

Amsterdam protest confirms widespread antiwar sentiment

Our correspondent
17 February 2003

Some 75,000 people from all over the Netherlands and neighbouring regions took to the streets of Amsterdam on Saturday to join the international demonstrations against a war on Iraq. The huge protest march lasted several hours and included people of all ages and many national origins. It confirmed that the overwhelming majority of the Dutch are strongly opposed to any military action against Iraq. Official opinion polls recently revealed that 89 percent of the Dutch population reject the war drive of the US government and its allies.

The protest was also directed against the stance of the Dutch caretaker government under Jan-Peter Balkenende, which supports the aggressive course of the Bush administration. The Balkenende government has agreed to deploy its own troops to the Turkish border with Iraq. It has also allowed the US military to use Dutch bases for the conduct of the war and for the training of exiled Iraqis who are meant to back the regime installed by the US in post-war Iraq.

The demonstration was organised by the “*platform tegen den nieuwe oorlog*” (platform against the new war), a grouping of 216 organisations and parties from the left and radical left. The speeches held before and after the march were dominated by representatives of established parties such as the Socialist Party (SP) and the Dutch and German Greens (GroenLinks and Bündnis90/Die Grünen) and a certain layer of the political establishment opposing a war under the leadership of the American government. Representatives of the Christian Church and cultural groups also spoke on the platform.

While various speakers pointed to the economic interests of the United States and the oil industry and demanded that “No blood for oil” should be shed, they also tried to restrict the demonstration to purely

pacifistic protest. They refrained from raising any wider political and social questions concerning the situation in the Netherlands or worldwide, and sought to transform the protest into an appeal to the right-wing Balkenende government.

In opposition to such a political orientation, the *World Socialist Web Site* intervened in the protest and called for an independent mobilisation of the international working class against war, the attacks on living standards and democratic rights, and the capitalist system as a whole. Supporters of the WSWs distributed thousands of leaflets, sold Marxist literature and discussed these policies with protest participants.

So great was the interest in the statement of the *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board—“The tasks facing the antiwar movement”—that the leaflets in Dutch, English and German were literally snatched out of the hands of the distributors. Many of the protestors already knew the WSWs and said they were reading it regularly.

Anna, a 43-year-old nurse, told a reporter from the WSWs: “This war is just about oil, not about human rights or democracy. There are many dictators in the world and our governments are not interested in them or even support them. So why is Bush going to war against Saddam Hussein? Because he sits on huge oil resources. The great majority of the European population is against this war, but still more people have to be informed about the war and have to join the protests.”

Marijke, a 56-year-old carpenter, said: “This war is immoral as is every war conducted for economic interests. The Balkenende government supports it although it has no right to do so and although 90 percent of the Dutch are completely against the war. I am here with my friend and tens of thousands to show

the world that the government is not acting in our name.”

Cecille, a 28-year-old student from Amsterdam, declared: “This war is not for the sake of the Iraqi people. You only have to look at Afghanistan to see that the United States and their allies don’t go to war for the sake of the people. The international movement for peace is growing bigger and bigger and this gives me hope. The international movement should also take up other questions, such as ecological developments, labour rights and democratic values.”

Hassan, a 52-year-old teacher, said. “I am from Iraq and I have been living in Holland for the last 25 years. Of course Saddam Hussein is a dictator and many Iraqis want to get rid of him. But the dictator Hussein is a creature of the USA, they promoted him, they supported his war against Iran and they gave him weapons of mass destruction. Mr. Rumsfeld himself was in Iraq in the 1980s to help Saddam Hussein.

“The effects of the 1991 Gulf War and the economic sanctions are a catastrophe and claimed the lives of nearly one million Iraqis. A new war will multiply the suffering. The Bush administration ignores that Iraq has its own history, that we have strong political and cultural traditions. Maybe they will find a few Iraqis from the opposition who are desperate enough to support Bush’s plans. But the Iraqi people will not tolerate a re-colonisation of their country. They will soon rise against the American occupation and their accomplices.”



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