

# Australia: Nationwide protests against war in Iraq

**Our reporters**  
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Despite a lack of any publicity in the media, thousands of people, many of them young, took part in protests across Australia last weekend against the impending US-led war against Iraq. The size and national scope of the demonstrations provide another indication of growing anti-war sentiment among broad layers of ordinary people.

The largest demonstration took place in Sydney on November 30, where an estimated 14,000 people—more than double recent anti-war rallies in the city—marched from the town hall to Hyde Park. Among the range of banners and placards carried were those declaring, “Weapons inspections—Inspect weapons in the USA”, “Regime change—Start with the regime in the US and Australia”, “Weapons of mass destruction—the most destructive weapons are Bush and Howard” and “No Blood for Oil”.

Simultaneous rallies were held in the Tasmanian capital Hobart, the Queensland city of Ipswich and the Northern Territory town of Alice Springs. More than 1,500 protested in Adelaide, the South Australia state capital, and over 500 rallied outside the US embassy in the national capital Canberra. The next day, some 6,000 turned out in Melbourne for a march through the city centre to Treasury Gardens. Protests were also held in the Northern Territory capital Darwin and Brisbane, the Queensland capital, and a rally is planned next weekend in Perth, Western Australia.

Demonstrators in Sydney and Melbourne were addressed by a variety of speakers, including actors, Greens and Australian Democrats MPs, church leaders, ACTU president Sharan Burrow and other union officials. All of them sought to confine the mounting opposition to the war to the official political channels and to block an examination of the deeper economic and political roots of the drive to war.

Speaker after speaker promoted the illusion that protests could pressure the Howard government to withdraw its support or that the UN might stop the war. But the major parties—Liberal and Labor—are committed to backing a US invasion of Iraq and the major powers have already passed a UN Security Council resolution providing Washington with a host of triggers for a war.

In many cases, the speeches were politically dishonest. Burrow and other trade union bureaucrats are all members of the Labor Party, whose leader Simon Crean has declared his readiness to support an attack on Iraq. None of them have undertaken any political struggle either within their unions or inside the Labor Party against the policies of the Labor opposition.

Journalist John Pilger, the keynote speaker in Sydney, made a short speech. He pointed to the growing scope of anti-war protests internationally and to the underlying US aim—to seize control of the Iraqi oil fields. But he did not attempt to explain why the Bush administration was being driven along the path of military adventure, and concluded with a lame appeal for “honest journalists” to tell the truth. The vast bulk of the mass media has been doing precisely the opposite—acting as a conduit for the propaganda of the Bush administration and the Howard government.

A number of those attending the Melbourne and Sydney rallies viewed the Greens as a party that opposed any war against Iraq. But the more the war looks like becoming a reality, the more muted the opposition of the Greens. In the campaign for the Victorian state elections, which was held one day before the Melbourne anti-war rally, the party barely mentioned its stance on the war.

Greens leader Bob Brown, who addressed the Hobart rally, has opposed the war, not on principle, but on the nationalist basis that the Howard government should

“focus on regional security issues”. Moreover, he has left open the possibility that the Greens will support an attack on Iraq—if it has UN approval.

In contrast to the official platforms, many of those who spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters in Sydney and Melbourne were critical not only of Howard and Bush, but of the political establishment as a whole and were grappling to understand the deeper causes of the war, which lie in the profit system itself.

In Sydney, David, a 22-year-old student, said US foreign policy was “heavily driven by their economic interests” and described the Howard government’s “war on terrorism” as “rhetoric to try and justify an inhumane policy”. He denounced Labor for its refusal to oppose the war threats against Iraq. “They are not being led by real values, just political opportunism”.

Guido, from Switzerland, said the preparations for war against Iraq were an “expansion of American imperialism” and added: “We don’t believe this is a solution—grabbing the world’s dwindling resources, oil mainly—but it’s all about power.” The US government, he continued was “not eliminating troubles in other countries, but making troubles happen and then telling us it’s all for world peace”.

Julie, a teacher, said: “I think it is an imperialist war. It’s about oil and it’s about George Bush pushing the parameters of being able to walk in wherever he wants and brutalise whomever he wants. I think he was just waiting for an excuse like September 11 to have something to hang on to so that he could smash Afghanistan and Iraq.

“I’m intensely disappointed with the Labor Party. They don’t follow the basic principles or the tenets they began with and they haven’t come out against the sabre-rattling of Howard or the refugee issues and detention centres. I started out as a Labor voter, but the Greens have shown more integrity. I would never vote Labor again, ever, state or federal. I’m a teacher and the Labor government has squeezed the life out of public education.”

Claire, a media worker, said: “There are a lot of other regimes around the world that are causing trouble, but the United States is not launching a war against them because these countries don’t have any oil. I’m here to protest about what they are doing. I’m not really sure what the solution is, it is obviously very complicated, but I’m open to options.”

In Melbourne, Angel, a professional artist, commented: “There is more to this war than just a struggle for oil. We are talking about a new imperialism, that of the US, and I feel their drive is part of a means of dominating the world. It’s about US capitalism and capitalism as a whole at work.

“American interests—I don’t mean ordinary people’s interests but those of the corporations and oil companies—are bound up with this military drive. The US is trying to have world domination like in Chile. Then they used the CIA—it was more covert—now it’s much more open.”

Musa Koc, an information technology worker, pointed to the increasing attacks on the democratic rights of Muslims in Australia, in particular raids by Australian secret police following the Bali terrorist bombing on October 12. As well as plans to take control of oil interests in the Middle East, Koc said the Bush and Howard governments had a racist, anti-Arab agenda. “As soon as some terrorist act comes they blame the Arabs. Instead of them proving that we are guilty, we have to prove our innocence.”

John Anton, a furniture maker, said he distrusted the established media and kept informed by reading books and searching the Internet. “The media has a big responsibility for the current situation. A huge amount of money is poured into the media propaganda to achieve their agenda—oil.

He opposed any reliance on the UN. “I can’t see any progressive role of the UN as an organisation. The US has complete power over NATO and the UN, which is doing nothing against the war. From what they did in 1991, which was to support the economic sanctions against Iraq, their track record shows they will do it again.”



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