Vienna demonstration draws 30,000

Our reporting team
17 February 2003

An estimated 30,000 took to the streets of Vienna on Saturday to register their opposition to a war against Iraq. The protest was called by the Austrian Social Forum (ASF) and was supported by a wide array of groups and political parties.

In the run-up to the demonstration, organisers had estimated a turnout of 5,000 to 10,000 participants. However, at the demonstration's meeting point at the Vienna Westbahnhof, 30,000 demonstrators convened, who then marched through the centre of the city to Stephansplatz. The demonstration was one of the biggest in the post-war history of Austria.

Taking part in the rally were large numbers of young people, university and school students. Also in attendance were entire families, senior citizens and large delegations of immigrant workers.

Many speakers spoke against the plans for a military offensive against Iraq. In addition to speakers from Christian organisations, also addressing the rally were representatives from Greenpeace, a feminist group, writers, actors and representatives of Iraqi, Kurdish and Palestinian groups, left-wing parties and the Greens.

Many speakers raised the Bush administration's intentions of using a war against Iraq to seize control of the oil resources of the Middle East. A number of speakers called on the United Nations to block these plans and demanded the UN Security Council oppose the war.

Over the course of last week, Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel (Peoples Party—ÖVP) ditched his reserved policy of wait and see to hesitantly line up with the German and French governments. In the process, he emphasised that Austria would always seek to put its own interests first.

The Austrian Green Party, currently preparing to join in a coalition with the conservative Peoples Party, has played a leading role in promoting Austrian national interests. The party's speaker on security policy, Peter Pilz, has not only called for the transformation of the Austrian armed forces into a professional army, but has called for stepped-up participation by Austrian troops in overseas military interventions. Pilz has also propagated open anti-Americanism, describing America as no longer an ally of Austria, but an enemy.

Actor and human rights activist, Otto Tausig, made similar comments at the rally, indicating that the mass of the American people stood behind George Bush and called upon those taking part to rally behind "old Europe", i.e., the German and French governments. He was countered with booing and whistling from the crowd.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party distributed leaflets proposing a socialist strategy against war. They met with a warm response. Many participants on the march said they already followed the web site and valued its reports. A student from Vienna said that the WSWS was one of the few media sources to provide honest and accurate analyses.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site