

Millions march in Europe against Iraq war

Our reporters
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On the first weekend after the US bombing of Baghdad, antiwar demonstrations took place in hundreds of cities across Europe. The main demand raised at the demonstrations was for an immediate end to the brutal war being waged by the American and British administrations.

In Italy, hundreds of thousands of young people and workers reacted immediately to the outbreak of war with spontaneous strikes and school boycotts Thursday. Universities were occupied, trains stopped and shops closed. Flags were flown at half mast in many local authorities with peace emblems and rainbow coloured flags hung out from windows. In response to public pressure the three biggest trade unions in Italy—CGIL, CISL and UIL—called a two-hour strike Friday.

Mass demonstrations took place March 22 in Milan where 100,000 turned out, as well as in Bologna, Florence and Venice. In Rome two separate protests took place—one organised by opponents of the war together with the Cobas (COMITATIDI BASE—Rank and File Committee) trade union movement. The second was a rally called by Italy's Olive Tree opposition alliance. The statue of the unknown soldier in Rome was decked with a large portrait of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi sporting a military helmet. In Naples, thousands of young people took part in a march through the middle of the city which was due to end at the NATO base in Bagnoli.

On March 23, 20,000 demonstrators took part in a blockade of the NATO base at Sigonella near Catania in Sicily. A large banner at the protest proclaimed: "*Guerra alla guerra dei padroni*"—"Make war on the war of the bosses". Demonstrators called for the reversion of this base, which is of central importance for the US air force, to civilian use.

An estimated 150,000 people took part in antiwar demonstrations in a total of 30 cities in France, with large rallies taking place in Marseilles and Strasbourg. Eighty thousand took part in the central demonstration in Paris. In the Greek capital of Athens, 300,000 people marched.

In Brussels, the Belgian capital, 25,000 demonstrators

marched through the city centre in a colourful and peaceful demonstration which passed the US embassy. The embassy had already seen clashes the previous day between demonstrators and police, who used water cannon. Again on Saturday a section of marchers halted in front of the embassy and shouted, "Close the embassy of the terrorists." Once again police intervened and made arrests.

On March 21 university and elementary school students in Brussels joined a demonstration held by European Trade Union organisations. The trade union demonstration was directed against the privatisation policies pursued by the European Union and the heads of state from 15 European countries who were meeting in Brussels for the traditional spring summit of the EU. Around 25,000 trade unionists from Belgium, France, Germany and Austria took part in the protest.

Antiwar demonstrations also took place in the Swiss cities of Aarau, Basel, Bern, Burgdorf, Langenthal, Lausanne, Lucerne, Zug and Zurich.

Amsterdam

Around 70,000 protesters marched through the city of Amsterdam Saturday to protest against the US-led war in Iraq. As had been the case February 15, the demonstration included young and old of all nationalities and from all social layers. Together with the placards and banners stating "No War", and "Niet in mijn Naam" (Not in my Name), other homemade placards declared "Stop the Bush-oil oligarchy" and "People of America: Reclaim your government."

The organisers of the march, Platform against a New War, went to some lengths to keep the protest apolitical, unlike the February 15 protest. Rally speakers included members of immigrant groups, the church and voluntary organisations, interspersed with music.

There were no speakers from political organisations or parties. In a distorted fashion this reflects the profound crisis of bourgeois politics in the Netherlands, which has been without a government since January. In the elections at that time the conservative Christian Democrat CDA

secured a slim victory over the social democratic Labour Party (PvdA). After a number of fruitless attempts to establish a coalition between the CDA and the right-wing LPF (List Pim Fortuyn), the CDA and PvdA began discussions last week about a renewed coalition.

For both parties, however, the Iraq war has disrupted their calculations. The PvdA, like the Social Democratic Party in Germany, was only prepared to support a war with a UN mandate. For its part the CDA stands solidly behind the war policies of the US and Britain.

Due to these differences a meeting between the two parties planned for last Wednesday was cancelled. In a television interview the leader of the CDA declared there were no immediate plans for a new meeting.

It was no surprise therefore to find many participants on the march disgusted with the state of official politics in the Netherlands. "Politics in the Netherlands is a farce," said Yvonne, a theatre technician. "I am really disgusted. The CDA and PvdA are searching for common ground in typical Netherlands fashion, but the times for consensus have passed. The entire country is split and hangs in the balance. Nothing functions anymore." She was also disturbed over international developments. "We should not forget that the enormous levels of poverty worldwide will only be worsened by these wars that are beginning, including poverty in the US itself. There they spend huge amounts of money on prisons. That is their response to poverty."

Mozaffar, an unemployed Iranian from the neighbouring city of Utrecht, was also convinced that the war against Iraq was just the start of a series of wars. "In reality the first war began with Afghanistan, now we have the war against Iraq and further wars will follow. What is taking place is an international offensive by big business against the people of the world. What is needed is an international answer based on opposition to the capitalist system."

A correspondent sent this further report from Amsterdam:

Already at 12 noon, one hour before the official beginning, people crowded in front of the Theaterstraat theatre company's stage on a red and yellow truck. Members of the Dutch Socialist Party had already run out of rattles to hand out to fellow demonstrators, though they still had some red whistles. Greenpeace handed out white squares, to symbolize being squarely pro-peace. A woman of South African origin dressed up like a butterfly for peace. Johan Vlemmix, leader of the small Dutch Party of the Future, handed out small paper blue peace flags with

white doves on them (a bigger one of these is with the voluntary human shields in Baghdad).

Signs read: "Oorlog oliedom [War for oil is stupid]"—"Not one man, not one woman, not one cent, for the war"—"Stop Dutch participation in the war"—"No Saddam, Bush, Dutch government support for war"—"United Rogue States of America"—"Stop war for oil and money"—"Against imperialism, for international friendship".

There were green and black Greenpeace banners; symbols of the anarchist punk rock band Crass; red and black anarchist flags; red flags with white letters from the New Communist Party of the Netherlands; white flags with red tomatoes from the Socialist Party; flags from Lebanon, Morocco, Iraq, Palestine, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Turkey, Kurdistan, the Moluccas. Turkish women from Amsterdam, Iraqi refugees and Moluccans were present. There were people from all regions of the Netherlands, and of many nationalities, including African, African American, Filipino and Chilean.

The demonstration went from the Dam to Paleisstraat, Rozengracht, Marnixstraat, Leidseplein, Museumplein. The demonstration was so large that although the first marchers had arrived long ago on the Museumplein, many people still had not left the Dam, the starting point. Many people encouraged the demonstrators from their windows, or by honking car horns, etc.

At the rally, to loud applause, Faisal Nasser of the Iraqi Platform in The Netherlands denounced the war and its terrible effects on the Iraqi people. He stated that Saddam Hussein should quit. However, war was absolutely the wrong way to bring that about.

A representative of an Iranian women refugees organization said that George W. Bush violated international law, like Adolf Hitler in 1939. As Franco and Mussolini had supported Hitler during the Second World War, the present prime ministers of Spain and Italy, [José Maria] Aznar and [Silvio] Berlusconi, supported Bush.



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