

# Thousands In Downtown Chicago Protest War!



**By James Janega and Jason George**

Tribune staff reporters

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As many as 7,000 Iraq war protesters clanged bells, blew whistles and caused a gleeful cacophony Saturday evening as they spilled onto Chicago's well-heeled North Michigan Avenue in an anti-war pageant to lambaste the war and demand an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The rally came on the third anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and capped three increasingly fitful years during which polls have shown falling public support for the war.

The frustration has simmered mainly in lonely pockets, with few rallying points for a national anti-war movement. Still, a cross-section of the Midwest showed up Saturday night in Chicago.

On Saturday night, a cross-section of the Midwest showed up to give voice to simmering frustration.

The rally included the white-haired and middle-aged, people carrying Puerto Rican flags and an upside-down Stars-and-Stripes. Youthful anarchists and children barely aware of the event's significance filled out the crowd's ranks.

March organizers said they expected a crowd of a few thousand; police Supt. Phil Cline said the numbers had swelled to 7,000 by the parade's end, with no one arrested. The multitude was sizeable and raucous, a movable, growing street celebration that felt like a Mardi Gras jazz procession.

"The anti-Vietnam movement started with protests like these!" organizer Andy Thayer shouted as the throngs gathered in the Ogden Elementary School playground at Walton Street and Wabash Avenue. "If you're going to stop the war, it's not going to be because of some great leader, it's going to be due to regular people like you."

According to the Pentagon, 2,313 U.S. service members have been killed in Iraq so far. , with other news sources reporting another 206 coalition troops and uncounted Iraqi troops, policemen and civilians killed in the Iraq war over the last three years. Another 278 U.S. troops have been killed in Afghanistan since a U.S.-led attack began there on Oct. 7, 2001.

When it was on the move, the crowd of protestors stretched for blocks, the cold making apples of cheeks and numbing hands as people clapped and called out, flags and placards fluttering. It glowed sporadically with flashlights and the flicker of candles.

A quartet of floats led the march, followed by clamorous thousands that included a marching band wedged into the crowd, marchers with bicycles and children in strollers. Helicopters rattled overhead.

Bystanders watched from sidewalks and police patrolled the median as traffic in the still-open northbound lanes of Michigan Avenue honked in support.

The dark shadows of store employees lined the dimmed windows at the J. Crew store and Nordstrom shopping center like mannequins, watching the tumult pass below.

The crowd seemed to grow as supporters joined the procession from the warmth of restaurants and coffee shops along the fence-lined route.

Bob McAnulty had protested on college campuses against Richard Nixon in the 1970s. His 16-year-old son Mac wondered what it had been like. Together, they walked in a noisy section near the front of the parade, occasionally joining the chants, the father pumping his fist in the air, the son's face blank and watching everything.

"I had no clue that it would be this big," Bob Mcanulty said, transported to his youth.

"Cool," his son said.

It was a cocktail of social causes. There were socialist groups, calls for Puerto Rican rights, gay and lesbian groups, nurses, civil rights workers and education activists.

"We are all here for our different reasons, but together our voice is so much more powerful," said 28-year-old Elisa Armea of Pilsen, who marched with her friends. "It's time to stop this imperialism and the occupation."

Throughout the U.S., protesters took their anger and frustration to the streets in a handful of major cities, from New York to Boston to San Francisco.

Protests also were held in Australia, Asia and Europe, but many events were far smaller than organizers had hoped. In London, police said 15,000 people joined a march from Parliament and Big Ben to a rally in Trafalgar Square. The anniversary last year attracted 45,000 protesters.

In Chicago, rally organizers had sought protest permits to march down Michigan Avenue since the war's first anniversary, only to have their proposals rejected on grounds the proposed march would snarl traffic.

To get around the obstacles, organizers copied the parade application for the annual Magnificent Mile Lights Festival. Unable to reject the march for its content, the city relented. A spokeswoman for the city's Law Department this week said the politics of protesters were never considered in the application process.

The march was a spectacle, but not a disruption, and to participants, it felt like a cathartic release.

On Saturday, Michigan Avenue became the Midwest's kitchen table, its glittering spine of skyscrapers a collective back fence across which angry citizens exchanged worries.

"There's no flag big enough to cover the shame of innocent civilians dying," said Jeff Tobis, 47, a guitar-carrying artist from Northampton, Mass., who trailed in the rear of the march. "You always hope for more folks, but any effort for peace is worth it."

The crowd rolled into Daley Plaza at 8 p.m. sharp, jamming the cavernous square under the giant Picasso statue, the masses dwarfed by empty office buildings before people trickled away into the Loop.

By 9 p.m., the assembly was gone, with only the blue police lights and yellow Streets and Sanitation truck blinkers flashing in the darkness.

*Tribune staff reporters Tom Rybarczyk and Dave Wischnowsky contributed to this report.*

*jjanega@tribune.com  
jageorge@tribune.com*

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