

International demonstrations against Bush war plans

Our reporters

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Demonstrations and protests against the preparations of the United States government for war against Iraq took place October 26 in Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Mexico, Switzerland, Australia and Japan. The protests were coordinated to coincide with demonstrations taking place in many cities across America.

Despite stormy weather conditions, an estimated ten thousand people took to the streets of Berlin to oppose a military offensive against Iraq by the Bush administration. The Berlin demonstration was the largest of 80 protests held in cities and towns across Germany. Demonstrations drew several thousand participants in Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg and Stuttgart.

The German protests were organised by a network of pacifist groups under the slogan “Stop the War on Iraq Before it Starts!”

The demonstration in Berlin was called by a number of groups organised under the umbrella of the “Axis of Peace.” It was supported by a number of immigrant and Arab groups. Large groups of high school and college youth attended. Placards included such demands as “Stop President Bush, for Solidarity with the American People.”

Some demonstrators bore placards protesting both plans for war against Iraq and the war currently being fought by Russia in Chechnya. Speakers at the meeting in Berlin included representatives of student groups against war, a Muslim representative and members of American anti-war organisations.

Although a prominent member of the Green Party spoke at the main rally in Berlin (Hans-Christian Ströbele) and a trade union member read out an anti-war resolution to the assembled gathering, it was clear from the composition of the demonstrations and the placards on view that the Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and trade union movement had made no effort to mobilise their members.

In the course of last month’s general election, Social Democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder tapped popular

sentiment when he expressed opposition to the plans being developed in Washington for a war against Iraq. This played a crucial role in the re-election of his SPD-Green coalition government.

Since their re-election, however, Schröder and his foreign minister, Joschka Fischer (Green Party), have gone to considerable lengths to play down the war issue and emphasise the close links between Berlin and Washington. In an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site* before the Berlin demonstration, Ströbele confirmed that the leadership of the Green Party had not even discussed the issue of war against Iraq since the elections.

In his speech to the rally, Ströbele emphasised the pursuit of material resources, especially oil, as a predominant factor in the war drive in Washington. He also condemned the sanctions carried out by the US and Great Britain, which have resulted in nearly two million deaths in Iraq.

However he avoided any mention of concrete demands to prevent the war against Iraq. He neither raised the demand for the closure of German-US bases, nor called for the withdrawal of German tanks stationed in Kuwait. He also made no criticism of the treatment of the war issue by his own party and its partner in government—the SPD.

The only speaker at the demonstration to warn against placing any trust in the stance of the German government was a 16-year-old student, who spoke from the platform and recalled that the SPD-Green government had voted in favour of 16 different military interventions during its period in office.

Despite the broad and largely youthful participation at the demonstration, the perspective of the speakers and organisers was limited to calls for increasing pressure on the United Nations and the German government.

Yugoslav filmmaker Zoran Solomun, who took part in the Berlin demo protest, told the *World Socialist Web*

Site:

“I think it is very important to support such demonstrations and make clear the extent of the opposition to the war plans of the Bush administration. If Bush is successful with this war, it will be a triumph for militarism with repercussions for the entire world.

“This war has been ten years in the making, and while, of course, material interests such as oil play a role, it must be seen as part of a broader military and political scheme aimed at establishing America’s absolute dominance worldwide. It began with Bush senior’s war against Iraq in 1991, and then came the war against Yugoslavia, and now everything is being done to bring to an end what was started in Kuwait.

“At the same time, I have little trust in the German government’s stance of opposition towards a war in Iraq. After all, they supported the military intervention in Yugoslavia and Germany was the source of two world wars in the last century. The only chance to stop war is to build on movements such as that of today until they embrace millions of people.”

Some 6,000 demonstrators, mostly young people, rallied in the centre of the Dutch city of Amsterdam to oppose the war preparations of the US government. With their slogans and posters they also targeted European political leaders such as the British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, denouncing their collaboration with Bush in the war in Afghanistan and the military preparations against Iraq.

Similar rallies took place in the cities of Rotterdam, Maastricht, Nijmegen, Eindhoven, Enschede and Groningen.

In Amsterdam, there were speakers from various left-wing parties, such as the Socialist Party and the Greens, and from minority organisations such as the Network of Moroccan Organisations in the Netherlands. An Iraqi writer and refugee, Mowaffk al Sawad, also took the platform to speak out in defence of Iraq and all oppressed people in the Middle East against the threat of colonial wars.

For historical reasons, Amsterdam is a city with a population of a truly international character. People have come from all over the world to live, study and work here. Not only Dutch youth and workers were to be seen at the demonstration, but also young Palestinians, refugees from Iraq, Syria, Bangladesh and Indonesia, workers from Greece, Spain and Portugal, and students from Peru, Sweden and Denmark.

Javier Soraluze from Galicia in Spain, together with his

friends Beatrice García from Cuba and Mariana from Peru, are students at the University of Amsterdam. They read a leaflet distributed by the *World Socialist Web Site* and spoke with WSWS reporters.

“I like what is being said here”, Beatrice said. “Especially that it is only a worldwide mass movement of working people that can stop the war, which is what we have to mobilise. We have to make people aware of what is going on in America, why the American government is heading for war. That is why I find important what is being explained in the leaflet.”

“This war must be stopped,” Mariana added. “It is not a war for ‘democracy,’ but for purely economic interests. It is an integral part of an economic strategy, just like the first Gulf War in 1991. That is as obvious and clear as daylight. We do not agree with the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, but that does not mean that you can allow foreign powers and armies to invade Iraq, bomb its cities and kill innocent people there.”

Beatrice continued: “If the US government is not stopped with this war, it will go on forever provoking new wars and terrorising one country after the other. That is why we have to stand up now.”

Javier said, “No country has the right to send its armies into other countries in order to overthrow governments and establish a new regime. It is up to the people of that country to decide and act on their government. That is democracy, not what Bush claims to defend.”

Beatrice concluded, “If we want to build a mass movement against the war, we have to make people conscious of the real issues that are behind that war. We are keen to have a look at the *World Socialist Web Site* and will keep in contact.”



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