

G8 summit protesters denounce US occupation of Iraq

On-the-spot report from Thônex-Vallard

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“G8—illegal”, “G8—illégitime” was the motto of the international demonstration on Sunday, June 1 on the shores of Lake Geneva. The protest was directed against the policies of the heads of state gathered together in the nearby town of Evian.

According to the organisers, over 100,000 protesters gathered in two columns from Geneva and French Annemasse and met at the French-Swiss border crossing point of Thônex-Vallard. They came from Germany, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, France and Belgium, and from across Switzerland.

Many wore T-shirts bearing slogans and carried colourful banners with texts such as “No to the G8 summit,” “G8: profit before people,” “Stop G8, the main cause of poverty—another world is possible!”, “G8—worldwide council for insecurity—for a globalisation of public interest” and “Long live the friendship between peoples—death to the arrogance and the unilateralism of the G8.”

Many slogans were directed against the Iraq war, such as “Stop the war,” “End the occupation of Iraq!” and “Law instead of violence.” Other slogans were more general, reading: “Overthrow capitalism and replace it with something nicer,” “Hitler, Stalin, dollar—we do not need dictatorships” and “Power to the people and not the financial markets.”

Some called for the abolition of the Swiss army: “Let’s globalise disarmament!” and “Solidarity instead of soldiers—dissolve the army in favour of civil solutions.” Some were directed against the huge mobilisation of police and army for the summit: “The army protects the warmongers and we are the ones who will have to pay dearly.”

The city had been cordoned off for large stretches extending over kilometres. It was even difficult getting to the start of the demonstration in the English Garden on the shores of Lake Geneva. Many hundreds arrived too late and attempted to catch up with the demonstration, which had

already set off. Helicopters circled the centre of town, which was cordoned off for all vehicles except police cars. Shops and restaurants were closed and boarded up. Letter boxes had been sealed and police in military garb armed with tear gas guns were everywhere to be seen.

“This is crazy. I am ashamed of our city,” was the comment of one Geneva inhabitant to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, who set up a banner and literature table and held discussions with participants in the English Garden. “What is being done by all these heads of state in Evian—above all Bush—is without parallel,” this protester added. “For us it is the most obvious thing in the world to take to the streets in protest.”

Many participants stated their opinion on the Evian summit. Andrew, a New Zealander living in Zurich, said: “There were obviously illusions in Schröder and Chirac. I think, yes, there is a capitulation right now, but there is still a divergence between the Europeans and the US, like what interests they want in their foreign policy.

“The French have also got the UN mandate for the peace-keeping operation in Africa now. I think that’s very important, like Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, two former French colonies. And the French previously didn’t have a mandate, which the British did have. Africa could be like another conflict zone for playing out this rivalry between the US and the Europeans. Much more dangerous is long-term nationalism in Europe and anti-Americanism, which is a real possibility.”

A woman from Grenoble, who like many French protesters had also been active in the drawn-out strike action of teachers in France, added: “When it comes to Chirac then in France we did not have such big illusions that he was a great pacifist. This is demonstrated by the entire thrust of his domestic policy, in particular his attacks on pensioners and teachers.”

Two youth from Zurich, Yves and Elias, explained why they had come to Geneva: “In our opinion it is unacceptable

for a few powerful people to decide on the fate of the entire world. The new collaboration by Chirac and Schröder with Bush and Blair shows they are not what they pretended to be. They do not represent any sort of alternative—they are just motivated by money and now want a slice of the cake. We hope that these demonstrations will be large and peaceful.” These sentiments were echoed by many other marchers, and the two main demonstrations set off calmly and remained peaceful.

Weeks before the G8 summit an enormous mobilisation of police and military had taken place throughout the French-speaking part of Switzerland, Romandie, and in the neighbouring French province of Haute Savoy. The massive police-military build-up was accompanied by an unparalleled campaign of hysteria in the press, with some newspapers indicating that a half million potentially violent “political tourists” were marching towards Geneva, intent on razing the city to the ground.

For the protection of the politicians assembled in Evian the French army had installed drones, ground to air missiles and anti-aircraft units, while the US government sent rapid-speed patrol boats for the supervision of the lake and waterways. The Swiss government closed off airspace over the lake for all civilian aircraft and Swiss police and soldiers guarded the banks of Lake Geneva in collaboration with the notorious French paramilitary CRS.

Police reinforcements also came from Germany, with the state of Bavaria sending 750 police with water cannon. In contravention of the normal use of foreign police contingents, the German officers were allowed to conduct control of persons at the airport of Cointrin and were then mobilised to supervise the city centre of Geneva on Sunday before taking part in police raids on the camps set up by anti-globalisation protesters. Many hundreds of demonstrators were taken into custody. Two German water cannon were employed in a police action against the “Usine” cultural centre. The German police demanded to see the papers of a number of those in and around the centre. Eventually a total of 12 were taken into custody.

The excuse given for the brutal intervention by police was the activity of so-called rioters—small groups of masked youth who deliberately broke windows and set fire to a number of shops in the city centre. Despite the enormous security precautions such groups were able to penetrate cordons and on Saturday night lay waste to shops in the centre of town. Police were slow to move in, allowing media cameramen to capture much of the destruction on film. Later these incidents were used as the basis for searching the campsites of anti-globalisation campaigners and banning a further demonstration planned for the city of Lausanne.

The identity of those comprising the so-called “black

blocs” is a complete mystery. The political opponents of the G8 summit have made a point of repeatedly and clearly distancing themselves from those in the “blocs.” Following the G8 summit in Genoa in July 2001, which led to similar disturbances, it was revealed that provocateurs from the Italian special units (Digos), together with fascist thugs, had penetrated the ranks of these forces.

On the German-Swiss political television news feature “Arena” a heated and controversial discussion took place last Friday evening between prominent bourgeois politicians, representatives of the Attac movement and the initiative “Switzerland without an army.” The theme of the programme was the “State of emergency in Romandie.” The Swiss military chief of command, Christophe Keckeis, also participated and argued that the entire mobilisation had been an important test for the military.

Jean Ziegler, former social democratic member of the Swiss national parliament and current UN special commissioner, angrily described how German police had checked his identity papers at the Geneva airport.

A Swiss army recruit explained why he refused to take up duties, as ordered over the weekend in Geneva, saying: “One thing is sure: I have not been trained for the job of taking part in demonstrations with a loaded weapon. Demonstrators and soldiers find themselves up against one another and that is highly dangerous. I would prefer to give my opinion along with all the rest about Messieurs Bush and Blair. I will not protect them. If it comes down to it, then as someone responsible for security my inclination is to arrest them.”

The chair of the Liberal Democratic Party, Christine Langenberger, argued together with other bourgeois politicians that the G8 summit had to be protected because important politicians had come together to discuss global problems such as AIDS and drinking water.

She was challenged by Nico Lutz, a representative of the organisation “Switzerland without an Army,” who argued: “One sort of war criminal is dispatched for trial to the Hague (European Court of Criminal Justice) while the other sort are protected by the military in Evian!” Jean-Luc Vez, a director of police who also took part in the programme, responded by saying, “In a strictly legal sense what you say is correct, but that’s the way of the world.”



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