

Europe: tens of thousands protest on second anniversary of Iraq war

Our correspondent
21 March 2005

Across Europe, tens of thousands of demonstrators marched in major cities on the second anniversary of the US-led war on Iraq to demand an end to the occupation of the country.

The biggest protest by far took place in London, fuelled by the fact that the government of Prime Minister Tony Blair has been the main ally of the Bush administration in its illegal war. Estimates of the size of the demonstration ranged from 50,000 to 100,000.

The march was organised by the Stop the War coalition, along with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Muslim Association of Britain. Protesters marched from London's Hyde Park Speaker's Corner via the American Embassy and Downing Street to a rally in Trafalgar Square. Banners proclaimed, "Labour Party, war party—No vote for Labour" and "Need a war on poverty not a war on Iraq." Among the many homemade placards were the slogans, "No blood for oil" and "Reject politics of fear." A large number of students and other young people were in attendance.

The highlight of the Trafalgar Square rally was the presence on the platform of a number of relatives of soldiers killed in Iraq, as well as an army reservist who has refused to fight in Iraq.

Ray Hewit said that he had joined the army when he was 16 years old and went to fight in Iraq when he was 19. He told the rally, "I'm a reservist and I just want to let Blair know that I won't fight his illegal war."

Rose Gentle, whose son Gordon is one of more than 80 British personnel killed in Iraq, told the rally, "He wasn't just killed in Iraq. He was killed by this government."

Reg Keys, whose son was also killed in Iraq, said, "We stand before you as bereaved parents but we are also betrayed parents. Our sons pledged allegiance, but

they didn't pledge allegiance to an illegal war."

Other speakers drew attention to reports that a number of countries such as Italy and Ukraine were in the process of withdrawing troops and demanded that Britain do the same.

The political focus of the rally was to publicise the campaign for George Galloway in the forthcoming general election in Britain. Galloway was expelled from the Labour Party for his stance against the war and is planning to run as a candidate for Respect, a coalition supported by the Stop the War coalition and a number of middle class radical groups led by the Socialist Workers Party.

Galloway is to stand in one of London's largest Muslim areas. Announcing that he was standing against a "New Labour war monger," he told the audience, "There is no point in being here if you're going to support Blair in May."

But Galloway is seeking to channel antiwar sentiment into a limited protest in which workers are called on to support anyone who registered opposition to the war—whether Labour MPs, or Liberal Democrats and Greens as well as Respect. He continued, "Ask your MP, 'did you vote for the killing of 100,000 Iraqi people and will you support immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq?'"

A campaign table set up by supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party attracted a lot of attention, with many coming to the stall to thank the WSWWS for its coverage of the war.

In Italy, some 10,000 people marched through the capital city of Rome, demanding the immediate return of the 3,000 Italian troops from Iraq—which has been promised by the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi.

In Copenhagen, Denmark, more than 2,500 people

rallied in front of the US embassy, demanding that 500 Danish troops and all American troops are withdrawn from Iraq.

In Athens, Greece, about 3,000 demonstrators brought the city centre to a standstill for about three hours as they marched to the US Embassy. They attended a rock concert and heard an address by Sue Niederer, the mother of an American soldier killed in Iraq.

In Glasgow, Scotland, hundreds of protesters called for the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq. The names of some of British, US and Iraqi victims of the war were read out along with a list of MPs who backed the war. Gordon Gentle was a soldier in the Royal Highland Fusiliers and many members of his family attended the Glasgow demonstration. His sister Maxine said, "It's an illegal war and it's just over oil, that's my personal opinion and I think they should be brought home to see their families."

In Warsaw, Poland, about 500 protesters marched past the US embassy and the offices of President Aleksander Kwasniewski, holding banners reading, "Pull out from Iraq now" and "Poles back to Poland."

In Turkey, 10,000-15,000 protesters rallied in Istanbul, and smaller demonstrations were held in Ankara, Izmir and Adana.

In Oslo, Norway, about 400 people demanded that the 10 Norwegian officers in Baghdad be sent home. Norway has previously withdrawn 150 soldiers from Iraq.

In Sweden, 300 protesters in Stockholm chanted, "USA, out of Iraq!" Protests were also held in Madrid and Barcelona.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact