

Antiwar rally in Washington

Protest group covers for Obama and the Democrats

Samuel Davidson
24 March 2010

From the signs and speeches at Saturday's antiwar rally in Washington, DC, one would be hard pressed to know that Barack Obama had been elected President and was now presiding over the continuation of the war in Iraq, the expansion of the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan and continued threats and provocations against Iran, North Korea, Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere.

On the official website of the demonstration, www.march20.org, there is little of Obama. His name did not even appear on the website's home page. Only a few of the more than two dozen updates on the website calling for people to attend the rally and reporting on support mention the Obama administration.

Outside of a few homemade signs, none of the official mass-produced placards mentioned Obama and the role of the Democrats in promoting the war.

As for the speakers, one had the strange feeling that you could have heard the exact same speeches at the rallies held two years ago when George W. Bush was still president. One had to wonder if Obama's name was censored from their remarks. However, it is more likely that the silence on Obama was self-imposed, a reflection of the fact that most of those who addressed the rally had either endorsed Obama in the 2008 elections or had adopted the more general "anybody but Bush" line promoted by the protest groups as a shamefaced form of backing the Democrats.

Brian Becker, the National Coordinator for the ANSWER coalition did not mention Obama at all, and gave no explanation for the growing militarization of American life. Instead he spoke on the anti-democratic

arrests and fines imposed on supporters of the ANSWER coalition in several cities and limited his remarks to the call for more and larger protests against the war, as he has done in past years.

Ramsey Clark, a former attorney general under the Johnson administration, made no mention of the Democratic Party control of the White House and both houses of Congress, but called for a reduction in the military budget by 50, then 70, and finally 90 percent.

A few speakers referred to Obama cryptically, such as one who insisted that "if some people in office are not brave enough to stand up for what they promised, then they should leave office."

The lack of virtually any mention of Obama is in line with the orientation of groups like ANSWER to subordinating the antiwar movement to the Democratic Party. Under conditions in which millions of students and workers who supported and voted for Obama in the 2008 elections to express their opposition to the war are now becoming disillusioned with and moving to break with the Democrats, the ANSWER coalition is coming forward to channel this movement back into the dead end of protest politics.

Their repeated calls for bigger and bigger protests were predicated on the idea that such actions could succeed in pressuring the Democratic Party to have the "courage to stand up to the right wing."

Ralph Nader and Cindy Sheehan were among the few speakers who did mention Obama by name. Nader said that Obama was continuing where Bush had left off. He then went on to tell the crowd to support the 67 congressional Democrats who voted against war funding in Congress and to pressure Representative John Conyers, chairman of the House Judiciary

Committee, to indict Bush and Cheney for war crimes.

Cindy Sheehan was the most outspoken critic of the Obama administration. Sheehan's son Casey was killed in Iraq, and she gained national fame by setting up a tent outside former president Bush's Crawford, Texas, ranch.

"Is the honeymoon over?" she asked. Referring to Obama she said, "He became a war criminal when he voted for war appropriations while in the Senate, when he voted for the Patriot Act, and when he voted for the bank bailouts."

She asked the crowd "Why are we giving him a free pass. We can't make any more excuses. The Democrats and Republicans are the war party."

Like the other speakers, however, Sheehan could put forward no alternative outside of more protests. Later that afternoon, she and seven of her supporters were arrested when they refused to leave the front of the White House grounds.

Estimates of the size of the protest ranged from 3,000 to 8,000. Most of those at the rally came from New York, Washington, DC, and other East Coast cities. Smaller delegations traveled from western Pennsylvania, Ohio and Virginia, with small groups of individuals coming from more distant locations.

Most of those present were supporters of various protest groups that make up the ANSWER coalition and other antiwar organizations. The yearly demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq increasingly take on the appearance of a reunion for these organizations.

After the speeches, the demonstrators marched from the White House through several blocks of DC, stopping at several of the corporations and political institutions that promoted and profited from the war, including Halliburton, the *Washington Post*, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Mortgage Bankers Association of America. As they stopped coffins were dropped off to symbolize those killed by their actions.

Smaller demonstrations with a similar political line took place in several West Coast cities.

The media has taken very little notice of the Iraq war entering its eighth year. Currently, the Obama administration has 125,000 troops stationed in Iraq—only a few thousand less than during most of the Bush administration. In addition, there are an equal

number of private contractors, such as Blackwater, supplementing the troops.

The troop level in Afghanistan is expected to reach over 100,000 this year, and the Obama administration has expanded the war into Pakistan using drone aircraft and other covert operations.

According to the icasualties.org website, 4,385 American soldiers have been killed in Iraq, and another 1,024 have died in Afghanistan. There is no official count of those from Iraq and Afghanistan killed in the two wars, but estimates put the civilian death toll upwards of 1,000,000.

Millions of workers and students who voted for Obama and the Democratic Party in the 2008 elections in the hope that they would repudiate the militarism of the Bush administration are now moving to break with the Democratic Party.

The role of the ANSWER coalition is to contain mass antiwar sentiments within the confines of impotent protest politics aimed at influencing the Democratic Party.

A genuine solution to the eruption of American imperialism can only be found in the international unity of the working class in a struggle against the capitalist system, which is the root cause of war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact