

Washington, DC: Organizers seek to subordinate September 15 antiwar protest to Democrats

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Demonstrators from throughout the country marched in Washington, D.C., Saturday in an antiwar protest that drew a crowd estimated at between 10,000 and 25,000 people.

While many of those who came to Washington to protest the US occupation of Iraq and demand the withdrawal of all American troops were justifiably enraged by the actions of the Democrats in Congress, the organizers of the protest deliberately prevented any serious or honest political analysis of this party's role. Instead, as in past demonstrations, they worked to channel the antiwar movement behind the Democratic Party.

The demonstration was held 10 months after the election of a Democratic majority in both houses of Congress and four months after the congressional Democrats approved another \$100 billion to fund the war. It came only days after hearings in both the House and the Senate that made it clear for the umpteenth time that the Bush administration intends to continue this war indefinitely, and that the Democrats do not intend to mount any serious challenge to this plan.

Yet the organizers offered nothing in terms of a political perspective to those who attended the rally. No lessons were drawn from these experiences, and the only proposal advanced was for bigger and better protests with the addition of a call for acts of civil disobedience.

The political line of the ANSWER (Act Now To Stop War and End Racism) coalition, the organizers of Saturday's demonstration, is to keep the antiwar movement tied to the Democratic Party. While the group's literature criticizes the Democrats in Congress for voting for war funding, the message heard over and

over again from the more than 30 speakers at the rally was that protest was needed so that Congress would "have the guts to stop this war."

Ralph Nader and Ramsey Clark, two long-time politicians whose political orientation is essentially to the Democratic Party, were the main speakers at Saturday's rally. Clark, a former US attorney general, repeated his standard case that the Bush administration is guilty of war crimes and violating the constitution of the United States, and therefore should be impeached. He made no mention, however, of the fact that the Democrats have said from the moment they took the leadership in Congress that impeachment is "off the table."

Nader, a former Green Party presidential candidate, emphasized that the antiwar movement had to concentrate their protests on members of Congress. "There are 535 members of Congress," he said. "Some are on your side. Some want to be on your side and some need the backbone to stand up to this administration." Nader went on to call for protest, including peaceful sit-ins at congressional offices around the country, to give members of Congress the "courage to stand up," as he put it.

What a fraud. The Democratic Party has supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since the beginning. On every decisive vote, the Democrats gave Bush the backing he needed to launch and continue these wars. The Democrats owed their victory in the 2006 elections to massive popular antiwar sentiment. Poll after poll have shown large majorities supporting the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. To tell people that the problem is that the Democrats now need bigger protests to give them "backbone" or the "courage to stand up and

fight” is an outright lie designed to cover up the real role played by this party.

The perspective of pressuring congressional Democrats with protest serves first to conceal the pro-war policy of the Democratic leadership, including the party’s presidential candidates, Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and former Senator John Edwards. Second, it covers up the fact that the Democrats in both the House and Senate have already voted in favor of the war and have ruled out in advance any vote to cut off funding, the only means at their disposal to end the war. Third, it provides a cover for the Democrats if they win the 2008 election, that it is not their fault that they support the war, but rather the fault of the people for not protesting enough and thus giving them enough backbone.

The perspective of more protest to the Democrats was also outlined in a statement put out by the ANSWER leading up to Saturday’s demonstration. The statement calls for a full discussion within the antiwar movement on how to fight the war. But this was not to be a discussion on the underlying causes of the war or the role of the Democratic Party in providing support to the Bush administration, but only on how to build a bigger protest movement.

Added to this bankrupt political outlook is the call for acts of civil disobedience. This took the form Saturday of a “die-in” on the Capitol lawn in which 190 people were arrested.

While no doubt there are many prepared to be arrested and jailed to demonstrate their opposition to this criminal war, the self-sacrifice involved in such actions is misspent to the extent that it is subordinated to the orientation of those like ANSWER, whose aim is to get the Democrats to “stand up.”

Four and a half years into the war, definite political lessons must be drawn by those who oppose it. Workers and students must reject with contempt the antiwar posturing of the Democratic politicians, which always ends with support and funding for the war. Furthermore, it is necessary to draw a balance sheet of those organizations, like ANSWER, that continue seeking to draw the antiwar movement back under the political domination of the Democratic Party.

The building of a genuine mass movement against the war can only be achieved by the mobilization of the working class on an international scale, completely

independent of and against the two capitalist parties as part of a mass independent socialist movement.



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