

Reports on the Resistance: Trump's Muslim Ban Spurs Strong Resistance: Thousands at Airport Protests

January 29, 2017



Thousands from New York City to Seattle went on January 28 to the nation's major airports to protest President Donald Trump's order banning for 120 days Muslim immigrants and refugees from seven nations, an order issued that same day. The protests, initiated by immigrant rights groups through social media, took place not only at the John F. Kennedy Airport in New York—where it grew to several thousand—but also at Dulles in Washington, D.C., O'Hare in Chicago, and at the Los Angeles and San Francisco airports.

Cet article est également disponible en français.

The protests of the Muslim ban were only the latest of almost daily protests against Trump's policies around the country, the largest of which was the January 21 women's march on Washington, D.C. that involved about four million in the United States.

In New York City, where I joined the demonstration, some 5,000 protestors rallied at Terminal 4, in the parking structure, along the parking lot, in the walkways, and finally blocking the streets and stopping airport traffic. At one point the Port Authority, a joint New York-New Jersey agency, stopped Airtrain Service to prevent more demonstrators from arriving, but Andrew Cuomo, Democratic Party governor ordered service restored and protestors continued to arrive. In Seattle protestors marched into one terminal's ticketing area.

Demonstrators in New York chanted, "No Hate, No Fear, Immigrants are Welcome Here," and held many handmade signs with slogans such as "Let Them In," which was also a chant. When police appeared in riot gear to remove people blocking an entrance to Terminal 4 and then the roadway, the chant of the peaceful protestors became, "Why you wearing riot gear? We don't see no riot here."

The protest had the flavor of the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011. People used the "human mic," repeating together an announcement or proposal to make themselves heard. Some supporters brought dozens of pizzas to the march and distributed them, as others brought bags of food, bananas, granola bars, and also hand warmers. Most of the demonstrators had traveled at least an hour each way by bus, subway, and Airtrain to get to the protest in cold winter weather.

The crowd in New York was made up mostly of young white men and women, though being New York there were immigrants from all over the world among them, and a number of Muslims, some of the women in hijabs. A number of women were wearing the pink "pussy hats" from the earlier women's protests against Trump.

As the size of the crowd grew after 1:00 p.m., with at least two organized protests at 4:00 and 6:00 p.m., the throngs became more militant, moving into the streets in defiance of police who everywhere seemed to behave with restraint.

At one point the crowd of protestors, some from Jewish organizations, such as Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), some of whom carried pro-Muslim signs, chanted, "Never again! Never again!" The obvious meaning was that neither Jews nor Muslims should ever again face a holocaust again. The chant was taken up by all of the protestors.

Those arriving at the airport on incoming or leaving on outbound flights found themselves awash in a sea of protestors chanting, "No ban, no registry, fuck white supremacy." A few older white men hollered the usual, "Get a job," but some Muslim Americans arriving with their suitcases joined the demonstration as protestors greeted them with "Welcome home!"

News that the American Civil Liberties Union had won a partial suspension of Trump's ban swept through the crowd at some point as did information about further protests planned for the following day.

The resistance to Trump is growing, creating tens of thousands of new activists who are being radicalized by the protests and now see themselves as part of a national movement. While we are not there yet, we are heading towards a social protest movement that could reach the enormous proportions of the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s.