

After the fall of Baghdad

# Hundreds of thousands demonstrate in Rome

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Several hundred thousand people—half a million according to the organisers—demonstrated in Rome under the slogan “stop the shooting.” The demonstration was called by “Fermiamo la guerra” (Stop the War), a loose conglomerate of NGOs, political parties, trade unions and church organisations. The march, which was 8 kilometres long, went through the centre of Rome, past the most important government buildings and the American and British embassies.

The demonstrators included workers and youth from all regions of Italy, some carrying self-made posters and banners, but with many marching behind the banners of trade unions and political parties. The main feature of the march was a one kilometre-long rainbow flag, the so called “River of Peace.”

Banners included: “No oil for war”; “Iraq—liberated or occupied?”; “Bread instead of bombs—Life instead of death”; and “For the self-determination of the Iraqi people.” Also seen were demands for a revival and a reform of the UN.

Homemade posters stated: “A terrorist is one who murders innocent people and occupies foreign countries—therefore Bush, Blair and Sharon are terrorists”, and “They call it unfortunate incidents—but in fact it is slaughter.”

One demonstrator from Florence carried a poster saying: “Yankees—the same old stories,” which he explained was a reference to the fact that American capitalism had suppressed the Indians in order to grab land and today occupies Iraq because it needs oil.

The demonstration ended at the historical site of the Circo Massimo, where most participants were forced to turn back because of the crush. No speeches by leaders of political parties or trade unions were planned. Instead there was a series of so-called “witness

statements.” These were given by people who were actively engaged in antiwar initiatives, including trade unionists, feminists, members of student and teacher committees and journalists. Speakers included a Franciscan nun, a Palestinian, an American opponent of the war, someone who took part in actions to block weapons transport, etc.

One worker from Caserta reported a strike in his cleansing company, Splendor, which pays its workers 200 to 300 euros a month and sacks without notice those who complain or attempt to organise. He said: “Workers around the world face the same fate as ours. We had a strike for a reasonable wage and for our rights and our dignity. Our strike is also against the war—and against all wars. In order to stop the killing machine, all workers have to rise worldwide.”

One speaker reported on the so-called “train stopping.” He said, “The government is lying. Article 11 of the Italian constitution is being violated in the most blatant way because the US army wages a war of aggression from our territory. Tanks, soldiers and heavy armament were transported on the rail network for everybody to see. Camps Darby and Ederle [US military bases in Northern Italy] were used as strategic locations for the war against Iraq. Popular sentiment against the war is being violated. The government says it wants to keep the peace but all they want is a share of the cake after the war.”

A journalist spoke against the lies of Silvio Berlusconi and his minister of defence, Antonio Martino, who both tolerated the arms transport and the use of US military facilities in violation of the constitution, while at the same time asserting that Italy doesn’t have anything to do with the war. He recalled 11 journalists, his colleagues killed in Iraq, and said, “They kill journalists because they want to suppress the

truth, but truth is stronger.”

Secondary school students and teachers spoke in support of the right to an education and against the destruction of schools and universities. Several universities have been occupied in recent weeks to protest the war. Last December many heads of universities resigned because of the massive cuts in higher education imposed by the government. One teacher said: “No to war but also no to the privatisation of our schools. Against permanent war we demand permanent resistance.”

Another education worker said, “This war is a dirty and an unjust one. But I can’t think of any wars which were clean and just. To call the end of this war ‘a peace’ is a disgrace. Peace means here merely that the weapons have become silent. We have to develop a culture of solidarity. Who can live in conditions of peace if he has no water, has nothing to live on or has to live in complete subordination?”

One opponent of the war from Tuscany calculated that “per inhabitant of the earth weapons worth \$137 dollars being produced. Armament sales have gone up since September 11, since the ‘war against terrorism’ began. Where weapons are being produced they will also be used.”

Although the determination of demonstrators was undiminished, it was apparent that the antiwar movement was influenced by a sense of helplessness after having been unable to prevent the launching of war.

Various components of *Fermiamo la guerra* conduct their own campaigns that contribute to increasing confusion. Greenpeace and the Greens have organised a national boycott of the Esso petrol stations in Italy—which belong to the US oil company Exxon-Mobil. They demand a boycott of American goods, mobilise anti-American feelings and create the illusion that war can be influenced by how one shops.

A team of WSWS supporters distributed a statement by the editorial board in Italian—“For an international movement against imperialist war”—and spoke with some of the demonstrators.

Guido, a small trader from Rome, explained: “This war is a disgrace. The law of the strongest dominates like in the Middle Ages when empires were built though force. Democracies should resolve their problems through diplomacy. This is a war for oil and

the one who sits at the oil tap lets his friends have some. I don’t hope it comes to that, but I have to assume that in 20 years time it will come to war over drinking water.” He reproached the Italian left for their inactivity against the unilateralism of the US.

One older worker from Milan spoke against the government and explained, “It was the Socialists who first supported Berlusconi in his construction deals in Milan—Bettino Craxi provided him with the money and the opportunities for that.”

One member of a delegation from Madrid reported that the centre for the European social forum in the Spanish capital had recently been closed by the police. “The Spanish police kills people on the streets,” she declared. She also said that in Spain all social layers were mobilised against the war.

While no political leader spoke at the end of the demonstration, leaders of political parties made political comments in the press. These revolved around the shifts within the political alliances within *Fermiamo la guerra*.

Although the parties of the parliamentary centre left opposition, the Olive Tree coalition and the *Margherita*, had identified with *Fermiamo la guerra*, they have distanced themselves from it since the occupation of Baghdad and did nothing to mobilise for this latest demonstration. The opposition leaders Francesco Rutelli (Radical Party) and Massimo d’Alema (Left Democrats—formerly the Italian Communist Party) are now busy restoring their damaged relationship with British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Fausto Bertinotti, the leader of Rifondazione Comunista, commented as follows: “They capitulated before the siren song of Blairism.”



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