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Correction*: The article "London protesters condemn occupation of Iraq and defend Palestinians," by Mike Ingram, posted September 29, 2003, inadvertently misrepresented the position of environmentalist and antiwar activist George Monbiot. It reported erroneously that in a speech from the platform in Trafalgar Square, Mr. Monbiot "presented the UN role in Iraq as a preferable option to the US occupation."*

In fact, Mr. Monbiot spoke against those calling for a UN takeover of the US occupation, a position which he had spelled out as well in an article published last month in the Guardian*newspaper titled, "Beware the Bluewash, The UN should not become the dustbin for America's failed adventures."*

The World Socialist Web Site *acknowledges its reporter's unintentional error and apologises to Mr. Monbiot. The article has been corrected accordingly below.*

More than 50,000 people assembled in London's Hyde Park for a march to Trafalgar Square to demand an end to the illegal occupation of Iraq by US and British forces. The protest was part of an international day of action, with demonstrations taking place in Spain, Korea, Turkey, France and Germany.

The fifth national demonstration since the war against Iraq began was organised jointly by the Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Muslim Association of Britain. It was called under the slogans "No more war—No more lies" and "End the Occupation of Iraq—Freedom for Palestine," and attracted a broad range of people of all ages and political backgrounds.

Marchers demanded the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq, chanting "George Bush, Uncle Sam, Iraq will be your Vietnam!" In a reference to the British prime minister, printed placards transposed the letters in "Blair" to read "Bliar."

Called on the eve of the ruling Labour Party's annual conference, the demonstration took on a strong anti-Labour theme, with many protesters chanting "Blair must go" and holding home-made placards and banners alluding to the lies exposed in the Hutton Inquiry into the death of weapons expert David Kelly.

The Blair government has been exposed as having repeatedly lied to Parliament and the population as a whole, and having dragged Britain into war on fraudulent grounds. In discussion with WSWS reporters, many of the marchers raised this.

Angela, a young education worker participating in the march, said, "I think that the whole issue over the war will lead to the collapse of the Bush and Blair governments. I think marches do work because they won't want to rush to war as easily. Things will either get worse or we will see a change. The only trouble with getting rid of Blair is that there is no one to replace him."

Justine Smith said, "I think Blair should step down. He conned the British people and they believed the information given to them at the time. The BBC reporter [Andrew Gilligan] needs to be given a medal for starting things. In enlightening things they have forced an inquiry. One word in a programme has altered things. The British people have been misled. Clare Short was right when she said Blair should stand down.

"This whole situation is not about Blair but about what's right—it's not their sons and daughters who are dying. It wasn't a war but an attack on Iraq. They knew there was no WMD, and Iraq didn't pose a threat. It was a way of trying to destabilise the Arab world. They have no water, electricity, just as they have done in Afghanistan."

Hufsa Mahood, a college student from Nelson, said, "Nothing has really changed in Iraq; its getting worse. I'm concerned about the truth, and it seems that the Hutton Inquiry will change nothing because no one is accountable. My big concern is that people are still getting killed and that a lot of people still believe the propaganda."

In the wake of intensified attacks by Israel upon the Palestinian people, the march attracted a sizeable contingent of Palestinian youth, calling for the stepping up of the *intifada* and chanting "Bush-Sharon assassins."

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Stalls selling Palestinian flags were also a source of attraction for British youth participating in the rally.

Raeed from Palestine told WSWS: “I believe the war was made for oil and US domination of the whole world. They didn’t go to give Iraqis democracy or get rid of a dictator, but in their own interest.

“It hurts me as a Palestinian to be marked as a terrorist and not to have the right to exist. Bombing people in their beds because they are militants when they are only saying their opinion is wrong. Yesterday the Quartet said that the Palestinians have to do more work as if we were equal with Israelis. We are being killed every day and nobody gives a damn.

“Up to now I have had no trouble in this country, but I am not getting employment because my name causes trouble. I think people in the Western countries should do more demos and strikes against the US and British governments. The policies of these governments are making people hate each other more in the Middle East and Islamic world. When people are stuck in a corner, you don’t know how they will react.

“I believe in peace—that we are equal human beings and have the right to exist. This fighting has got results that no one anticipated.”

Noticeably absent from the march were the trade unions, with barely half a dozen banners present. Even those such as the rail unions RMT and ASLEF and the civil service union, whose leaders addressed the rally, had no visible presence within the march. This contrasted sharply with the repeated declarations from the platform that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) was “100 percent behind the antiwar movement.” In reality, the stated opposition of the TUC crumbled at the first sign that this would bring it into conflict with the Labour government.

The trade union leaders who spoke at the rally felt obliged to adopt their best left-wing rhetoric as part of their attempt to bridge the widening political gulf between the trade unions and the working class. ASLEF General Secretary Mick Rix said that there should be an international court convened to remove Israel from Palestine and asked Blair, “How can you talk about democracy if you don’t have democracy in the party?” He concluded his remarks with the chant “Blair must go!” which was picked up by the crowd and echoed throughout Trafalgar Square for a good five minutes.

RMT leader Bob Crow said that questions had to be put at the Labour conference next week. “It is no good just calling for Blair to resign,” he said. “Where was the rest of the cabinet?” in opposing the war.

Referring to the antiwar MP George Galloway, who is facing expulsion from the Labour Party for his stance, Crow said that the RMT “are not turning away from Labour, but if George Galloway is expelled, people are going to have to make a decision.” Crow said one could not support a party that expelled antiwar MPs, while it left those who had supported the war within the party. The RMT is a supporter of a campaign for the “democratisation” of the political fund, allowing unions to support election candidates outside of the Labour Party. The purpose of this campaign is to head off growing demands for outright disaffiliation from the party and the breaking of the Labour and trade union link.

The mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, spoke as the host of the rally. Referring to Bush’s planned visit to Britain next month, Livingstone said, “If George Bush is expecting a civic reception in City Hall he can think again. There will be a reception but it will be for the antiwar movement.”

Environmentalist George Monbiot spoke, criticising those advocating a UN role in Iraq as being a preferable alternative to the US occupation.

Echoing Monbiot’s remarks, Galloway told the demonstrators: “I want to deal with a very dangerous diversion, a very dangerous red herring, a false dichotomy which is emerging in this debate—whether or not Iraq should be controlled by a group of foreigners with blue helmets or a group of foreigners with stars and stripes.

“Foreign occupiers are not the solution to Iraq’s problem, they are Iraq’s problem,” Galloway said to loud applause.

Media reports sought to make much of the fact that the demonstration was smaller than previous ones, citing police figures of 10,000-20,000, as against the organisers’ claims of 100,000, as consolation for Blair. In fact, the demonstration represented a more entrenched opposition to the Labour government both in relation to its foreign policy and the increasing attacks against working people at home.

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