

10,000 march in Berlin against Iraq war

A WSWS reporting team
14 April 2003

An estimated 10,000 antiwar demonstrators marched Saturday from the headquarters of the conservative opposition (Christian Democratic Party—CDU) in West Berlin to a final rally at the city's central Brandenburg Gate.

The numbers turning out on the protest were far fewer than had been anticipated by the march organisers, with some undoubtedly deterred from attending as a result of biased media reports of an end to the war and of some Iraqis welcoming the troops. At the same time, it was also clear that a combination of disorientation and outright adaptation to the political line of the German government on the part of the organisers of the march had helped spread confusion.

The leaflet distributed to mobilise for the march by the organisers—Axis of Freedom—noted that the German government had conceded important aid to US-British military operations by allowing the unhindered operation of US bases in Germany and the use of German airspace. In the same sentence, however, the leaflet then went on to declare that the actions of the German government had been “helpful in isolating the US-led ‘coalition of the willing’ internationally.” None of the handful of speakers at the rally Saturday—who came from a range of single-issue protest groups and the church—was able to explain how a government which was actively collaborating in the war against Iraq was able at the same time to isolate its ally.

Rather than direct their political fire against the German coalition government of Social Democrats and the Green Party for their assistance to the US war, the organisers instead arranged for the march to proceed past the CDU headquarters, thus allowing demonstrators to vent their anger at the openly pro-Bush stance adopted by CDU chairperson Angela Merkel.

At the short rally before the demonstration a speaker

for Americans in Berlin Against the War also levelled criticism against the CDU, but failed to challenge the SPD and Greens. His contribution was followed by a representative of Pax Christi, who called for a minute's silence for the victims of the terror but had nothing to add in terms of clarifying the aims of the war.

The final rally at the Brandenburg Gate was dominated by musical presentations. As the rally was winding down, protest organisers intervened together with police to force a small group of anarchists chanting anti-government slogans to leave the rally.

Ralph was an elderly participant on the march who expressed his disappointment that so few had turned out and that no clear stance had been taken by the organisers of the march against the complicity in the war of the German government:

“I can remember many of the decades of postwar Berlin after the Second World War and it is clear to me that we are dealing with a very different American government and a different America than the one I grew up with. I do not pretend it was all just altruism but America really did help out Germany after the war. My generation owes a lot to America and we have to always bear that in mind to prevent any form of anti-Americanism developing in the current situation.

“But the America of today and the government of George Bush are something completely different. It seems to me they do not base themselves on the tradition of collaboration and working together with their neighbours. Instead, Bush bases himself on a very different tradition—wars of aggression, might makes right and contempt for his allies—we know all about that from German history and it led to a catastrophe.

“I am very disenchanted with the German government. After all, it's because of Schröder and Fischer that we now have fully armed B-52 bombers flying over our heads. Just imagine the consequences if one of those things experienced a technical fault. I do

not think the German government is doing people in Germany and people in America any favours by backhandedly backing this war. There are already signs that Bush and company have other countries in their sights.”

Protests in Mannheim and Ludwigshafen

Around 250 people demonstrated April 12 in the city of Mannheim against the US-led war on Iraq. The protest was organized by the Peace Plenum Mannheim.

The speaker of the Pupils of Mannheim against Right-Wing Tendencies, Sebastian Lorenz, rejected the criticism that students were fed up with politics or that they only demonstrated because it was fashionable: “We must make sure that this fashion becomes permanent.” He also criticized the school board of the state of Baden-Wurttemberg, which had banned demonstrations by students.

The war in Iraq would bring “not peace and liberty, but devastation and destruction,” Lorenz said. He expressed the mood of many attending the demonstration when he said: “Nobody knows what will happen now. I don’t have an answer to that question. But we must carry on.” One had to appeal to the politicians not to throw bombs, he added, but to use diplomacy and patience.

A speaker of Attac Mannheim criticized the German SPD-Green national government and stated that the war abroad was accompanied by a war at home with the welfare state under attack. She then attributed a main role to the trade unions, which, she declared, had to organize demonstrations against the war. She failed to mention the fact that the unions have done virtually nothing to mobilize their members against war.

WSWS representatives distributed the leaflet “Political lessons of the war in Iraq” and discussed with participants of the protest. The dominant mood was one of frustration and perplexity because the war had not been averted, despite protests by millions. The lack of a viable political perspective was also expressed by some on the demonstration, who insisted that pressure had to be kept up on politicians, parties and the UN.

In contrast, the WSWS statement distributed at the demonstration emphasizes that the established institutions are incapable of opposing imperialist war and that a mass movement of the international working class based on a socialist perspective must be built.



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