

Over 100,000 march in New York against Iraq war

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Over 100, 000 people marched in New York City Saturday to demand an end to the US war in Iraq. Protesters assembled between 17th and 23rd Streets in lower Manhattan and marched to Foley Square near City Hall. Groups of trade unionists, veterans—including many returned from Iraq— peace and church organizations, as well as large numbers of students participated. Individuals and contingents came from all over the East Coast.

While the march was one of the largest recent protests against the Iraq war, its organizers offered those who participated no independent political alternative upon which to fight against war. Instead, many of the march's organizers and celebrity participants openly called for an orientation to the Democratic Party.

While United for Peace and Justice, the protest coalition that called the demonstration, solicited a petition in which signers pledged not to vote for any candidate that supported the war, Democratic party politicians like Jesse Jackson and the Rev. Al Sharpton were prominently featured as speakers. Interviewed for the Agence France-Presse, leading march organizer Leslie Cagan, said, "We are here to send a message to the White House and Congress that we must end this war now."

Among a great number of the marchers, however, there was a clear understanding that the Iraq war was not only the responsibility of Bush, but that of the Democratic Party as well.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party intervened in the march with thousands of copies of a statement by SEP US Senate candidate Bill Van Auken that analyzed the historical roots of the war and called for a socialist solution to the crisis.

His statement exposed the record of New York's incumbent Senator Hillary Clinton in voting for the

war, continuing to oppose a withdrawal of US troops and attacking the Bush administration from the right in relation to its buildup against Iran. Van Auken explained that Clinton, far from being a right-wing aberration, was entirely representative of the Democratic Party.

"Not a single serious step can be taken to end the war in Iraq and oppose the eruption of global US militarism outside of a decisive break with the Democratic Party," he said, adding, "A real struggle against war requires a new political strategy based upon the independent mobilization of working people on a socialist and internationalist program."

SEP supporters found widespread support for Van Auken's campaign and agreement that his Democratic opponent in the Senate race, Hillary Clinton, was representative of corporate interests and that it was from this position that she had supported the war. Thousands at Saturday's action expressed thoroughgoing disgust for Clinton's right-wing policies.

The WSWW interviewed a number of participants at the march.

Cynthia, a clerk at a national charity came to participate in the demonstration from Torrington, Connecticut. "I am opposed to a violent solution to the world's problems," Cynthia said. "We should get out of Iraq. The money spent there is so much more needed at home for the sick, the poor, and the elderly. The capitalists have taken over our country. We are their slaves. Everybody that died for the Bill of Rights has been betrayed. It's all being lost. Where are the Democrats? This war is just as much their fault as the Republicans."

"I lived in Sweden for a while, and there was so much more equality there. There was a diversity of

political parties. No party can have overwhelming power. It should be like that here. All viewpoints should be represented in Congress. It's just the rich and the privileged that are doing the talking now. We need to have some exposure of minority parties.

Josh, a student at Hofstra University in Long Island, told the WSWs: "I came to show that there is a lot of popular opposition to the war in America. The Democrats haven't improved the situation: 'You fought the war the wrong way, with the wrong number of troops, you needed more bombing,' they say. The Democrats have not contested this war."

Shawn, from Brooklyn, said "We're here to fight for a real cause, for real justice. There has been a massive shift in awareness of the war in the United States, but there is a lot of money up top, oil money, and a demonstration like this is not enough.

"I would definitely support a socialist campaign—anything to make life more equal, fair, just, and balanced. In the last 50 years, the balance has shifted toward the rich. There is just no equality any more."

Tom, from the United Kingdom, said, "My opinion on the Iraq war is to oppose it, first because it is illegal. I'm also opposed to the sanctions that were imposed on Iraq for ten years before the war, because they hurt the Iraqi people and didn't hurt Saddam Hussein.

"As a UK citizen, I disagree with the Blair government supporting the US in the second Iraq war when it was clear that there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction as is apparent to everyone today. The irony is that the UK and US governments are claiming that they're trying to sort out the problems in Iraq. They state they're trying to promote a democracy and yet ignoring the desire of the majority of the people in their own countries who oppose the war. They are denying the democratic will of the majority at home."

Zoe and Sara, two students from LaGuardia High School in New York City, told the WSWs: "We see this as a beginning for peace in Iraq, but we are also here to bring up the issue of metal detectors in the city schools. They are putting them in middle and high schools, treating us like criminals. That makes people act like criminals. We are protesting against them taking away our freedom, not just in Iraq, but here. We need books but instead they are punishing us. These

protests publicize the issues and unite people. We need to change all of these policies."

Kavi Rajah, who owns a shop in New Brunswick, NJ, said: "The Democrats and Republicans are two sides of the same coin. They pretend they stand differently on the issues, but in reality they're the same thing. The Democratic Party like President Bush represents the interests of big business owners against the interest of the people. I feel the political parties and the media tried to misconstrue the war to be a response to 9/11 but it has nothing to do with it."

Aya Okta, originally from East Timor, told the WSWs: "Iraq, like my home country, was invaded to capture the wealth of the land. They invaded my country because it had a widespread socialist movement, which threatened the interests of imperialism. Even though the political situation in Iraq is different, the aims were the same—to capture the wealth of the land."



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