

200,000 march in Paris against Iraq war

A WSWS reporting team
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Some 200,000 people marched in Paris on Saturday to protest the impending US war against Iraq. The procession, which gathered protesters from every region of France, took several hours to march from the Place Denfert-Rochereau in the south of Paris to the Place de la Bastille in the central east.

Students, trade unionists, professional workers, North African and African immigrants joined in the march. In keeping with recent French tradition, there were no speeches and the huge crowd dispersed in the early evening hours.

The protesters carried signs denouncing George W. Bush and the US government, accusing Washington of planning a brutal war for oil. In a play on words, numerous demonstrators condemned the threatened “Busherie” (*butchery* in French is *boucherie*). “We demand the veto” was another slogan (referring to France’s veto power in the United Nations Security Council). Others shouted, “We are all against war,” “Bush, murderer!” and “With the UN or not, we don’t want war.” Signs read “Bush and Rambo, the couple of the year,” “War is not a game” and “Give peace a chance” (the latter two in English).

The banner at the head of the march read, “No to war against Iraq. Justice and peace in the Middle East.” Among those leading the procession were French Communist Party (PCF) officials Marie-George Buffet and Jean-Claude Gayssot, Green Party leader Noël Mamère, the secretary general of the CGT (the CP-linked union) Bernard Thibault, head of the CFDT (the union aligned with the Socialist Party) François Chérèque, the leader of the Farmers Confederation José Bové and Alain Krivine of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR).

Some 80 organizations, political parties and trade unions sponsored the protest, including the official left and some of the “far-left” parties, as well as the anti-globalization movement Attac, the League for the

Rights of Man, the Movement for Peace, the Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between Peoples, and Palestine solidarity committees. There were also delegations on the march from Lutte Ouvrière, the anarcho-syndicalist movements and a host of other organizations. Trade unions represented included the CGT, CFDT, SUD (a small left-wing union) and, in far smaller numbers, the Catholic unions. Several dozen Americans also joined the demonstration in Paris.

The leadership of the Socialist Party (PS) was out in particular force, with the party secretary, François Hollande, and former ministers Laurent Fabius, Jack Lang, Pierre Mauroy, Martine Aubry and Elisabeth Guigou all in attendance. This delegation had a certain significance. PS leaders have generally declined to show their faces in public since the party’s electoral debacle last spring.

Demonstrations took place in 80 French cities, among the largest in Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nice and Marseilles. Organizers estimate that at least half a million people participated in these protests.

As substantial as they were, the protests in France were dwarfed by the mass demonstrations in Britain, Germany and Spain. The present international and national political conjuncture has a great deal to do with this. The ongoing conflict between American and French imperialist interests has permitted the government of Jacques Chirac to posture as “peace-loving” and “humanitarian.” This misconception is reinforced by the media and the official left.

The demonstrations had something of the character of officially sponsored events. While neither the government party, the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), nor its coalition partner, the UDF (Union for French Democracy), supported the demonstrations, 15 right-wing deputies signed an anti-war appeal and Philippe de Villiers, the anti-European ultra-rightist, told journalists that he intended to participate in the

march.

The PS and PCF (Communist Party) officials present in Paris expressed their basic agreement with the Chirac regime's policy. Hollande reaffirmed the support of the PS for the government over Iraq, explaining that this was "the role of an opposition conscious of its responsibilities." Buffet of the PCF told the press, "We are here to say no to war, yes to peace. Today, we all feel a bit like citizens of the world in view of the breadth of the mobilization on a world scale. I find that the position of France is courageous, but I hope that this position will be held right to the end." Thibault of the CGT commented, "The position of France has been firm. It is to be wished for that our country rests on the principles that boil down to one thing: international law."

Others like Jacques Nikonoff of Attac merely implied their support for Chirac by raining all their fire on the US government. He hoped that "the rejection of war which is expressed in the polls concretizes itself in the streets" because "the desire of the US to consolidate its imperial supremacy goes hand in hand with neo-liberal globalization."

There was no question about the depth of hostility felt by the mass of demonstrators for Bush and US imperialism or their genuine horror about the consequences of the impending war. In discussions many also expressed scepticism about the motives of Chirac in opposing the American plans, pointing to the current French colonial-style intervention in the Ivory Coast.

Supporters of the WSWS intervened in the demonstration, distributing thousands of copies of the French version of the statement, "The tasks facing the anti-war movement." Interviews with a number of demonstrators in Paris will be posted in the coming days.



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