

Britain: School pupils protest war vs. Iraq

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Thousands of Secondary School pupils around Britain walked out of lessons to join antiwar demonstrations on Wednesday March 5. Protests took place in London, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Sheffield.

Around 500 protested outside the Houses of Parliament and outside Prime Minister Tony Blair's residence in Downing Street, in a demonstration organised by members of the Stop the War Coalition and timed to coincide with the student antiwar demonstrations later that day in the United States.

Three pupils, two 16-year-old boys and a 17-year-old girl, were arrested in Cambridge on suspicion of public order offences and two 16-year-old boys, pupils at Prince Henry's Grammar School in Otley, near Leeds, were suspended for campaigning for the rally the day before.

Hundreds of Secondary School pupils from schools throughout Sheffield, South Yorkshire walked out of lessons at 11 a.m. From various points across the city the pupils, aged between 11 and 17 years, marched to the Peace Gardens in the city centre. On a lively and good natured demonstration they chanted, "what do we want, peace now", "one, two, three, four—we don't want your dirty war", "five, six, seven, eight—spend it on the welfare state" and "welfare not warfare".

Amongst the schools represented on the demonstration were large numbers from King Edward VII, High Storrs, Silverdale, Tapton and Notre Dame. Small numbers of university level students also participated after some of the younger pupils made an appeal during a Fine Arts lecture.

The pupils had decided to quit school and join the protest despite education officers in the city issuing a notice to all head teachers not to allow them time off. The students continued their protest for more than two hours, stopping spontaneously at various locations across the city to chant their slogans.

World Socialist Web Site interviewed several of the demonstrators.

Malcolm Bush from Castle College told the WSW: "I'm here because I don't want a war. [Prime Minister] Blair's refusal to listen is disgusting. There should not be governments. Government is supposed to be the voice of the people but Blair won't listen to us.

"He should be kicked out. I don't know why it hasn't been done. It would get enough support".

Heather from King Edward VII explained: "Blair and Bush just want oil and the chance to try out their weapons. I've got two friends in the Royal Navy and I want them to be safe. I also have Iraqi friends at school and I don't want the Iraqis to die. Above all, I don't want war because it is wrong and a waste of time."

Her friend Georgia, also from King Edward VII said: "Blair and Bush are greedy. They just want Iraq's oil.

"Even at school you are taught that when you have an argument, you don't fight, you sit down and talk it out.

"Government should be listening to the people and they're not. Governments are supposed to help us but in what way does this war help us? We don't want this. The vast majority of pupils at our school don't support the war and many more walked out than are actually on this demonstration".

An Iraqi passer-by, who is Kurdish, sympathised with the demonstrators. He said he was completely opposed to Saddam Hussein who is a brutal dictator, "but I don't want this war because it won't bring democracy to Iraq. Instead the Iraqi people will suffer, the Kurdish people will suffer and now there is the rumour that Turkey will be allowed to do whatever it wants to the Kurds."



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