

Hundreds of thousands march in London to oppose war vs. Iraq

Robert Stevens
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A protest march against the threat of impending military action against Iraq was held in London on September 28. An estimated 250,000 to 400,000 people attended the demonstration called by the Stop the War Coalition and Muslim Association of Britain under the banner, "Don't Attack Iraq and Freedom for Palestine".

The coalition was formed in September 2001 and is supported by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a number of Labour MPs, radical groups, several trade unions, church organisations, the Muslim Association of Britain, the Muslim Council of Britain, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the Islamic Human Rights Commission and various prominent musicians and artists.

The march was the largest anti-war demonstration ever held in Britain or Europe. It set off from the Embankment beside the River Thames in central London and headed to Hyde Park via the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall.

A large number of speakers addressed the rally including London Mayor Ken Livingstone, ex-Labour MP Tony Benn, Rail Maritime and Transport union General Secretary Bob Crow and Mick Rix, the general secretary of the train drivers union ASLEF. Also among those speaking from the platform were Tam Dalyell, the Labour MP and Father of the House of Commons, Labour MP George Galloway, former United Nations weapons inspector Scott Ritter, investigative journalist and broadcaster John Pilger and film director Ken Loach.

Benn said, "Nothing can take the British people into a war that they do not accept and do not want... Although when the bloodshed begins, if it does, criminal responsibility for what has happened will rest with those who have taken that decision, there is a share of responsibility with us as well. We believe it would be wholly immoral and wrong and criminal for the United States and Britain to attack Iraq and inflict casualties upon innocent people. We must see it is not allowed to happen".

Dalyell said the threat to attack Iraq was "the most dangerous crisis since Cuba 40 years ago" and warned that the use of nuclear weapons against Iraq was being seriously considered and prepared for by the United States and Britain. He informed the rally that last week he had asked for an assurance in parliament whether nuclear weapons were being moved to

Diego Garcia by the United States with the authority of the UK government. "We must demand to know whether the US have moved these weapons to Diego Garcia, a British Indian Ocean territory, and how it would be intended to use them."

Dalyell said that he believed that B2 stealth bombers were being moved to Diego Garcia: "One of the weapons they can carry is the new B61-11 earth-penetrating nuclear bomb. It is designed specifically to destroy underground bunkers, including those holding chemical and biological weapons. We are sleepwalking to disaster. The government's dossier states that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons ready to use. We know Iraq was prepared to use them in 1991 if Baghdad was attacked. We can be sure they will use them if cornered."

Dalyell added that the UK Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, had said that Iraq "can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons."

Labour MP Alice Mahon stated that the government had effectively prevented a parliamentary debate on the issue of military action and was also attempting to prevent a discussion on the issue at the forthcoming Labour Party annual conference.

Livingstone said that the demonstration "will have an electrifying effect on the Labour Party conference and on those MPs opposed to war. It's quite obvious to even the dimmest person that this is a war about oil. Bush's administration will enrich themselves personally by tens of millions if there is a war on Iraq. I don't think people should die simply because George Bush's cronies want to get their hands on Iraqi oil. An assault on Iraq will inflame world opinion and jeopardise security and peace everywhere. London, as one of the major world cities, has a great deal to lose from war and a lot to gain from peace, international cooperation and global stability."

Rix said, "This war is not about weapons of mass destruction. It's about payback time for the same corrupt multinational businesses that put Bush in power in the first place."

Scott Ritter said there was no evidence that Iraq had any weapons of mass destruction. "I'm not a pacifist. I have fought in a war before and I will fight in a war again, if the security of the United States is put at risk. But as of yet, no case has been made, based upon substantive fact, that shows that Iraq represents a threat to the United States or to the international

community worthy of war.”

It was announced that the Stop the War Coalition has called a “Don’t Attack Iraq Day of Action” to be held on October 31.

The World Socialist Web Site interviewed a number of those taking part in the protest.

Sam is a motor mechanic from Zimbabwe:

“My opinion is that a lot of goodwill is expressed today in stopping this planned war against Iraq. However, I think it may be futile as there are a lot of different groups here today who are divided over most things. I think if such a movement could be a united force then it could have the strength to change the world.

“I think a protest against the war should be based on the humanity of all people. It needs an intelligent organisation to bring all this together.

“Business interests are being looked after over human needs. This is a very systematic effort to secure all the oil resources in the Middle East. The objectives are very clear. Whoever speaks for Bush and Blair knows they are hypocritical. Look at Saddam Hussein—only a few years ago he was an angel and now he is the bogeyman.”

Ali is originally from Yemen and travelled to the demonstration from Birmingham with his family:

“This war is wrong as it is going to hurt a lot of innocent people. This demonstration shows that a lot of people don’t want this war. It is the administrations of Bush and Blair who want this war.

“I am not a supporter of Saddam Hussein and I understand he even killed some of his own family when he came to power, but I do respect the people of Iraq. They are the ones who are going to suffer.

“The reason for this war is that Bush is trying to get the oil. He is saying, ‘We will take Hussein out and take the oil too’. There is an axis of Bush, Blair and [Israeli Prime Minister] Sharon and they are the ones who need to go as they are the problem. They are the reason why there is this plan to have a war.

“There are a lot of people here who have seen the last Gulf War and have family in the Middle East and remember what happened. What they see is that it’s not the people of Iraq who are the problem, but these leaders who want this war”.

Emanuel is a student from Preston:

“I think this war is all about money and oil. The issues of weapons of mass destruction are just excuses. Prior to 1991 it was known that Iraq had the fourth largest army in the world. This is not the case today.

“In the past Britain and the US supported Saddam. When he was attacking the Kurds those countries supported him. This is about oil resources and the war in Afghanistan was also about oil. In the Caspian Sea region there are now some big problems due to the influence of the US in that area.”

Antonio is a musician and graphic designer from Brazil:

“I came to the demonstration because I disagree with the

policies that England is taking by supporting the war against Iraq. The British have enormous economic interests in supporting the US as they have lots of investments with America. What disgusts me the most is that this is supposed to be a Labour government and they are supporting war. It only shows how fragile the whole system is.

“Things don’t end with just voting, you need to keep a check on them. There is no popular support for the war and the government is feeling the mood. The media will manipulate things and say the demonstration was small, when it’s very large.

“The war is about one thing—oil. Since World War II everything that has happened has been based on dividing people and conquering. It makes things simple for imperialism. They always create a ‘bad-guy’ to justify ‘democratic commitment’. We have seen it in Cuba, Nicaragua and the Middle East. They are creating a new consensus—if you disagree then you are anti-democratic.

“In Brazil we had military control for 30 years. People always disappeared and were taken away if they didn’t agree. The same is being created here. A dictatorial state is being put in place.

“I think this is the worst moment in the last 50 years. The extreme right in US, Israel and the world over are leading the way.”

Moheb, whose family is originally from Egypt, is a security guard:

“I’ve come here because I’m concerned about the hundreds and thousands of innocent lives that are at stake in the war against Iraq.

“The war is about oil fields and lucrative contracts for the oil companies. Blair is blindly following George Bush. The British have business interests worth millions through the arms trade. They hope that they will get a slice of the pie when America controls the oil, but whether that will happen I don’t know.

“I really fear for the security of the whole world when I look at Bush’s policies. What is the future going to be like if they take control?

“Protesting will not achieve much other than to display the opinion of large sections of the population. The government doesn’t listen or care. They do what they want. For the past 50 years the crusade against ‘communism’ was utilised to launch all sorts of military adventures and now the west have used Islam as the new contrived threat.”



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