

Over 100,000 in New York City march against Iraq occupation

A WSWS reporting team
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A massive stream of protesters estimated at over 100,000 paraded through New York City Saturday to demand the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and protest the Bush administration's global policy of US militarism. The march, which followed a 34-block rectangle, virtually encircled the center of Manhattan, with the last marchers stepping off only shortly before the front of the march arrived back at its starting point on Madison Avenue and 24th Street.

Many carried hand-lettered signs and banners bearing slogans that included "Stop mad cowboy disease," "Fund cities, not war," and, echoing the chants of demonstrators in Spain: "Your wars, our dead." One sign read, "Aznar, Blair, Bush—1 down, 2 to go." On another was written "Look, I found the Weapons of Mass Destruction!" above large cutout photos of Cheney, Bush, Powell and Rumsfeld.

Reflecting the heavily immigrant character of the city, there were numerous contingents raising banners protesting US policy in their countries of birth. These included groups of Palestinians and a large delegation of Haitian immigrants carrying Haitian flags and signs denouncing the US-organized coup d'état in their homeland.

Also marching were relatives of US soldiers, many of whom bitterly protested that their loved-ones had been sent into harm's way based upon the lies of the Bush administration.

Sue Niederer, who came to the rally from her home in Pennington, New Jersey, marched carrying a sign that read "You killed my son." The poster bore photographs of Seth Dvorin, 24, an Army Second Lt. with the 101st Airborne Division, who was killed February 3 trying to dismantle a roadside bomb south of Baghdad.

"My son was just killed last month in Iraq," she said before the march began. "I want to know why our troops are being sent over there untrained, ill-equipped; and why no one is caring enough to report that. I also want to know why our families of the deceased are not being told the truth about how our relatives perished over there.... Our government continues to hide how many are being hurt, maimed and dead."

She joined the rally together with members of a group called "Military Families Speak Out," many of whom also carried signs with pictures of relatives deployed as part of the US occupation.

Addressing the rally from the speakers' platform was Fernando Suarez del Solar, whose son Jesus was one of the first US Marines killed in the invasion of Iraq. "Bush lied, and who died?" he shouted to the rally. "My son Jesus, my beautiful Aztec warrior.

Bush lied, and who died? More than 570 beautiful American boys. We need to stop this today."

Also speaking from the platform was Adele Welty, whose son Timmy, a New York City firefighter, was lost at the World Trade Center. She came to the rally with other relatives of people who were killed in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, who denounced the Bush administration's exploitation of the tragedy in New York City as a pretext for the unprovoked war in Iraq.

The organizers of the rally and the principal speakers, however, provided nothing in the way of a perspective for fighting against the occupation and worldwide US militarism outside of a celebration of protest and exhortations to "keep marching." That the war itself was launched in the immediate aftermath of the largest protests the world had ever seen was not mentioned by any of the speakers.

A number of Democratic politicians were brought onto the platform, including New York City Council members Charles Barron and Bill Perkins. Barron led the crowd in a chant of "Bush must go!" There was no mention of the fact that the Democratic presidential nominee, John Kerry, has repeatedly expressed his determination to continue the US occupation in Iraq and even advocated the expansion of US active-duty army forces by another 40,000 troops.

Among the main speakers was Ohio Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who is continuing his campaign for the party's presidential nomination, despite having received 5 percent or less of the vote in all but a handful of the primaries.

"I'm in this race all the way to the convention to give a voice to those who feel they don't want to exchange a Republican version of the war in Iraq for a Democratic version of the same," he told reporters before the march began.

While Kucinich's remarks to the crowd were limited to the general praise of protest and invocation of peace and solidarity, his presence had an unmistakable purpose: to portray the Democratic Party as the vehicle for carrying forward the struggle against war.

Among those who marched there was represented a wide range of political opinion on the coming election and the role of the Democrats. While most expressed a determination to throw out the Bush government, none of those who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed any enthusiasm for the prospect of a Kerry presidency.

Louis Daniel, 21 and from Venezuela, is a student at Manhattanville College in New York. "The Bush administration

planned this war well in advance as part of a larger plan to gain military control over the region,” he said. “They misled the American people, who were very scared at first, and were led to believe lies. And, of course, something very different just took place in Spain—they were attacked and instead of being scared, they voted those responsible, the PP, out of office. The Spanish people said, ‘We didn’t want this war in the first place, and now look at what you’ve brought on.’

“As far as the upcoming American elections are concerned—Democrats and Republicans ... these guys are from the same background, the same schools and in general have the same policies and the same agenda. One says a little of this and the other a little of that, but at the core, in what matters, nothing differs. I think there is a huge gap in social consciousness in America; a lot of people think there is a big difference between Bush and Kerry. A new political movement needs to be built from the ground up.”

Sandra Saidi, 23, came to the rally from Princeton, New Jersey, where she is a graduate student. “I’m here because I was against the war in the first place and now the horrible mess it’s become,” she said. “The Bush administration is filled with liars and they’re greedy. They hastily dragged us into war for the wrong reasons. I fear that Bush and his people will try to stay in power by the sleaziest means. They will do anything to keep the power they have, and the media will be a big part of it. The mass media is very conservative and backs Bush all the way. Bush particularly has allies at Fox News where, as I understand, his cousin had a big part in helping in the theft of the 2000 election.”

Phillip Heying, 44, a photographer from New York City, said: “The war is the reason that we are protesting today but it is not the root cause. The root cause and the reason that people are in the streets is a deeper stress that we are feeling as a society as a whole. Part of the drive behind this war is the fear of disparities in access to the world’s resources and the stresses that this is causing. Or put another way, this war is about an impulse to control the world’s resources on the part of the political right in the US. They are lashing out to gain control. The people with the most to lose, the richest people, feel the threat of their power being diminished. At the same time, Cheney and his cronies have been, and are as we speak, looting the economy and attacking the poor. The tax cuts are a classic example.”

Ruthie Doyle, 22, a student at Sarah Lawrence College in Yonkers, New York, told the WWS: “I think these demonstrations show solidarity and it is showing others around the world that we care. I was in Florence, Italy, when the war was declared one year ago and people were like, ‘What are the Americans doing?’ All of the McDonalds were closed and boarded up so they wouldn’t be destroyed. In the end, I think the war was launched for big business and money. I really do feel that there is no choice here [in the elections]—Kerry is married to the Heinz heiress—that speaks in and of itself. We need more options politically. I’m interested in the ideas of socialism—I’ve committed the rest of my semester to reading Marx.”

Simarpreet Kaur, 19, is a sophomore at Queens College. She came to the United States with her family from India seven years ago. She told the WWS: “Bush went into Iraq for the oil. That was the whole purpose. Instead of spending all this money on Iraq,

it should be spent here on education and to raise the minimum wage. The Bush administration takes from the lower classes and gives the money to the rich.

“On the war, the Democrats and Republicans are both the same. The Democrats are saying that they are against the war, but they voted for it. They are afraid to go up against the rich people. They know that if they were to do that, they would be in danger. The rich control all of the money in the US and give the funds to the politicians.”

Jerry Hassett, 58, an actor and limo driver from Queens, said, “The US presence in Iraq is a disgrace to humanity. It is based upon lies. They never mention how many children were killed in Iraq. Under the sanctions, 500,000 children were killed.

“Hussein used to work for us. Bin Laden worked for the CIA. Noriega, too—the list goes on and on. We are still trying to find out how on September 12, 2001, that no planes could fly except to get the bin Ladens out of the country.

“This has been a bipartisan policy. The only one coming out and saying anything is Kucinich. It’s sad that Kucinich is going to support Kerry after the Democratic convention. Kerry wants to send more troops. It’s a disgrace. We ought to pull them all out and bring them back home.”

The WWS also spoke with Lohith DeSilva, 21, who immigrated with his family 15 years ago from Sri Lanka. He traveled to the demonstration from Binghamton, New York, where he is a junior at New York State University. Lohith said: “I was against this war from the beginning. It was immoral and it was wrong. I’ve never seen a president make such an immoral decision before.

“The Democrats have betrayed the trust of the American people. They went along with all the lies Bush put out to the American people. They didn’t have the courage to stand up. They were afraid of losing their constituency among the voters by going up against a popular war president. But they were even more concerned about losing the support of the wealthy.

“It’s the wealthy who own the media. The media has corporate interests. These don’t coincide with the interests of the people. The media is not there to inform the people, but to brainwash them.”



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