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Afghanistan

Movement against war grows

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Around the world a series of actions and demonstrations have taken place calling for an end to the war in Afghanistan.

Italy

The strength of the Italian movement against capitalist globalisation was shown once again on November 10, 2001 when the supporters of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi tried to show that Italian society supported the war.

The date for a demonstration in opposition to the WTO meeting in Qatar had been set in August. But when Forza Italia and its allies announced of a big demonstration of solidarity with the US for the same date, a debate opened in the movement: was it necessary to choose other forms or other dates? The hesitations were legitimate: the risk of a mobilization smaller than Berlusconi's and a confrontation was real. Finally the most radical and most directly involved sectors determined the choice to stick with a demonstration in Rome.

From the morning, Rome witnessed an impressive deployment of the "forces of order", the city centre being practically paralysed. From 3 pm the troops of the centre right gathered in the Piazza del Popolo while the participants in the other demonstration (against the war and the government) filled the Place de l'Esedra. It was a huge, pluralistic march with the enthusiastic participation of numerous contingents linked to the Social Forum, a whole range of social movements, important trade union sectors, political formations including Rifondazione comunista, the Greens and representatives of the left and youth from the Left Democrats (DS, the party of Cossutta, voted against the war but did not join the demonstration). Everybody was glued to the radio: how strong were our adversaries?

The verdict came in quickly; Berlusconi was beaten! According to police estimates, which minimized the size of our demonstration, there were 70,000 for the "global no" gathering and 40,000 for Berlusconi. Berlusconi's supporters were a disparate mix, stretching from members of the Roman aristocracy and the big bourgeoisie to representatives of the middle layers and intellectuals aligned with the new régime, the suburban electors of the National Alliance being very few in number. As to age, the Corriere della sera said that nearly all the young were with the "global no" movement and that Italian society appeared clearly divided: on the one hand those who defended the existing "model" of life, on the other, those between 20 and 30 who did not accept this model. The centre left, who had just voted for the war, were simply absent.

The polls are no consolation for Berlusconi either: 44% of people want to stop the war against 36% who support its continuation (20% had no opinion). The anti-globalisation movement has again shown how profoundly rooted it is in Italian society. (Livio Maitan)

Pakistan

Thousands of peace activists protested at Rawalpindi on November 6th. They demanded an immediate end to American bombing of Afghanistan and demanded, "stop the war!". They also denounced the terror of religious fundamentalism. The Alliance of Peace and Justice organized the rally. This is an aggregate of hundreds of civil

society organizations and left wing political parties including the Labour Party of Pakistan.

The protesters gathered at Rawalpindi Press Club and later marched along the main Muree Road. The rally was over a kilometre long with hundreds of banners. Police estimated over 5,000 in attendance but according to the organizers of the rally, the number who participated was more than 8,000. They came from all over Pakistan including far off places like Baluchistan and Sind. The bulk of the participants came from the North West Frontier Province and Punjab.

The Labour Party Pakistan from Rawalpindi mobilized over 12 coaches with over 500 workers from a working class district where the majority is from the railways.

The demonstration started with slogans of: "US imperialism, stop bombing Afghanistan; Bush, Stop bombing; No to religious terrorism, No to war; Struggle is our path, those with US imperialism are not friends of the people; Stop religious fanaticism; No to military government of Musharaf; We want peace and not war; and War is no solution."

There were many women at the rally who actively participated in this historic peace rally.

Speaking at the end of the rally, the spokesman for the Alliance, Irfan Mufti told that this is the start and we demand an immediate end of US bombing of Afghanistan. He said we have no sympathy with the religious fundamentalists. We are totally opposed to the terror of religious fanatics but we cannot side with US imperialism who are bombing indiscriminately Afghan cities. Many innocent citizens have died.

LPP Punjab Council member Bashir Butter from Rawalpindi described the rally as an historic event and the birth of a new peace movement in Pakistan. He called on all the trade unionists to join the Alliance for Peace and Justice to have a broader alliance of progressive forces of Pakistan.

After the rally, speaking to a public meeting at Rawalpindi press Club, LPP general secretary Farooq Tariq said that we have broken the monopoly of the religious fundamentalists who are in the streets against the bombing of US on Afghanistan. "These fundamentalists are a by-product of US imperialism and are not in the street for peace, they are in the streets for more war and terror against innocent citizens. Their rallies are not peace rallies but rallies for more bloodshed. This is the first major peace rally in Pakistan. We condemn them both. We want to defeat US imperialism but we cannot do that siding with the religious fundamentalists. We must build an independent peace movement," Farooq Tariq told the rally participants. He said we will organize more rallies across Pakistan. Only a peace movement in Pakistan and internationally can stop the onslaught of US imperialism, he said. Farooq Tariq said that US imperialism is the world's number one terrorist power and has been promoting the terrorists across the world. We, the working class of Pakistan, will build an international solidarity movement to defeat the religious fanatics and US imperialism, he said.

The rally ended peacefully. It has given a lot of encouragement to all those who participated in the rally that something can be done and we have to get united. (Amir Suhail, LPP Lahore information secretary)

Portugal

ON October 30, 2001 a unitary demonstration against US bombing of Afghanistan took place in Lisbon, gathering 5,000 people. It was called by a group of personalities from the Portuguese Left wing, mainly from the Communist Party and Left Bloc (for more information see www.bloco.org). An alternative information anti-war web page has been

set up by the Left Bloc at www.guernika.org.

United States

When George W. Bush and other world leaders arrived at the United Nations on Saturday November 10 for the meeting of the UN General Assembly, New York's War Is Not the Answer coalition greeted them with demands for an end to the bombing of Afghanistan and the resumption of humanitarian aid.

Thousands of New Yorkers have participated in rallies and marches since the tragic terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, to demand that the US government not twist anger at the attacks into revenge. War Is Not the Answer is a coalition of New Yorkers that first met less than two days after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. It is united in seeking peaceful solutions to the problems of the Middle East and the conditions that give rise of terrorism - and in opposing responses to the Sep 11 attacks that lead only to more deaths.

San Francisco has been the site of several large anti-war demonstrations. One had about 10,000 people and one about 5,000 and there have been numerous smaller vigils, rallies and teach-ins. The demands that most of the actions have supported have been: "Stop the War, Stop the Bombing of Afghanistan; No racist scapegoating of Muslims and Arabs and other immigrants; and Defend Civil Liberties."

Catalonia

OVER 20,000 people attended an anti-war demonstration in Barcelona on 28 October, 2001. The main slogan was "For peace, stop the war".

Britain

ON November 18, 2001 a major anti-war demonstration took place in London. Organisers claimed that 100,000 people had joined the march. The demonstrators were addressed at the end of the march by veteran left leader Tony Benn and two Labour MPs, Paul Marsden and George Galloway as well as writers Tariq Ali, George Monbiot and John Pilger.

On November 3, 2001, there was a large demonstration in Manchester against the war organised by the Greater Manchester Coalition to Stop the War. Over 2,500 people marched from Whitworth Park to Castlefield Arena. About a quarter of the demonstration was made up of members of Manchester's Pakistani community. The march was videoed and can be seen at: <http://la.indymedia.org>.