

A million march in Spain against war

Police fire rubber bullets at demonstrators

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An estimated million people joined marches and demonstrations in Spain in major cities and regional centres last weekend in protest against the US-led attack on Iraq. Half a million demonstrated in Barcelona with over 100,000 protesting in Madrid.

Police attacked demonstrators outside the US Embassy in Madrid, injuring 81. Thirty police officers were also hurt in the clashes. Many of the injuries were caused by rubber bullets, used liberally by police during the weekend. Police injuries tended to be sustained by bricks and bottles.

The March 22 demonstration in Madrid started peacefully enough, early afternoon, led by members of the opposition parties and the trade unions.

By 8 p.m. in the evening, however, riot police surrounded a section of the march, comprising approximately 10,000 mainly young people, taunting the protestors, gesticulating, charging their guns and waving truncheons.

An object apparently thrown by the crowd acted as the trigger for a police charge into the protestors, who were then chased into adjacent streets by the police. As people used rubbish bins to form barricades, police opened fire with plastic bullets, hitting anyone in their path.

A 500,000-strong demonstration in Barcelona the same day passed peacefully, although paint, eggs and stones were thrown against a government building. A 23-year-old man was arrested. Another group of young demonstrators drew slogans on a mobile unit of Spanish Television.

The protests were part of a series of demonstrations that have been held across Spain since the military onslaught on Iraq begun early March 20.

Earlier in the week hundreds of thousands of university students throughout Spain left classes to

march on government buildings and American Consulates. They chanted slogans calling for the resignation of Aznar's People's Party government and for a general strike against the war. Flags at the University of Rovira i Virgili (URV) in Tarragona were lowered to half-mast "as a signal of mourning and solidarity with the innocent victims of the conflict" said the university and "will remain so till the end of the war".

People's Party buildings, including individual politicians' houses, and US consulates have been a particular target for young people's anger with eggs, paint, bottles and animal blood thrown at them during the last three days. Now protected by riot police, protestors have taken to spitting at them.

Many big demonstrations also took place on Saturday in smaller towns and cities. The protest against war was often linked with hostility to the government's domestic policies. A home-made banner on one read: "Another massacre we will not make us forget the rubbish work contracts, the miserable salaries, the mortgaged life. NO TO STATE TERRORISM".



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