

Germany: 15,000 demonstrate in Mainz against Bush visit

Our correspondents
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A security lockdown tantamount to a state of emergency prevailed in the German city of Mainz on Rhine on Wednesday, February 23. All major access routes and motorways to the town were re-routed or closed for US President George Bush's visit. Heavily armed policemen patrolled bus and railway stations, and many trains were cancelled. The whole city centre was hermetically sealed off and snipers were stationed on the roofs in all those areas where official motorcades passed. Local residents were not allowed to go onto their own balconies or leave their homes. The city resembled a ghost town.

For days the media had warned that traffic would come to a standstill in the entire region. Despite the enormous intimidation—many participants were stopped, scanned and searched by police—and despite icy cold weather, about 15,000 demonstrated for hours against Bush's Mainz visit. Taking part in the protest were people from all over Germany, native-born Germans and immigrants alike from all age groups, including many university and school students, as well as older demonstrators who still recalled the Second World War.

The demonstration was a loose alliance of critics of globalisation, conscientious objectors, physicians against nuclear war, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and young trade unionists gathered under the slogan "Not welcome, Mr. Bush!"

Many carried homemade posters and banners with slogans that included: "Bush go home," "George Bush, you are too expensive for us," and "Anti-Bushists of all countries: unite!" Many of the signs directly opposed the war in Iraq and the US threat to attack Iran: "Your war is the real terror, Mr. Bush," "Two world wars are enough," "All occupiers must leave Iraq," "No violence against Iran," "Bush vs. world peace," "No to war and torture" and "No war for a false freedom—what's the punishment for genocide?"

Some banners referred to the link between the Bush administration's policies and the rise in world terrorism. These declared: "The world is safer without George," "50 years of arrogant US foreign policy has created terrorism," and "Bush—No. 1 terrorist." Others opposed any collaboration by the German government with Bush: "Schröder: no handshake with Bush" and "Stop Bush—no war—no German troops abroad."

A lorry used for the traditional Mainz carnival rode along the route of the demonstration. On board was a mock-up of Guantanamo Bay, with prisoners dressed in orange jumpsuits being beaten by guards in US uniforms.

At the rally that concluded the demonstration, a number of speakers directly addressed the illegal war waged by the Bush government. The German SPD (German Social Democratic) Green Party government was also criticised. A number of important issues were addressed but there was a lack of any clear political alternative. Representatives of political parties and the trade unions expressed the perspective that a diplomatic

offensive by the European Union led by Germany could provide an alternative to the war policies of the Bush government. Speakers from Attac, IG Metall—Germany’s main engineering workers union—the PDS and the peace movement addressed the rally.

Some contributions dealt concretely with the horrors of the Iraq war. A message from physicians in Fallujah was read out, recounting the Iraqi death toll from the US bombardment of the city. Dr. Mahammad J. Haded wrote: “We recommend the German population place the following questions to George W. Bush: Why did more than 2,500 persons in Fallujah have to die from US weapons? Did you ever ask yourself how many dead are still buried under the rubble? Where are the terrorists who you used as the pretext to attack our city, although we had assured you there were none there? When will the troops leave Iraq?”

Thousands of copies of the *World Socialist Web Site* statement, “An answer to militarism and war” were distributed at the demonstration. WSWWS correspondents spoke with many participants who were unanimous in their opposition to the war policies of the Bush government. But many still retained some illusions in the role of the Schröder government.

Two students, Christian and Sebastian from Mainz, said: “We want to make public our opinion and stress above all that we are against war. It is important that not only young people, but also older people demonstrate here. With regard to the German government, it can talk with the Americans, but Schröder must persist in his point of view. Schröder and the other European governments should not be swayed by the US government. They should try to change US policies. Many more people would have come if the police had not created so many obstacles. It is just extraordinary how many police there are on patrol.”

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Mechthild, a social worker from Mainz, stated: “We want to make it clear that Bush cannot spread his version of democracy and liberty with bombs all over the world. That is not liberty. It is exactly the same terrorism as that carried out by the terrorists. I agree with the fact that the German government has refused to send soldiers to Iraq, but that is not enough. It has to

be made even clearer that these are the wrong methods. I find the whole ‘charm offensive’ by the US government to be unconvincing. One cannot believe anything Bush says. The kind of capitalism that prevails in America is to be implemented here. But peace and freedom can only be achieved when there is social justice.”

Leonardin from Chemnitz explained: “Something has to be done against Bush. This man should not be allowed to run free. He is exactly the same sort of terrorist he accuses others of being, because he has so many human lives on his conscience.”

Joerg from Hagen, who had come with a friend, said: “We are here in order to show the American president that there are people who oppose him, above all here in Germany. Personally I approved of the fact that Schröder was against the war at the beginning, although this opposition has been diminishing; it is reprehensible that he is now creeping up to Bush, just because we are economically dependent on the Americans.”

When confronted with the fact that the Schröder government had done nothing practically to oppose the war, his friend answered: “Yes, that’s right. Now they are training the police in Iraq. This is another reason why we are here to protest.”

An older married couple explained: “We are here because the biggest terrorist of them all is being honoured here on a large scale. We are also protesting against the hosts. Bush is one of the biggest imperialists in the world. And what they have done here represents a real state of emergency.”



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