

NATIONAL

Protesters Mark the First Anniversary of the War in Iraq

Story and Photos By:
Ron Fitzwater

On Saturday March 20, Downtown Manhattan, along Broadway from 34th to 24th Street, according to the New York Times' March 21 edition, rang with the sounds of democracy in action. Amidst a heavy police presence, several groups opposed to the United States' continued involvement in Iraq, and a few in support of it, gathered to exercise their First Amendment rights through speech, song, music and dance.

The crowd was thin for a few blocks, with only a handful of people scattered along the avenue handing out free, or at least moderately priced, copies of their publications and flyers outlining the positions of their respective groups.

The groups represented included Socialist groups Solidarity, The Spartacist League of the U.S., and the Peoples Weekly World Newspaper. Other groups represented were NESARA (The National Economic Security and Enforcement Reformation Act), Medical Marijuana Supporters and Family Radio (a National Christian Broadcast company), as well as a group led by Representatives Maxine Waters and Major Owens which called for an immediate investigation into the involvement of the US in the ousting of former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Signs reading "ACTNOWTOSTOP WAR & END RACISM", "US OUT OF Vieques", "US OUT OF Korea", "US OUT OF The Philippines", "Impeach BU\$H" and many more were peppered sparsely with ones reading Proud of Bush, President Bush Liberated Their Country, Bush Cheney '04, and one with a picture of Osama Bin Laddin and the words You're Next!, written under it.

Most of the people along the avenue



Freedom of Expression in Action



Pro and Anti Bush Supporters Face Off on Madison Ave.

were chanting, singing, dancing, beating drums, and banging gongs, backed up, non stop, by a shrill female voice telling everyone to "buy anti-war buttons from one of the salespeople moving through the crowd" and "donate all you can in the red buckets," also moving through the crowd to, "stop the war."

Though most of the crowd was caught up in the chant of "No More War", a few people stopped to comment on the day's events and why they had come down to participate;

Jason Middleton, a student and member of the Spartacist League of the U.S carried a sign simply reading "http://VoteNoWar.org." Stopping for a moment to comment for the Decree, Mr. Middleton posed this question: "I'm not saying that Hussein wasn't a bad guy, but why would the Iraqis want to exchange one dictator for another?" When asked to expand on his implication that the US was acting as a dictator, he said, "The US is controlling every facet of the, so-called, new Iraqi government. Their Constitution was conceived and written by the US, probably the CIA, to try and make them just like us, which is, of course, what Bush wants." When asked, if that were true, wouldn't the new constitution give them rights and privileges, especially for women, that they had not had for decades, Middleton responded, "Sure it will, but they did not come up with this on their own, that's the problem. They didn't ask Bush and his allies to liberate them. There was no revolution underway that they stepped in to support. Bush wanted to make a legacy for himself and finish what his father started."

British citizen Angela Walsch, visiting NY "on holiday," came to the rally to lend support to the protest organizers. She shared her feelings on the matter with much

enthusiasm, saying, "Bush and Blair are War Criminals all they want to do is destroy an ancient culture and make themselves look like the Great Liberators." When asked to what end they would do this, she said, "So that the world will fear them. That's the only way," she concluded, "that they can form their One World Government." Following up, Ms. Walsch was asked about all the allied coalition members and if she felt that they are after the same result; One World Government? "I seriously doubt it." She said. "I think they are just afraid to say no. "Not all of the people who came



Lone Bush Supporter Greets Protesters on Madison Ave.

out were opposed to the US and Coalition actions in the Middle East. Daniel Jacobs, a New York City native, was at the rally to stand, in the minority, in support of US actions in Iraq and in the War on Terrorism as a whole. "Look", he said bluntly, "I don't really give a damn one way or the other about the Iraqi people, they should have gotten rid of the scumbag on their own, but, the President was right in going in, because Hussein was a terrorist sympathizer and helped them with refuge, and such, all the time. Had he stayed in power, he would have kept helping them attack us and the Jews and anybody else they wanted. The simple fact that we haven't been attacked again proves that our kicking their

asses in Iraq and Afghanistan has worked to keep us safe. I just wish these people would realize that sometimes you gotta' spill the blood of a few to save the lives of many. It's a sad thing that we have to fight sometimes, but freedom and security have a price tag. If we don't pay the price we pay the price, you know what I mean?" Concluding Jacobs added, "I for one don't want to lose everything our ancestors dreamed about."

Both sides of this highly volatile topic seemed to conduct themselves well. There were a few shouting matches here and there, someone would yell "fascist" at someone yelling, "Why don't you protest terrorists, huh?"

The New York Post reported that there were only four arrests made and they were for minor infractions. This was in contrast to last year's protest, where there were many arrests made and several allegations of police misconduct.

Organizers claim that there were 100,000 people jammed into the few square blocks with upwards of 33,000 at the center where several speakers, such as Democratic Presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich and actress Natalie Portman, addressed the crowd.

In a statement released by protest organizers A.N.S.W.E.R. (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) Coalition, they commented, "The March 20 demonstration in New York City far exceeded the expectations of the march organizers. Chanting 'Occupation is a crime from Iraq to Palestine' and 'Bring the troops home now,' more than 100,000 people marched."

The statement continues, "The demonstration was initiated by the A.N.S.W.E.R. Coalition and the United for Peace and Justice, the two major anti-war coalitions in the U.S. A large number of Arab and Muslim organizations co-organized the event."

The protest was not confined to New York There were simultaneous demonstrations in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, London, and Fayetteville, NC.

