

Chicago Sun Times - Letters to the Editor

Politicians Battled Peace March

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Recently, on a sunny day at high noon, an estimated 100,000 people were granted permission by city officials to take to the streets of Chicago to protest proposed changes to immigration laws ["In overwhelming display, immigrants protest bill," metro story, March 11].

Prominent politicians, including Mayor Daley, Gov. Blagojevich and U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), attended the rally in an attempt to capture some of the large, mostly Hispanic, immigrant vote. The march literally closed off and clogged vital downtown and adjacent neighborhood streets, sidewalks and intersections for hours, disrupting the lives of many of the million or so people who work in the area. To ensure public safety, there was a heavy presence of Chicago police officers, most dressed in their everyday work uniforms and most without riot gear.

CNN and other media later reported that many of the 100,000 marchers were, ironically enough, probably illegal immigrants themselves. So, we have 100,000 people -- some of whom are in the United States illegally -- marching at high noon through the streets of Chicago with the blessings of politicians, escorted by police in non-riot gear, disrupting the transportation systems and lives of a million people working in the area.

Now, fast-forward to Saturday night's [March 18] peaceful "Festival of Rights" march down Michigan Avenue. Here, 7,000 peace activists marched together to voice their opinions on the Iraqi invasion and overthrow of the Iraqi government. The Iraqi invasion has cost the American people their international good name, turning many friends and allied countries into enemies, or at least very distant acquaintances.

The Iraqi invasion has taken the lives of over 2,300 American troops and 100,000 Iraqis and has injured over 25,000 American troops -- not to mention the grave misuse of hundreds of billions of dollars of the public's money. Unlike the immigration protesters who danced at high noon through the business district, participants at the "Festival of Rights" were relegated to march at 7 p.m. and were escorted along a carefully controlled route by heavily armed and fortified police from city, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies slapping their billy clubs while dressed in full riot gear.

The festival's organizers had been trying for three years to get a permit from the city ["War protesters finally get OK to march on Michigan Ave.," metro story, March 16], yet were met with refusal after refusal from officials who argued the group's march would jeopardize public safety, the march times were not conducive, or other lame reasons. The group eventually filed a federal lawsuit.

So, here we have 7,000 people -- most, if not all legal U.S. citizens -- walking at 7 o'clock on a Saturday night under the close control of heavily armed police in riot gear. And, of course, the politicians who were vote stomping at the immigration protest were nowhere to be found at the peace rally. Interesting dichotomy, huh?

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