

Spain: Thousands protest outside Iraq donors' conference

Vicky Short

27 October 2003

Thousands of people marched in protest at the Iraq donors' conference held in Madrid on October 23 and 24. The 20,000-strong demonstration renamed the meeting the "Occupiers' Plundering Conference" and demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq.

The march was organised by a coalition of 50 groups that included political parties, civic and neighbourhood organisations, and students' unions. At the end of the demonstration, the author Rosa Regás read a manifesto in which she denounced the hypocritical designation "donors" given to the countries attending the conference. She described the assembly as "a conclave in which the shameful benefits of the business of war are being calculated."

She also criticised the actions of the United Nations, which "demonstrate the subordination of this international institution to the imperialist interests of the Bush administration in the occupation of Iraq."

"It is a union of thieves," she added.

Referring to Spanish prime minister Aznar, she said Washington's agreement to hold the conference in Madrid was meant as a "gesture of thanks by the master to one of his lackeys for services rendered."

Marchers chanted, "They are not donors, they are thieves," "It is not terrorism, it is resistance" and "The Yankees assassinate, the UN legitimises."

Present on the march were a number of relatives of Tele 5 photographer José Couso, who died when US forces opened fire on the Hotel Palestine in Baghdad, where scores of international journalists were staying. His relatives carried a large banner that read, "War crimes. We demand justice."

To cries of "assassins," Couso's mother Matilde Pernuy demanded justice for her son and justice for Iraq. She said it was "shameful to see how the very people who lied to us in order to destroy Iraq,

assassinated thousands of civilians and broke international law, today demand that the international community pay for their war of occupation."

She continued: "They lied when they said that there were weapons of mass destruction, and they lied when they assassinated my son and the other witnesses of their crimes."

On October 17, the Spanish High Court finally accepted a lawsuit by Couso's family against three members of the 3rd Division of the Army Infantry of the United States, charging them with responsibility for the photographer's death on April 8. The three US soldiers are Sergeant Gibson, who shot Couso, Captain Philip Wolford, responsible for his unit, and Lieutenant-Colonel Philip de Camp, responsible for his regiment. The suit states that Couso's death was a "war crime" and cites the Geneva Convention, which stipulates that "journalists who carry out dangerous professional missions in the zone of armed conflict will be considered as civilians."

According to the newspaper *El Pais*, the lawsuit was accompanied by testimony from other journalists, including a declaration by Sergeant Gibson, who states, "I did not shoot him immediately. I called my superiors and told them what I had seen. Ten minutes later they called me back and told me to shoot him, and so I did."

Journalists Jon Sistiaga, of Tele 5, Olga Rodriguez, of Cadena Ser, and Carlos Hernandez, of Antena 3 TV, all of whom were staying at the Hotel Palestine, have stated that US troops had been stationed for six hours on the bridge over the river Tigris, from where they could clearly see the technical equipment of the press on the Hotel Palestine balconies.

Hernandez said, "There were no snipers, no Iraqi military and no hostile forces in the hotel." Rodriguez said that the death of her colleague had set a precedent:

“We now know that if we go to a war in the future, we run the risk that the same thing will happen again, with impunity for the perpetrators, unless we are embedded with the US troops.”

Another contingent of workers, from the television station Antena 3, joined the demonstration after holding a lobby at the Planeta Group to protest a new employment regulation affecting the communications industry. A representative of the Antena 3 workers spoke at the rally, castigating the government for not fulfilling its obligations either to Spanish workers or the Iraqi people.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact