, with readers writing in to denounce the town's action as a blatant violation of their right to free speech. In the end, the town authorities backed down and the sign stayed up.

"We asked our son if he wanted us to stop, and he said no," Marianne said. "We sent him some articles from the local paper and he passed them around to the other soldiers. He told us they got a kick out of it. They told him that at least somebody over there was trying to fight for them."

Fred, a Vietnam veteran, said that he had opposed the

war on Iraq from the outset. “It’s a ridiculous war that we never should have gotten into,” he said. “They should have given more time to look for the weapons of mass destruction, of which there never were any—and won’t be, unless the CIA plants them there.”

The Allwein family came to the demonstration from Lebanon, Pa., to protest the deployment of their 22-year-old son, Anthony. Mrs. Allwein spoke to the WWS: “Our son has been in Iraq for about a month. I think he shouldn’t be there, nor should anyone else.

“There are no weapons of mass destruction. The Iraqi people don’t want us there. It’s a forced ‘democracy,’ which is an oxymoron. Everyone should come home and the US should hand everything over to the UN. I don’t approve of the Bush administration’s policy at all. It’s all based on lies and innuendoes. I have no idea how my son is doing. All I’ve received from him is one two-minute phone call.”

Chris Allwein, Anthony’s older brother, came from Philadelphia to the rally. “Before he went to Iraq he was stationed in Germany,” Chris said. “He told us that the morale was very low. The soldiers thought there was no justification for the war and that they were being sent to Iraq to protect the wealth of Halliburton, George Bush and Cheney.

“Anthony enlisted last November because he wanted to get help finishing school. A lot of young people do that because of the high cost of college. The military says they will give you \$50,000 for your education. As the buildup for war occurred, we tried to convince my brother not to join.

“He wouldn’t listen. He downplayed his chances of being sent to war. He said he only had three semesters to finish school and they were going to pay for it. Now he’s in Iraq, guarding the airport outside of Baghdad.

“Like a lot of the other guys, all we heard from the government and the media was that we were going to free the Iraqis from Saddam Hussein and his torture centers and acid baths. They showed us the images of his statue being torn down and said the soldiers would be welcomed as heroes.

“Now we are scared for his life. The government never releases the names of those being killed. My brother has tried to call home several times, but the phone lines are constantly down. Bush won’t let them show pictures of the returning dead on the news. He didn’t have any problems sending them over there, but he doesn’t even bother to attend their funerals.

“My brother and the rest of the soldiers he was stationed

with in Germany hate Bush. It’s a disgrace that we were all lied to about the real cause of this war. The Republicans impeached President Clinton for oral sex, but Bush has been allowed to lie and play with people’s lives.

“I can see why the people in the Middle East are angry with us over the policies of the US. We have meddled in their affairs for years, backed people like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, and subjected Iraq to wars and sanctions.”

Lisa and Bob told the WWS they had come to the rally out of concern for a younger relative. Lisa said, “My cousin’s son is 20 years old and has just been deployed. He was in the National Guard for two years. He was called up at the beginning of October and he’s in Fort Bragg now. My feelings about the policies of this administration are here on this presidential report card that my husband is holding. All ‘F’s’.”

Her husband, Bob, continued: “As a Vietnam veteran, I was in the dark. I never knew that the National Guard was an international guard to be sent to war or to police another country. I always thought they were supposed to help at home with things like disaster relief.

“Even in Vietnam we knew when we were coming home. A Navy man had 6-8 months. An Army man had a year. Everyone had calendars to mark off each day that we made it. So we’d know when we were going home. Those men and women don’t know when they are coming home. I’m waiting to hear about an indefinite extension for duty in Iraq. We are starting to hear the low morale stories of the troops coming out of Iraq.

“Bush needs to come clean about all the lies of his administration and ask for help, but I don’t think that will happen. I don’t think that we as Americans can go into another country and establish what we think is right and dictate what type of government they will have. Democracy installed by force is not a democracy. There have been no elections in Iraq. Everyone has been hand-picked and installed and things have been dictated by the US.”



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