

Europe: Thousands protest plans for US-led war against Iraq

Steve James

6 December 2002

Thousands of people have joined demonstrations across Europe to oppose the planned US-led war against Iraq.

Over 180 organisations marched through Istanbul, Turkey on December 1. Tens of thousands demonstrated, holding banners saying, “We will not be America’s soldiers,” and “We’re on the side of the Iraqi people.” Statements made at a two-hour rally demanded that the Turkish government refuse to allow military bases in Turkey to be used for attacks on neighbouring Iraq.

The demonstration follows smaller recent protests. In October, 1,000 lawyers, dressed in legal regalia and organised by the Islamic Bar Association, took to the streets. The head of the association, Yucel Sayman, read a statement, “War is a disaster, war means thousands of losses of life, coffins and loss of territory.” Students at Istanbul University have demonstrated on several occasions. On November 29 marchers were met with heavy security after they held banners proclaiming, “The Middle East belongs to the Middle East public. No to US attack.”

In London on December 1, hundreds of people blocked government buildings at Whitehall, near the Houses of Parliament, in a “die-in” intended to simulate the impact of war on Iraq. Protesters, including comedian and television presenter Mark Thomas and a Green member of the European parliament, Caroline Lucas, dressed up in bandages and bloodied clothes. The peaceful protest, organised by *Voices in the Wilderness UK*, which opposes sanctions against Iraq, was confronted by police riot vans. One arrest was made.

In Brussels, on November 10, up to 5,000 people marched against the war organised by Palestinian and anti-capitalist groups. Some of the marchers were

confronted by riot police and water cannon following stone throwing at US businesses and police.

The recent NATO summit in Prague in November drew up to 4,000 antiwar demonstrators. Protesters from a variety of protest groups marched in the face of extremely heavy policing. They also held a weekend of discussion and film shows. Some 300 protesters were turned back at the Czech border and held protests at the border posts where their progress had been barred.

The demonstrations in London, Prague and Brussels follow the huge September and October antiwar demonstrations in London and Florence in which, hundreds of thousands took part.

The coming weeks will be marked by continual demonstrations and protests in cities and at military bases around the globe, which will grow in intensity and number as war approaches.

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Meanwhile, other initiatives have been taken to expose the consequences of war, or to pressure governments into opposing it.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has launched an unprecedented legal case against British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, to prevent the British government declaring war, or using force against Iraq, after December 8—the date when Iraq is due to submit its weaponry list to the United Nations. The case is supported by several MPs.

A “global letter” signed by numerous pacifist, green, legal and religious leaders, and signed by 318 organisations, calls for the US to eliminate its own weapons of mass destruction rather than launch a war against Iraq.

A theatrically inspired group in England, describing

themselves as the Gloucestershire Weapons Inspectors, have taken to turning up at the nearby Fairford US air base demanding to inspect the facility for B2 Stealth bombers. The group's press release complains, "We have compiled a dossier of evidence but have so far met with only obstruction in our attempts to inspect possible weapons sites." The group notes that the B2 bombers that will be used for attacks on Iraq have been used in Kosovo and Afghanistan to drop cluster bombs and depleted and natural uranium alloy munitions.



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