

Mass demonstrations inaugurate international antiwar movement

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The events of the past weekend constituted the largest single political protest and the first truly global demonstration against war. More than ten million people marched and rallied in over 60 countries and over 600 cities, with demonstrations taking place on every continent—including Antarctica, where scientists and others at the US McMurdo Base held a rally—in an historically unprecedented international movement against the Bush administration's planned war against Iraq.

The worldwide outpouring reflected the growing realisation that humanity is witnessing a resumption of imperialist militarism that threatens all humankind with a catastrophe. It marked a political reawakening amongst broad layers of the working class and youth.

The weekend's protests began in Melbourne, Australia, where 150,000 converged on the centre of the city.

In the United States itself, demonstrations took place in some 225 communities in a massive display of opposition to the Bush administration that was all but ignored by the American media. The largest demonstration took place in New York City, which attracted between 300,000 and 400,000 protestors. On the West Coast, another 200,000 marched, with over 100,000 demonstrating in San Francisco and 50,000 in Los Angeles.

In Canada there were antiwar protests in some 70 cities and towns, including marches of 80,000 in Toronto and 150,000 in Montreal—possibly the largest political demonstration in the country's history.

Significantly, the largest protests took place in those European states whose governments have lined up, in defiance of the popular will, behind Washington's war drive. There the protesters' anger was directed against the undemocratic actions of their respective

governments.

* In Italy, as many as 3 million people marched through Rome against the rightist government of media magnate Silvio Berlusconi.

* In Spain, 3 to 4 million took to the streets in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Seville and more than 50 other towns and cities.

* Perhaps most embarrassing of all for the Bush administration was the massive display of opposition to its key ally, Britain's Tony Blair, embodied in the 2 million demonstrators who jammed London's streets, as well as the 100,000 who protested outside the Labour Party's spring conference in Glasgow, where Blair had just spoken.

Elsewhere in Europe, scores of protests, large and small, were held.

* In Germany, more than a half million people gathered in Berlin in the largest protest in the country's post-war history. Demonstrations took place in many additional German cities.

* In Paris some 200,000 marched, while hundreds of thousands rallied in regional demonstrations held in over 80 other cities. Organisers estimate that at least half a million people participated in these protests.

* In Belgium, up to 100,000 people demonstrated in the capital, Brussels.

* In the Netherlands, 75,000 people gathered in Amsterdam.

* In Austria, 30,000 took to the streets of Vienna to oppose war against Iraq.

* In Denmark, 20,000 to 30,000 marched in the capital, Copenhagen.

* In Greece, a protest by 150,000 in Athens turned violent when police fired tear gas and clashed with anarchists.

* In Ireland, estimates of the Dublin rally range from

80,000, according to the police, to 200,000. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, 10,000 demonstrators took to the streets of the city centre. The demonstration spanned the city's traditional sectarian divide, with marchers coming from every area.

* In Croatia, 1 of the 18 countries supporting the US war drive against Iraq, the capital city, Zagreb, saw 10,000 take to the streets. Protests were also held in Osijek, Vukovar, Knin, Zadar, Sibenik, Split and Dubrovnik.

* In Belgrade, Serbia, approximately 200 protested against an attack on Iraq.

* In Mostar, around 100 Muslims and Croats united against the war.

* Demonstrations in Russia were smaller, with 400 protesting in Moscow.

In all of these demonstrations, opposition to war was combined with a broader protest against right-wing, pro-business policies and attacks on social conditions at home.

Throughout Latin America, rallies were held to protest the war plans. In Argentina, 8,000 demonstrators gathered in Buenos Aires. In Brazil, 1,500 rallied on Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach, and another 3,000 demonstrated in Sao Paulo. Close to a thousand demonstrated in Puerto Rico and protests also took place in Guatemala, Chile and Mexico.

Australia, where the right-wing Howard government is another key ally of Washington, saw its largest ever demonstrations. Sydney was brought to a standstill by over 250,000 people who massed in the city's Hyde Park and marched through the central business district. Over 100,000 gathered in Brisbane and Adelaide. Smaller demonstrations of tens of thousands took place in Perth, Canberra, Newcastle and Hobart.

In New Zealand, 22,000 people marched through Auckland and Wellington.

Scores of demonstrations took place in Asia.

* In India, protests were held in New Delhi, Srinagar in Kashmir, Madras in Tamil Nadu, and Bangalore in Karnataka.

* In Bangladesh, nearly 2,000 marched.

* In Pakistan, there were demonstrations in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Khanewal, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Hyderabad and Khairpur.

* In Sri Lanka, a protest of 250 was held outside the US embassy.

* In Seoul, capital of South Korea, hundreds of demonstrators gathered. In Thailand, some 2,000 people rallied in front of the US and UK embassies. In Malaysia hundreds demonstrated outside the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur, defying a police ban.

* In Hong Kong a demonstration of a thousand people was held.

In the Middle East, 3,000 Jews and Arabs marched together in Tel Aviv, Israel. At least 1 million people marched in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, and more than 200,000 marched in the Syrian capital of Damascus. The Gulf States also witnessed a series of protests.

On the African continent, rallies were held in South Africa (Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban), Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Rwanda, Morocco and other countries.

Teams of reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* and members of the Socialist Equality parties intervened in many demonstrations, as reported below. They distributed the WSWs Editorial Board statement, "The tasks facing the antiwar movement", which makes the case for an independent international movement of the working class against war on the basis of socialist policies.

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