

Hundreds of thousands protest Bush's visit to India

A WSWWS reporting team
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While visiting US president George W. Bush has been accorded a red carpet welcome by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, hundreds of thousands of workers, peasants, students and youth have taken to the streets in all parts of the country to protest his visit and the policies of the US government. The demonstrations have targeted the Bush administration's attempt to assert global US hegemony and in particular its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The protests have been organised by the two Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI-M] and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—and their allies in the Left Front, and by various Maoists and Muslim organisations.

In an admission of the widespread mass hostility prevailing in India towards the US president, unprecedented security arrangements have been made by both New Delhi and Washington. Hundreds of Indian policemen and US secret service agents have taken up positions around the hotel where Bush is staying, sealing off all surrounding streets.

Indian security officials have gone to great lengths to ensure that not a single anti-Bush poster is pasted along Bush's route. In some cities police have been carrying out preliminary arrests of prominent protesters before marchers could even assemble.

In addition to the massive Indian security mobilization, the US has sent its own security contingent, said to number more than 5,000 personnel.

On Wednesday, about 100,000 gathered at Ram Lila grounds in New Delhi, in response to an appeal from Muslim organizations, to protest against Bush. The protesters shouted, "Bush murdabad" (Death to Bush) and "Bush vaapas jao" (Bush, go back) and carried placards reading "Bully Bush Go home."

Raj Babbar, one speaker who addressed the crowd, said: "Whether Hindu or Muslim, the people of India have gathered here to show our anger. We have only one message—killer Bush go home." Mohammad Anwar Hussain of the Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, an Islamic group, said referring to Bush, "He is a war criminal. America has invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. Their policy towards humanity is deplorable."

Police, some of them armed with rifles, were heavily deployed around the ground.

On the following day, tens of thousands again gathered in New Delhi shouting anti-Bush and anti-American slogans. At Ram Lila grounds, protesters were waving red flags, holding placards and banners reading "Killer Bush Go Back" and "Bush War Criminal". Students, CPI-M and CPI workers and supporters, writers and farmers from across India participated in the rally.

The Indian writer and Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy called Bush a "war criminal responsible for bloodshed and death in Iraq and its continued devastation." She also denounced Bush's economic policies for creating ever-greater social inequality, rewarding the rich with tax cuts, while pushing millions of people into abyss of poverty.

Both houses of the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, were hastily adjourned amidst the din of anti Bush protests and slogan shouting. In the Lok Sabha, Left Front members joined Samajwadi Party (SP) members wearing red caps and raised slogans "Go back Bush! Go back Bush!" while in the upper house, the Rajya Sabha, members created an uproar demanding suspension of question hour, to discuss the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, forcing its adjournment.

Nilotpal Basu a CPI-M member of parliament told

reporters “We wanted both houses of parliament to discuss why the government had invited the American president after parliament had passed a unanimous resolution against the US assault on Iraq.”

Protests were also held in Calcutta in the east, Bombay in the west and Madras, Hyderabad and Bangalore in the south.

In Calcutta, on Wednesday, tens of thousands marched through the city center demanding Bush go home and an end to the killings in Iraq. Protesting Manmohan Singh government’s enthusiastic moves to establish close strategic ties with Washington, some called on India not to become a US lackey.

In Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, where Bush is to visit March 3, protests began as early as Monday. CPI-M, CPI, their allies and two Maoist groups organized demonstrations at the RTC Cross Road. The main theme of the protests was the adverse impact of US and World Bank policies on Indian agriculture.

The CPI-M and CPI are playing the dominant role in the anti-Bush protests. They have formed a Committee against the visit of Bush, joining with their allies in the Left Front, Samajwadi Party, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Indian Justice Party. In a statement issued on Monday, the committee said: “We emphatically oppose the forthcoming visit of US President Bush who is the topmost official of U.S. imperialism, the leading enemy of the sovereignty of nations and the peoples of the world today. He is the leader of the imperialist quest at neo-colonial world domination. He is certainly not welcome in India...”

However, the CPI-M and CPI remain crucial backers of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, which is seeking to forge a “global partnership” between India and the US. The two Stalinist parties have repeatedly pledged that they will continue to vote to keep the UPA in power despite their denunciations of it for pursuing neo-liberal economic policies and for joining the US-led campaign against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Their aim in organizing the anti-Bush protests is to pressure the UPA to align with other great powers than the US and, above all, to provide a political cover for their continued support for the UPA.

Significantly the CPI-M’s weekly English organ

People’s Democracy carried an editorial titled “US Imperialism Down Down” in its February 26 issue, which denounced the Bush administration’s “agenda of global hegemonism” and forcing of “neo-liberal economic policies” on “the developing world.” Yet the editorial uttered not a single word about the UPA government.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed copies of the statement Protests against Bush in India: For an international socialist strategy to fight imperialism at several of the protests.



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