

MUNICH, GERMANY

Thousands protest NATO conference

By John Catalinotto

Some 10,000 people surrounded by 3,500 police demonstrated on Feb. 7 against the NATO Security Conference in Munich, Germany. The demonstrators demanded the "withdrawal of occupation troops from Iraq." They were also protesting the German government's plans to increase its and other European Union military intervention all over the world, starting in Afghanistan.

Left groups were there, including immigrant groups from Turkey and Kurdistan and working-class organizations from Germany and Austria. So were ATTAC-Germany and some of the more progressive unions and religious organizations.

Talks at the rallies attacked the aggressive war policies of the United States and the European Union, according to the Berlin daily, Junge Welt, of Feb. 9. Anti-militarist Tobias Pflüger of Tübingen, who made one of the major talks, said "the stated military strategy of the European Union is 'together we will struggle for good', but its true goals are aimed at gaining more power and economic influence to the detriment of the people of the South." A larger role for NATO with participation of the German Armed Forces can be expected in Iraq, he said.

The singer-songwriter Konstantin Wecker received loud applause when he asked soldiers in case of war to "disobey the generals' orders."

The day before German police had used clubs to attack a group of demonstrators blocking a street near the meeting. Pflüger, who is a candidate of the Party of Democratic Socialism for election to the European Parliament, had his neck injured when police arrested him. In all 259 demonstrators were arrested on Feb. 6, then released the next day at noon.

A few dozen war opponents were able to confront U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld during his dinner with high-ranking NATO generals. Rumsfeld was defending Washington's decision last March to go to war on Iraq.

Rumsfeld downplayed differences with the U.S.'s European allies regarding last year's invasion of Iraq as unimportant. He welcomed the European NATO states' participation in the so-called "war on terror." German Defense Minister Peter Struck asked that starting in August an international colonial force made up of troops from Germany, France, Spain, Belgium and Luxembourg be sent to take the lead in the occupation of Afghanistan.

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