

# Ten Thousand March on Pentagon!

By Sean Hannley

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March 21<sup>st</sup> 2009 is a day I will remember for a very long time – my first national protest march in Washington, DC. I had been volunteering for several weeks to help set up the “March on the Pentagon,” a protest march aimed at ending the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, ending support for Israel’s war against the Palestinian people and stopping war profiteers from cashing in on and encouraging both wars as well as other conflicts around the globe. I had seen images of protests and news reports about them, but nothing compared to the experience of being there, of marching with a crowd of 10,000 people for a single purpose, to stop our government from using our money to kill and maim people and destroy property and states.

The protest began with a rally near the Lincoln Memorial. The location could not have been better chosen. “Free Palestine!” and “Stop the War!” reverberated off of the Vietnam and Lincoln Memorials. The crowd was quite diverse and the speakers talked about a broad range of issues, from US intervention in Latin America, to the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, to the need for worker solidarity and beyond.



Photo by Bill Hackwell

It was empowering to hear all of these diverse issues talked about in solidarity with one another. What surprised me was how many groups and issues all revolve around US military intervention and arms sales. It made me wonder why such simple issues such as not invading sovereign countries and flooding the world with technologically sophisticated weapons were so difficult to resolve. When we passed the Pentagon and marched on into Crystal City to drop off coffins at the war profiteers, this was made clear. I saw the wealth that our wars had generated for those involved in producing, marketing and selling products whose only purpose is to kill human beings and destroy their property. When such an industry exists in a country like the United States, war becomes inevitable.

Our system is set up so that the entities which command the largest share of the resources and wealth can make or otherwise affect government policy, and judging by the buildings these firms work in, they are quite well positioned to create a government policy where those sorts of products are in demand. They have an enormous stake in a system where the United States and other governments believe they need to kill human beings and destroy their property.

One of the important aspects of the protest was to deliver hundreds of coffins bearing the flags of the United States, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine to those corporations whose lobbying and very existence are responsible for deaths of citizens of those countries. The coffin I helped deliver bore the flag of Palestine, which has seen tens of thousands of men, women and children die by means of US weapons in Israeli hands. It drove home the point that war is not an American invention; it has been around for thousands of years before this country achieved independence. However, the United States, both its government and corporations, have served to make war deadlier, dirtier, and to separate murderers from those they kill by as long a range as possible.



*Photo by Kathy Hoyt*

The feeling of oneness with the crowd was overwhelming, to be surrounded by so many people, united in purpose, chanting, “Occupation is a crime! From Iraq to Palestine!” and “We want money for schools, NOT FOR WAR!” While I’m sure that the protest won’t end the war tomorrow, I am convinced of the need for organized resistance to the continuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as a way to bring together people and organizations who, while having many different goals, all see the need for an end to the aggressive and expansionist US foreign and military policies and the continued development of ever deadlier weapons systems.

At the end of the march I came face to face with literally hundreds of riot police, holding shields and batons and the occasional semi-automatic rifle. I knew that many of them would have loved to unleash their weapons on me and the crowd but that our solidarity, numbers and level headedness kept us safe. Protesters at the parallel demonstration in San Francisco weren’t so lucky and several young women ended up in the hospital with broken bones.

After the demonstration I was exhausted, having worked two twelve hour days in a row helping set up the demonstration. I left with a deep sense of accomplishment, knowing that I, in solidarity with thousands of others, had sent a message that the death and destruction caused by United States militarism was not in my name and that I had taken a real step toward its dismantling.