

Tens of thousands march in London against Iraq occupation

Our reporters

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Tens of thousands took part in a one-hour march through London called by the Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Muslim Association of Britain.

The march raised four demands: “Stop the Bombings, Stop the War,” “Defend the Muslim Community,” “Defend Civil Liberties” and “Bring the Troops Home.”

The route through central London along Whitehall and into Piccadilly culminated in a rally in Hyde Park. Police said about 10,000 people took part, but Stop The War Coalition said up to 100,000 were protesting.

The families of three British soldiers killed in Iraq addressed the marchers.

Susan Smith, whose son Phillip Hewett died in July when a roadside bomb exploded under his vehicle near Basra, addressed her remarks to Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair: “You can never know how it feels, but you have the power to stop it happening again. You made the decision to go to Iraq and you can make the decision to get our sons and daughters out of there.” She read out a letter she had handed in to Downing Street calling on Blair to bring the troops home. This read in part, “You don’t know what it’s like to be told your son has been murdered in Iraq and then find out through TV news he wasn’t killed instantly, but lay dying at the side of road.

“You don’t know what it’s like to have to meet an aeroplane carrying a coffin containing his body. I can’t find the words to describe how that feels, but I hope to God, you and your wife never experience it.... You’ve let down those three young men and the other 89 British soldiers who have so far died in Iraq and it’s time you started listening to me and the other families who want to see our boys pulled out of a hopeless situation.”

Peter Brierley, whose son Shaun was killed in a road traffic accident in Kuwait on March 30, 2003 while serving with 1(UK) Armoured Division Headquarters and Signal Regiment, said: “My son was betrayed by Blair. If the government do not bring them out, there will be more families like us.... Looking at what happened in Iraq through this last week it is obvious that Iraq does not want the troops there and if they don’t bring them out there will be more families like us.”

Reg Keys, whose son Tom was one of six military policemen killed in June 2003, also spoke.

British soldier Lance-Corporal George Solomou, who refused his call-up to serve in Iraq, spoke in his army uniform and said: “The British people are increasingly realising that they have been told more and more lies about the war.”

The demonstration was again characterised by the near absence of Labourites and trade union leaders. The Labour Party’s only representation on the demonstration was a letter from London Mayor Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn, the retired former MP for Chesterfield and the president of the Stop the War Coalition. Benn called the Iraq war “immoral, illegal and unwinnable.” It was a war for oil and power that politicians and the media were trying to present as a religious war between Christianity and Islam, he said.

Benn demanded that a date for the withdrawal of troops be set, that Israel withdraw from the Occupied Territories and that the authority of the United Nations be restored. He described the UN as the only body capable of ensuring world peace.

A letter of support for the march was read out from a few left-talking trade union leaders who said they were unable to attend because they were preparing for the Labour Party conference.

A team from the Socialist Equality Party distributed thousands of copies of the leaflet, “Katrina, the Iraq war and the struggle for socialism” and sold copies of the *World Socialist Web Site Review*.



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