

Reports on February 14-16 antiwar demonstrations

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The World Socialist Web Site is continuing its coverage of the historic international demonstrations held last weekend to protest the US war drive against Iraq. Today we are posting reports on demonstrations in Uruguay, Argentina and Sweden.

We encourage our readers to send in further reports from last weekend's rallies, as well as comments on the demonstrations and the statement that was distributed in six languages from the World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board entitled, "The tasks facing the antiwar movement". We also invite readers to access the full coverage of last weekend's rallies.

Massive anti-war protests in Uruguay and Argentina

On February 14, an estimated 70,000 people marched down Montevideo's Avenida 18 de Julio in what was the largest Latin American demonstration against a US war on Iraq. This turnout, in a country of little more than 3 million inhabitants, was an undeniable reflection of the overwhelming opposition that exists to the Bush administration's militarist policies in a country whose government is one of Washington's closest allies.

Other demonstrations were reported in the interior of the country, including in the cities of Maldonado, Salto, Florida and Colonia del Sacramento. Thousands of Uruguayans and Brazilians also gathered on the border between their two countries for a demonstration held under the slogan "Frontier of peace against war."

Meanwhile, across the Rio de la Plata in Buenos Aires, some 50,000 Argentines marched in the pouring rain behind a banner reading "No to imperialist war against Iraq." The march was seen as the most politically broad since the end of the military dictatorship. Unemployed groups and unions were joined by religious communities, human rights organizations like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo as well as intellectuals and artists. Entire families also

marched carrying hand-lettered signs.

The demonstrators filled up more than 10 blocks in the march toward the US Embassy. Some protesters burned a US flag, chanting, "If you don't stop the war, we'll burn down the embassy."

The Friday evening march in Montevideo began in Plaza Cagancha and proceeded to the Universidad de la Republica. Along the route, thousands gathered on sidewalks and balconies to cheer the protesters.

At the rally that concluded the march, a 10-year-old girl read out a statement calling for peace: "Why are wars made?" she asked. "For ambition to have more riches and more power. But in the end, what is more important, that or us, the people?... Don't they think about the children and the world they are leaving us?"

An essay written by Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano denouncing the war threat as a US grab for Iraq's oil was also read. It said in part: "[T]he pretexts for the coming slaughter offend one's intelligence. The only country that has used nuclear weapons against a civilian population, the country that unleashed the atomic bombs that annihilated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, wants to convince us that Iraq is a danger to humanity. If President Bush loves humanity so much and really wants to avert the greatest threat that humanity suffers, why doesn't he bomb himself instead of planning a new extermination of innocent peoples."

Polls taken recently indicate that 83 percent of Argentines and 79 percent of Uruguayans oppose a war on Iraq "under any circumstances," while 89 percent of Argentines and 84 percent of Uruguayans oppose any participation by their governments in military action.

The massive turnout in Uruguay is due in part to the widespread suspicion that the government of President Jorge Batlle may be preparing to support a US war as part of a deal to get the Bush administration's backing for more favorable terms from the International

Monetary Fund on foreign debt repayment.

Last year, Batlle served as Washington's errand boy in presenting a motion denouncing Cuba before the United Nations Human Rights Commission. As a result, the country was declared an economic model, even though its debt is mounting even faster than Argentina's.

In recent weeks, a Uruguayan delegation has been carrying out negotiations aimed at winning US support before the IMF, while Paula Dobriansky, the US State Department's sub-secretary on world affairs, has visited Montevideo. Press sources report that in both sets of talks, the possibility of Uruguay's supporting US policy in Iraq is on the table.

Thus far, the Batlle government has avoided taking an explicit position in relation to US war policy, confining itself to statements supporting the United Nations and assertions that war is the "last resort."

For his part, Argentina's President Eduardo Duhalde has publicly rejected direct support for US military action. His Peronist predecessor, Carlos Menem, sent a warship to the Persian Gulf during the US war there in 1991, at a time when his regime proclaimed its enthusiasm for "carnal relations" with Washington. "We are not going to participate in anything that smells like war," said Duhalde recently.

Given the lack of support elsewhere, the pressure for Batlle to make an explicit endorsement of a US war as a condition for financial support will inevitably become all the greater.

Report from Stockholm protest

I am an American graduate student studying abroad in Russia at the moment. This past Saturday I was in Stockholm, where 35,000 people packed into the center of the city to protest against the war. Several people that I spoke with said that their first impression was that this was the largest demonstration (and youngest, in terms of demographics) that they could remember, at least since the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

A friend with me claimed that the size of the demonstration could be explained away by the fact that most, if not all of the major political parties in Sweden, from left to right, have come out in opposition to the war. However, despite this, one of the most striking things about the demonstration was that the speakers from these various organizations who addressed the crowd drew at best a lukewarm response, and most of

the time, silence. No one seemed to expect anything insightful or significant to come from the speakers' podium.

Everyone was quite sedate. And so I got the sense that despite the fact that people felt very motivated to come out and express their opposition to the war, they weren't looking to anybody in the political establishment to provide them with any sort of larger perspective. The most visible representatives were those from the local Kurdish organization who carried flags bearing pictures of Ocalan.

The people that I spoke with at the demonstration were very aware of the fact that the demonstration was only one of many taking part around the world. The next day, the first thing that my friends did was sit down and read out the numbers of people in various places around the world who had come out to demonstrate. It seemed to me that by and large people understood the rally in Stockholm as only one part of a larger world-wide event and were excited by that.



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