

Hundreds of thousands take to the streets across Germany

Berlin rocked by a series of mass demonstrations

Our reporters
21 March 2003

Hundreds of thousands took part in spontaneous demonstrations across Germany Thursday to protest the beginning of a war with Iraq. Tens of thousands, consisting of predominantly school students and youth, held rallies and marches in the cities of Dortmund, Essen, Duisburg and Bochum in the industrial region of the Ruhr.

Over 15,000 school and high school students demonstrated in Stuttgart, 13,000 in Bremen and 10,000 in Hannover. Over 10,000 also turned out in the cities of Cologne, Kassel, Saarbrücken. In the East German city of Rostock 10,000 protested and 20,000 in Leipzig. Additional strikes by school students took place in Aachen, Siegen, Mönchengladbach, Tübingen and Hamburg.

Berlin

As soon as German radio and television announced the news of US military action against Iraq, tens of thousands of school students left their classes in the German capital and assembled in Berlin's central Alexanderplatz to demonstrate their anger and concern. Police estimated a total of 50,000 students and school classes who assembled to march through the middle of Berlin and protest outside the heavily guarded and barricaded American Embassy.

Many youth and children had painted "no war" on their faces or etched into their hair. Some bore banners calling for the prosecution of Bush as a war criminal and others protested against the inevitable deaths of many Iraqi children in the planned bombing campaign. Students expressed their solidarity with ordinary Americans and emphasised "Bush is not America".

After the body of the demonstration had dispersed, a group of about a hundred lay down in front of the

American embassy, depicting themselves as symbolic victims of war and blocking traffic. Another group proceeded onto one of the main traffic hubs in Berlin and occupied the Siegesaule crossing for over half an hour. Huge traffic jams developed within a short period of time, but it was notable that many car drivers expressed their sympathy with the demonstrators and waited patiently until the protest finished. At the same time as school students demonstrated, a mass rally of students met at Humboldt University to condemn the war and express their solidarity with the protests.

Later in the day, at 6 p.m., a further protest of over 50,000 assembled at Alexanderplatz for a central rally against the war. Again many students and young people were evident on the demonstration, this time supplemented by those who had come directly from work to express their indignation and outrage at the Bush war.

The central meeting was held under the slogan "No help for the war", referring to the German government's collusion in assisting the operations of American military forces from German bases as well as allowing US planes to use German airspace. At the end of the demonstration protesters marched to the American Embassy and the German Foreign Ministry and held further rallies demanding that the German Social Democrat-Green Party government refuse to cooperate with American war manoeuvres. A third demonstration marched from the Berlin suburb of Kreuzburg to protest outside the Berlin headquarters of the Social Democratic Party.

Supporters of the WSWs handed out thousands of leaflets at the protests and spoke with demonstrators. Alant has dual Canadian citizenship and lives and

works in Berlin. He told our reporters:

“When I heard the bombing had started this morning my first reaction was one of disgust with Bush and the entire American government. The start of the war is hardly a surprise, they have been gunning up for it for months. Nevertheless it is criminal what they are doing. Despite all the pious words from Bush about minimising casualties amongst civilians I am convinced they are going to organise a bloodbath in Iraq with the possible loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.

“The US is seeking to decimate the Iraqi army and there will be inevitably huge losses of civilian life. To show what it is capable of, only last week the US military showed off its new “mother of all bombs”, the most explosive “conventional” bomb short of nuclear weapons.

“As to the reasons for the war then I have to answer oil, oil and once more oil. Iraq is of huge importance geostrategically in the Middle East. In addition to oil, command of the region by the US also allows them control of huge gas reserves. It will also change the balance of forces with regard to other resources—in the Caucasus, for example. The war shows that the neo-conservatives around Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz have been able to win the overhand with their extremely aggressive foreign policy against those in the US government who favoured a more isolationist approach. The repercussions for the Middle East and Israel in particular will be enormous.

“The position of the German government is completely inconsistent. They say they oppose the war but then continue to make the war possible through the use of German facilities and airspace. I have personally presented a legal representation against Schröder’s support for the US war effort, which is in contravention of article 26 of the German constitution as well as paragraph 80 of the German Criminal Code. It is hypocrisy to state you are against the war and then violate German law to give backhand support. Finally let me say that I am a regular reader of the *World Socialist Web Site* and I am very impressed by the intellectual level of the work of the site. Keep it up!”

Klaus lives in Berlin, has travelled extensively in the Middle East and is a regular reader of the *World Socialist Web Site*: “When I heard the news of the beginning of bombing this morning I was distraught. The loss of life will be appalling—mothers, children,

innocent civilians, but also the soldiers who are being pressed into fighting such a callous war.

“I read the article on the WSWS web site this morning on Bush’s 20 lies and agree totally. He is forced to twist and bend the truth to justify his crimes. He made a short speech, but nevertheless I thought I counted more than 20 lies. Anyway, your article dealt with the most important ones. The war against Iraq is Bush’s first preventive war but I am afraid it will not be the last. It is entirely possible that he will strike out at other countries—even his former allies are not safe.

“With regard to the stance of the German government, I have to say I do not trust it. This is the same Schröder and Fischer who went to war in Kosovo. I was opposed to what they did then and was active in the movement against that war. I do not trust them now. I also think it is correct to raise the social crisis as you do in your coverage. One of the reasons for this war is to divert from the social crisis in America itself. There is also a connection here in Germany. Schröder made his speech demanding the break-up of the German welfare state and the final imposition of ‘American conditions’. Such American conditions have played an important role in driving Bush to war.”



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