

Germany: antiwar protests in Berlin and at US air base in Ramstein

A reporting team
22 March 2004

Demonstrations took place in a number of German cities to oppose the occupation of Iraq. The protests were boycotted by the main political parties, including the ruling Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens, and the trade union presence was minimal.

In Berlin, between 3,000 and 4,000 demonstrators marched through the city centre for a rally at the ruins of the city's Gedächtniskirche (Memorial Church). Banners called for an immediate end to the occupation and the withdrawal of all troops. Contingents of Palestinians at the demonstration called for the pulling down of the West Bank security wall and an immediate end to Israeli violence, including the targeting and assassination of political opponents.

Speakers addressing the Berlin rally warned of the predatory nature of US foreign policy, which, following the war against Iraq, was preparing an intensified intervention in Venezuela. Speakers also greeted the decision by the Spanish electorate to vote out of office the right-wing prime minister, Aznar. An American speaker, Professor Norman Page, sought to drum up support for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, saying the sole aim "of our anti-Americanism is to get rid of Bush, and that means supporting the Democratic Party."

Under the slogan, "To Keep Quiet is Deadly," 3,000 demonstrators took part in a protest march to the US air base at Ramstein, near Frankfurt. The US Air Force keeps large stocks of nuclear weapons at Ramstein, which has played a key logistical role for American operations in Iraq.

Speakers addressing the rally at its assembly point made clear that far from effectively opposing the Iraq war, the German government had undertaken a series of measures to facilitate the US invasion and subsequent occupation. At the rally in front of the Ramstein base,

the 84-year-old sociologist Horst-Eberhard Richter noted that the possessor of the biggest stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction worldwide was the US itself. Declaring that the "war against terrorism is worse than terrorism itself," he said that the US Air Force had a total of 65 nuclear weapons at Ramstein and Büchel—every one of which was five times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. "The bombs being stored here," Richter concluded, "represent a terrorist threat of the worst sort."

The final speaker at the rally was the former finance minister of the German government, Oskar Lafontaine. Far from criticising the SPD or Green Party, Lafontaine made a conciliatory gesture to the government, which he said had reacted entirely appropriately to mass demonstrations last year by not capitulating to American pressure. Lafontaine said that the present situation should be seen as an opportunity to bolster the influence of the United Nations.

Demonstrations and rallies were also held in a number of other German cities, including Hamburg, Stuttgart, Heidelberg, Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Heilbronn.



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