

North American protests mark third anniversary of Iraq war

Our correspondents
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Protests were held in a number of cities across North America on Saturday and Sunday, marking the third anniversary of the Iraq war. Several thousand demonstrated in San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and other cities in the United States and Canada.

Approximately 4,000 people marched through downtown Hollywood, California. As with most of the demonstrations, the organizers and many of the speakers sought to channel opposition to the war behind the Democratic Party. Among the speakers were various Hollywood celebrities, union officials and California Senate Majority leader Gloria Romero, a Democrat.

Many of those participating were hostile to the organizers' orientation to the Democratic Party. A young media developer from Los Angeles spoke to the WSW: "I do not belong to any political party," he said. "The stuff the speakers are talking about is already old." He said the Democrats were "spineless". "They have so much ammunition to work with that they really could make a change, but they seem like they just wait for somebody to bring up a debate. They bring up some little points here and there and then, at the end of the day, that's it, they go home. They're not fighting."

A post-production worker in film and video spoke about the international character of the right-wing shift of politics: "I am here today because I am opposed to the way things are going in the world. What I see is that the governments that are in power are more corporations and businesses rather than organizations run by people. Especially our government is a corporation more than anything. The people of the world should run the world."

"I do not think the Democratic Party expresses the views of the American people," he said. "I think that no political party expresses the views of the American people. I think that the Democratic Party, along with the Republican Party, has its own business interests in mind."

Christine, a teacher from South-Central Los Angeles, said, "I personally don't think that the Democratic Party is really expressing what the people want to happen in the States."

Some of the country's largest protests were in San Francisco, California, where over 10,000 people took part, and Chicago, where some 7,000 joined in demonstrations.

In New York, about 1,000 demonstrators gathered near Times Square in Manhattan on Saturday. The dominant mood was one of anger and determination to expose the lies behind the war and continuing occupation, as well as disgust with the role of the Democratic Party. Several protesters spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*:

Raul, an accountant, said, "Bush wanted to take over Iraq since his first day in office. It had nothing to do with 9/11, weapons of mass destruction or democracy. The war was for control of oil and the entire Middle East."

"They thought that Iraq was going to be an easy target," he noted. "However, taking control of that country has turned out to be a lot harder than this administration has ever imagined. In my opinion, controlling Iraq is more than this government can handle. The world was not a very safe place before Bush took power, but now it is much worse. There might be a civil war in Iraq. This war has opened a Pandora's Box of troubles which can easily spread. The world has definitely become a more dangerous place."

"Most people in America and around the world are opposed to this war," Raul added "This country is supposed to be a democracy, but Bush doesn't care about us or what we think."

Lauren, an actress from New York, explained her reason for being at the rally. "My feeling about the war and the government is completely helpless," she said. "They say they went to bring democracy to people who, we are told, don't want it. If the US is there for 10 years, it wouldn't make a difference and bring democracy. We went in for oil."

"The Democrats have moved so far to the middle in the last couple of elections that we have no real choice and have only been voting the lesser of evils," Lauren said. "I am just beginning to look at my party, the Democrats. I would definitely consider an alternative."

Over 200 participated in a five-day march that began in Mobile, Alabama, and ended in New Orleans, Louisiana—an

area that was devastated last year by Hurricane Katrina. The demonstrators called for ending the war in Iraq, and for money to be spent instead on rebuilding New Orleans in the interests of the population. Many of those who took part in the demonstration were Iraq veterans or relatives of soldiers, including Cindy Sheehan, who has been campaigning against the war ever since her son was killed in Iraq.

About 250 people marched in downtown Detroit Saturday. Several victims of Hurricane Katrina joined the protest, denouncing the lack of aid for storm victims. One banner read, "Make levees, not war."

In Canada, thousands took part in antiwar demonstrations in more than 35 cities across the country. In addition to opposing the illegal US-British invasion and occupation of Iraq, many of the protests and protesters voiced opposition to the cozy relations Canada's new Conservative government wants to establish with the Bush administration and the deployment of Canadian troops to southern Afghanistan, where they are helping prop up the US-installed government of Hamid Karzai.

Most likely the largest demonstration was in Toronto, where some 1,500 people rallied across the street from the US consulate before marching through the city's downtown core. In addition to students, striking college teachers, and other trade unionists, the demonstration was attended by a number of American "war resisters"—US soldiers who have fled to Canada to escape having to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The rally in Toronto received greetings from Cindy Sheehan, who will be in Toronto next month as part of her campaign to oppose the wars being waged by the Bush administration. Peggy Nash, a prominent New Democratic Party (NDP) member of parliament, also spoke to the crowd, hypocritically posing as an opponent of Canada's military involvement in the region. The social-democratic NDP has in fact supported such actions, but insisted they be carried out under the fig leaf of the United Nations.

In Montreal, about 1,200 people braved a deep chill to march against the war and continuing US occupation of Iraq. The demonstrators were addressed by war resister Brendan Hughey, who condemned his government's war on the Iraqi people. Sizeable protests were also held in Vancouver and Halifax.

On Sunday in Ann Arbor, Michigan, about 500 people demonstrated at the University of Michigan. The political orientation of the organizers of many of the demonstrations was clearly on display in Ann Arbor. The event was sponsored by the College Democrats and a number of other organizations oriented to the Democratic Party. None of the speakers sought to challenge the Democrats or point to the fact that both major parties in the US support the war.

Priya Goel, a member of the executive board of the College Democrats, directed her main criticism at the Bush administration for "squandering an opportunity" to get wider international support for American foreign policy. She said that the administration's handling of Iraq meant that there were not enough soldiers to handle other threats, pointing to Iran in particular. She cited comments by Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, who warned on Sunday that the US has been unable to sufficiently pressure Iran because Iran knows that the American military does not have enough troops on reserve to launch an invasion.

The lack of any alternative political perspective among the organizers of the demonstrations was one of the main reasons why the protests were smaller this year than in previous years. Opposition to the war in the United States has not diminished but, on the contrary, has grown more intense. However, this opposition finds no political expression within the framework of the two-party system. The decline in the number of people protesting reflects a growing sense that protests by themselves will not lead to any change, since there is no one within the political establishment to whom the protests can be directed.

At demonstrations throughout the country, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party and readers of the WSWS distributed a flyer calling for a break with the two-party system and the building of a new political movement of the working class, based on a socialist program and an internationalist perspective. (See "For the immediate withdrawal of all US troops") It urged those opposed to the war to support the SEP and its 2006 election campaigns.



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