

Worldwide protests against invasion and occupation of Iraq

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Several million people took part in demonstrations April 12-13 against the US-British invasion and conquest of Iraq. There were large demonstrations in Europe, South Asia, Australia and North America.

The demonstrations were considerably smaller than the worldwide protests of February 15, a month before the beginning of the war, which mobilized as many as 20 million people. However, under conditions of US-British triumphalism over the inevitable outcome of the one-sided conflict and an extraordinary level of media propaganda and lies, combined with stepped up police repression, political attacks on opponents of the war and the cowardly response of governments and politicians previously opposed to Washington's war policy, the demonstrations testified to the deep-seated opposition of working people around the world to US imperialism and militarism.

Demonstrators expressed revulsion over the crimes that have been committed by Washington over the past three weeks. Many carried photographs of Iraqi children maimed or killed by American bombs and missiles.

By far the largest protests were in Italy and Spain. In both countries right-wing governments have supported the US war on Iraq despite overwhelming public opposition. As many as half a million people marched through Rome, where some demonstrators carried signs saying "Stop Esso War" and picketed US-owned gas stations.

Crowds estimated at over 200,000 apiece marched in Madrid and Barcelona, 25,000 demonstrated in Cordoba and smaller numbers rallied in many regional centers. One of the most popular chants was, "Aznar resign!" directed at the Spanish prime minister who has already announced he will not seek reelection next year.

In Spain the protests against the occupation of Iraq were linked with expressions of sorrow and outrage over the deaths of two Spanish journalists. Jose Anguita Parrado, a correspondent for El Mundo, died when an Iraqi surface-to-surface missile hit a US army command post outside Baghdad. Jose Couso, a cameraman for the Telecinco network, was killed when US forces opened fire on the Palestine Hotel, the center for hundreds of journalists covering the war in the Iraqi capital. Many signs in the Spanish protests called the death of Couso a deliberate murder by the United States, aimed at discouraging press coverage of the carnage in Baghdad.

Smaller but still sizeable protests took place in Berlin, Paris, Oslo, Basel and elsewhere on the continent. Among the demands raised by the 10,000 marchers in Berlin was that the German government deny use of its airspace to US and British warplanes flying missions against Iraqi targets.

The 20,000 demonstrators in Paris were limited mainly to the members and close supporters of 30 different left-wing and anti-globalization organizations. For the most part, these groups have worked to subordinate the campaign against war to the maneuvers of the Chirac government.

The Socialist Party youth organization, for instance, put out a leaflet calling for the strengthening of the United Nations, where France has a veto in the Security Council, as a bulwark against American "unilateralism." Two other groups, "Rougesvifs" and "Coordination Communiste," recent split-offs from the French Communist Party, called for reviving the moribund party of French Stalinism.

In London a crowd estimated between 150,000 and 200,000 marched in two separate columns through the British capital, meeting in the center and then rallying

in Hyde Park. The marchers held a moment of silence in Parliament Square for those who have already died in Iraq, then chanted slogans such as “Blair calls it liberation, it looks to us like occupation.” Among the speakers was film director Ken Loach, who denounced the conquest of Iraq as a violation of international law.

The largest protest in Asia took place in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, where 50,000 marched, charging the US and Britain of committing crimes against humanity. Another 15,000 marched in Calcutta, while 4,000 marched in Seoul, according to press figures, which usually understate the turnout.

Of special political significance is the rally in Tel Aviv, where 1,500 Jews and Arabs turned out to oppose the invasion of Iraq and support the “refuseniks,” Israeli soldiers who refuse to serve with the forces occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Those demonstrating clearly felt that the US and Israeli occupations were linked and would produce similar tragedies for the occupied peoples.

In North America there were protests across Canada, the largest in Montreal, and three major demonstrations in the US—in Washington, DC, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The march in Washington drew an estimated 30,000 people, considerably more than the march organizers had expected. The turnout was noteworthy given the impact of nonstop US media propaganda celebrating military victory and the supposed “liberation” of the Iraqi people.

The route of the march took the protesters past the offices of several corporations directly implicated in fomenting and supporting the war, including Fox News, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and Halliburton, as well as the headquarters of the FBI. Outside the *Post* office, the marchers stopped and chanted, “*Washington Post!* Tell the Truth!”

Chants, signs and t-shirts denounced the occupation of Iraq as “the new colonialism,” condemned the media propaganda for the war, denounced corporate profiteering from military contracts and the exploitation of Iraq’s oil resources, and declared the Bush administration responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent Iraqis, many of them children.

In Portland, Oregon, 5,000 demonstrators took to the streets to protest the war, as well as the role of the media and the Bush administration’s attacks on civil

liberties. The marchers stopped for speeches outside the offices of KOIN, a local TV station, and the *Oregonian* newspaper, where speakers denounced the sanitized images and manipulation of the news of the war by the corporate media.

The March terminated at Pioneer Courthouse Square where several speakers addressed the crowd. Steve McGready, a friend of Maher “Mike” Hawash, spoke about Hawash being detained as a material witness in a “terrorism investigation.” Hawash, a Palestinian-born US citizen, was arrested where he worked at Intel Corporation three weeks ago and has since been held in seclusion, though no charges have been filed against him. McGready said that Mike Hawash is a prisoner of war.

At many of the protests supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed copies of leaflets, one for the United States, the other for Europe. [See “US barbarism in Iraq: The way forward in the struggle against imperialist war” and “Political lessons of the war in Iraq.”]



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