

Canada: protests against US occupation of Iraq in 40 cities

A reporting team

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Demonstrations and rallies marking the second anniversary of the US's illegal invasion of Iraq and demanding the withdrawal of US occupation forces were held Saturday in at least 40 Canadian cities. The largest protests were in Toronto and Vancouver. Each numbered about 5,000-strong. In Montreal between 2,000 and 3,000 people marched.

The Toronto demonstration proceeded from city hall to the US Consulate. Speakers included several known as "war resisters"—US soldiers who have deserted in protest against the war and who are seeking refugee status in Canada—among them Jeremy Hinzman and Daryl Anderson.

Anderson, who fought in Iraq for seven months before being disciplined for refusing to fire on unarmed civilians, told the crowd: "If I was to follow the Army's procedures, I would have killed innocent people. Compared to the violence of the American forces, Saddam Hussein was like a little boy with a stick. This is a war of corruption and greed. It must end now."

To a far greater extent than the much larger protests that were held in Toronto in early 2003, Saturday's demonstration was politically dominated by the labour bureaucracy. There was a speaker from the Canadian Auto Workers and two from the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

Marilyn Churley, deputy leader of the NDP in the Ontario legislature, and Peggy Nash of the Parkdale constituency association, proclaimed the NDP the party of peace. In fact the NDP supported the decade-long UN sanctions regime against Iraq, has lauded the deployment of Canadian troops to prop up the US-imposed puppet government in Afghanistan, supports increased spending on the Canadian Armed Forces, and has remained all but completely silent about Canada's

role in the overthrow of Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In Montreal, by contrast, the labour bureaucracy and political establishment essentially boycotted the demonstration. The principal speaker was Raymond Legault of the *Échec à la guerre* (Stop the War) coalition. He made a number of telling and no doubt heartfelt criticisms of the Bush administration, its purported war on terrorism and the brutal and criminal character of the US military occupation. But Legault's speech was above all aimed at buoying hopes that the military occupation of Iraq can be ended and future imperialist wars prevented by placing pressure on the existing political establishment through demonstrations and protests.

If Legault felt the need to stress this point, it was because of the palpable disappointment of many demonstrators with the turnout. Saturday's march was only a faint echo of the demonstrations of more than 200,000 people that the *Échec à la guerre* coalition organized in February-March 2003. In the interim, neither popular opposition to the war nor to the Bush administration has diminished. But because the coalition is oriented to the existing political framework, it is unable to counter the political confusion created by Bush's reelection and has no perspective for uniting the struggle against war with the struggle to mobilize the working class against the big business offensive on jobs, wages, and public and social services.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party intervened in the demonstrations in Toronto and Montreal, handing out hundreds of copies of a statement in English and French titled "For the unity of the international working class against war and social reaction."

The statement explained the connection between the

US conquest of Iraq, the Bush administration's targeting of Iran and Syria, and the decline in the world position of US capitalism. "The struggle against US imperialism and war," it declared, "cannot be based on appeals to capitalist governments like those of Canada and Europe, institutions like the United Nations, or big business parties like the US Democratic Party. Rather it must be aimed at developing a political movement of the international working class against capitalism and the nation-state system in which it is historically rooted."



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