

Protests in France against the war

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Opposition to the war against Iraq received a powerful expression in demonstrations in over 100 towns and cities all over France as part of the international movement on March 15.

Up to 80,000 in Paris and 10,000 in Marseilles were on the street. In Amiens, with nearly 2,000 demonstrators, it was the largest protest yet against the war.

All the trade unions, different currents of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, antiracist organisations, ATTAC—the anti-globalisation movement and delegations from the radical left Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), Lutte Ouvrière and the Parti des Travailleurs actively mobilised for the demonstrations as well as numerous ad hoc committees or umbrella groups..

A reader from Paris reports :

“In Paris, the demonstration , which numbered about 60,000, left the Place de la Nation for the Place de la République behind a banner saying ‘No to war against Iraq. Justice and peace in the Middle East’.

“This ‘day of action for’ peace was organised by a committee of several dozen trade unions, pacifist, antiracist, human rights organisations, groups supporting the Palestinians, the Kurds, the Chileans, Argentineans, Colombians and Zapatistas, Attac, as well as the political parties of the Left (the Greens were virtually absent) and far left parties.

“The march was varied and colourful, lively and good-natured. The banners, placards and notices were unanimous in declaring ‘No to the war’ and the slogan, chanted by all the groups ‘ONU ou pas, la guerre on n’en veut pas’—‘With or without the UN, we don’t want the war’. A very moderate pacifism was, in fact, the common denominator of the demonstrators and the varied organisations.

“Every group brought its colour: the red of the Lutte Ouvrière contingent or the Turkish Marxist-Leninist

Party, the black of the clothes worn, of the flags and banners of the anarchists or of a group of women, the many colours of the left Solidaire trade union marchers and the rainbow colours of the flags of individuals. Most impressive were the banners of a Kurdish group bearing portraits of Oçalan and the immense Palestinian banners flanking the march held by tens of demonstrators.

“The groups had their own slogans: ‘Against the war we will not lay down our arms’ for the Young Communists, ‘No money for the war, money for hospitals and maternity clinics’ or ‘No blood for oil’ from the Parti des Travailleurs and ‘Queers don’t dig war’ from the Panthères Roses—the Pink Panthers. The pro-Palestinian groups repeated ‘Bush, Sharon murderers’, the anarchist CNT chanted ‘Against the war! General strike!’, the French Communist Party loud speaker blared out ‘Come all you pacifist people...’ to the tune of the French national anthem, the Marseillaise, and the student union UNEF made the Mexican wave singing ‘Go on Chirac!’ (like a football supporters’ chant).”

The main thrust of all these organisations was the exertion of pressure on President Jacques Chirac to maintain opposition to unilateral action by Bush, and to exercise the veto in the UN security council. Nowhere was there in evidence the fact that France had voted for Resolution 1441 which makes Iraq a de facto UN protectorate

In Amiens, Danièle, a retired teacher, told the WSWs: “Chirac is doing a good thing opposing the war. If he does a good thing we should support him.” She agreed that the protest by itself would not change things, but added: “Many drops of water make a flood.”

There were similar organisations to those described in Paris. The Young Communists were distributing a leaflet which said, “We must continue to demand a

peaceful and diplomatic solution to this crisis” and “Let’s demand the ending of the embargo which is starving the Iraqi people and reinforcing Saddam Hussein’s power. The highly nationalist group of former Socialist Party minister of the Interior Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen—the Citizens’ Republican Movement—opposed the “American crusade for world domination,” judged that “France’s policy is the most responsible”—an endorsement of Chirac and Raffarin—and said that “for the citizens it’s a question of supporting the French veto to this unjust war.”

The LCR explained the differences between Chirac and Bush as a battle over oil resources: “It is true that the interests of the ruling classes of France and Europe differ from the plans of the Bush administration. The interests of the TotalElfFina group are not the same as those of Texaco.” But they could not, just as in the presidential run-off between Chirac and the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen, quite bring themselves to show clear opposition to Chirac, whose government led by Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, is engaged in a wholesale assault on pensions, education and other social gains: “We will see if Chirac goes the whole way in his opposition by using the veto?” Chirac has made it quite clear to the Americans and his political supporters that a veto would by no means signify that France would not participate in the colonising of Iraq and the race for the spoils.



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