

# **Britain: Thousands join campaign of civil disobedience to oppose war vs. Iraq**

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Thousands of people joined protests across the United Kingdom on Thursday March 20, to protest the launching of war against Iraq by the United States and Britain.

Numerous rallies and demonstrations of varying sizes were spontaneously convened in towns and cities—from Edinburgh to Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, Leeds, Sheffield and Cambridge—in response to a call by the Stop the War coalition for a campaign of civil disobedience in the event of war.

The protests took place throughout the day, as people awoke to news that the US-led war against Iraq had officially begun, and continued until the evening.

The largest protest was in London where some 6,000 people took part in a demonstration and rally in Parliament Square near the Houses of Commons. There was a massive police presence in the area as people—mainly students and schoolchildren—gathered throughout the day.

Earlier the government had announced that some 1,500 extra police, many armed, would be deployed across the capital in response to a possible “terror attack”.

Outside parliament, police responded forcibly as about 100 students attempted a sit-down protest. Children, some as young as 12 years old, were physically dragged off the street by police officers as a crowd gathered chanting “leave the kids alone”. The BBC reported that a police officer was seen punching one protester in the face.

Outside Downing Street, the prime minister’s residence, a noisy crowd gathered in response to a plea by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament for Britons to protest against the “illegal, immoral war”.

There were also clashes between police and protestors in other cities.

In Brighton, police used CS gas to prevent protestors forcing their way into the town hall.

Bristol city centre was sealed off as several hundred people gathered to protest the war. Two people were arrested.

In Cambridge, 300 demonstrators staged a sit-down protest blocking traffic whilst in Newcastle hundreds of protestors caused major hold ups on the roads as demonstrators lay down in the central roadway.

Common to all the protests was the large numbers of young people participating, many in defiance of threats of suspension from their schools and colleges by education authorities.

In Scotland, hundreds gathered in the capital Edinburgh, near to the Scottish parliament for a spontaneous rally. The area was closed to traffic as the 500-strong protestors, mainly schoolchildren and students mounted their protest. Later 3,000 people demonstrated up the Royal Mile to the Scottish parliament.

In Glasgow people began assembling in George Square, in the city centre from noon. Many were school students, from both state and private schools, who had brought their own banners and other protest materials as they prepared for the daylong vigil.

Throughout the day the protestors led chants against the war and mounted an impromptu demonstration. Traffic was continuously disrupted as students staged sit-down protests in several areas around the city.

Elsewhere in Scotland, protests were held in Aberdeen, Inverness and Lerwick. Stirling University was forced to close as 1,500 students and lecturers joined a protest rally. Later in the day, antiwar protestors briefly held up a train of football fans traveling through the Lake District for the UEFA cup match between Liverpool and Celtic.



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