

Australia: Protestors express deep disgust with US war plans

Our correspondents
20 February 2003

WSWS correspondents in a number of Australian cities spoke to participants at the anti-war rallies last weekend. Altogether around a million people marched in all the capital cities as well as in many smaller regional centres and towns across the country.

The interviews contain a range of opinions expressed by the broad assortment of people of different ages and social backgrounds who joined the protests. What is common to them all was a deep disgust at the US war plans, a sense of common purpose with others around the world, and the feeling that their views have been completely ignored by the Howard government, the media and political establishment.

Melbourne

Catherine Skipper, a retired teacher, told WSWS: "I oppose the war because it is no solution. The build-up to the war gives me the impression that the issues are more complex than just oil in the Iraq of Bush's daddy. What is happening does not correlate to what is said by the US.

"The US is making a bid for global power. I can't explain it any other way. I've always felt that George Orwell's *1984* had a basis in faint trends he must have perceived then, but are very clear now. Australia has a history of entering every single war ever since the Boxer Rebellion. Howard has a dreadful inferiority complex. The capitalist system seems to need war."

Payam and Avin Ismael, two sisters aged 13 and 16 whose family comes from Iraq, said: "Life in Iraq is already destroyed enough. It is going to be horrible. The nation is going to be wiped out this time. In 1999 we went back—hospitals were ruined, they had barely any medicine. Last month our grandmother died, she was only in her 60s. No medicine was available for her. If she was here she wouldn't have died.

"Everyone knows this war is about power and oil. The government doesn't care about the people. Howard is just Bush's doormat. The United Nations is not helping the people of Iraq. George Bush is the same as Hitler. In the future people are going to look back at him and say he was the next Hitler."

Adrian Dunlop, 30, formerly a student, presently unemployed, said: "I've been looking at the way Howard and Blair are acting, when people all around them are less than enthusiastic, but they are trapped into war. They don't want to concede, they've already decided on it. They're pushing so hard—it must be something Bush and company have told them privately—it seems very sinister to me.

"Why does Howard use this term 'pre-deployment' of troops? The deployment is already taking place. What sort of language is this he's using? It's a fraud, it's a joke. We're not likely to see a war crimes tribunal against the US government. But in reality they have targetted the civilian population in Iraq. There are at least three war crimes they are guilty of, whether directly or indirectly."

Patrick Callaghan, a third year psychology major at Melbourne University, said: "In the long run, it is a critical mass—sheer numbers are against war. I am here because of the implications of war, what it does do to people, not the sanitised media version. A lot of people have been desensitised to what war really is.

"With a few friends I have been looking at ways to make it a reality for people—a form of mass art. We want to use photography, film clips of real war images, showing the realities. People don't realise fully what they are. Art has to be saying something about the war."

Tricia Haddom, a part-time student with three children, said: "I came because like all the other people I want peace in the universe. I think this war is not about Bush taking on Bin Laden but more about oil and the US wanting to dominate the world.

"I think Howard is trying to keep in good with Bush, our traditional allies. Howard is supposed to represent us. It is the same with Aboriginal reconciliation. Thousands of people want it but he keeps just going against the majority. He is not taking heed; he is like some autocratic headmaster with his own agenda."

Leon, a senior student from McKinnon Secondary College, said: "I don't like being lied to by our government, I just can't trust anything they say. Howard is in cahoots with Bush, even though it is well known Bush has contacts in the oil industry and is speaking for those interests.

"By having a war it diverts from the situation occurring at home in the United States. If you look at the situation, US children don't get an education. It seems like in the US they are creating an environment of paranoia like they did during the Cold War."

Steve Percy, 16, student at Footscray City Secondary College, said: "This is the first demonstration I've been to. I believe George Bush first wants oil, then second because he thinks he owes it to his father and they want to flex American muscle.

"Howard doesn't have a view of his own. He thinks it's better for Australia. America will write itself into the history books and Howard wants Australia next to it. The UN is misdirected. I thought that its purpose was to bring peace. The weapons inspectors are acting for America. If they want to stop weapons they should disarm America."

Sydney

Ryan, 24, commented: “I came to around the world who doesn’t want war. I don’t want to feel idle or helpless at a time like this. This war is all about oil. It is all about multinationals and power. It is a debasement of human life and I don’t understand it. If this war happens it is an awful betrayal against humanity.

“Australia’s involvement is terrible. The Howard government is pandering to Bush because he’s always had a chip on his shoulder because Australia is not a power in the world, so he lines up with America. I don’t believe the UN will support this war. How can it? It is a war based solely on oil and money.”

Keiran and Mathew, both 17, have just finished high school. “We came because we wanted to be counted. We wanted to help make up the numbers. We didn’t know there would be this many people here though. This war is for the same reason as war always is—to build their economy. It is about oil. It is something we don’t need. I don’t think terrorism has got anything to do with it.

“What’s been happening in the UN shows that it’s got no power. The US just does what it wants. Bush is saying ‘we’re going in anyway’. We will still oppose the war if the UN backs it. Why do we have to worry about [a threat from] a country with just 23 million people. They say it’s because Iraq mistreats the Kurds, but Turkey is right next door and it mistreats the Kurds and the US supports them. It’s just lies.”

Bob, a 59-year-old retired accountant, came with his wife. “We’re here because there’s nothing else we can do. This seems to be it. The government doesn’t listen to ordinary people’s views. I think the war is about oil and quite a bit of American paranoia. They always seem to have to have some enemy. I can still remember the ‘domino theory’ and Vietnam. This is the same thing.

“I’m certain that Iraq has dangerous weapons. I’m certain that Saddam Hussein is an evil dictator and doing many of the things that are being attributed to him. But I simply want to see the issue resolved through a peaceful process and in a legal way. I don’t want Australia to be involved with a war crime, which is what this war will be without the UN.

“If the UN calls for war it will probably affect my attitude, but I’d still like to be convinced it was necessary. At the moment I’m deeply suspicious of about every argument I hear in favour of war. There doesn’t seem to be too many people anywhere in favour of the Bush administration’s policies. I wish I knew why Howard was supporting them. I’d like him to explain it to me. The only thing I can see is that he is just being carried along by his own stupidity, but more than that, I simply can’t understand it.”

Rajar Singh, a computer technician, was one of a number of regular WSWs readers who took part in the Sydney demonstration.

“I came today to protest against the war, but more than that, I came to protest against the existing system. The pretext for this war is the claim about ‘weapons of mass destruction’. But the real reasons are that the major powers are competing for control of the world’s resources and profits. Oil is a major factor in this war, so is strategic positioning. The US is trying to dominate Central Asia, the Middle East and the Korean peninsula. We are being dragged toward a greater global conflict.

“We need to have a long perspective toward this. A protest is not

enough. This movement has to be channeled so that people are made aware of what is happening and all the complexities of what is happening in American and world politics. The French and German governments are seen by some as opposing the war, but they have a hidden agenda. Their opposition is because they are not getting their cut. The Russians are not getting their cut. They are coming out because they are threatened by the US but they have the same motive—domination.

“This movement has to oppose everything capitalism represents. Opposing Bush is not enough. Bush is just a manifestation of the class forces at this time. What we are seeing now is the naked face of American capitalism and capitalism per se.

“Power is controlled by a few by the elite. Socialists are trying to overcome the elite and put the power where it should be—in the hands of the working class. The working class has to move away from nationalism and racial and ethnic and linguistic differences and form an alliance around the world. Socialism can’t be built in isolation. We have to learn from what happened in the Soviet Union.”

Adelaide

The WSWs received the following comments from two supporters who attended the February 16 demonstration in Adelaide, the state capital of South Australia. An estimated 100,000 people marched in the city, which has a population of one million.

“We distributed SEP leaflets, downloaded from wsws.org, and entered into many conversations. Although many marchers had unreal expectations of the power of petition and protest, almost all were aware that the war is about the world domination by US capitalists and their allies over the rest of the world, and that ‘weapons of mass destruction’ etc., etc.,’ is a con.

“It was inspiring to see so many thousands of people uniting under the banner of ‘No War Against Iraq’. We plan to attend the next rally and distribute more leaflets. Thank you for providing such great material.”

Newcastle

Leo, a high school student, said: “I disagree with the imminent war on Iraq but it seems to be going ahead. I don’t believe Bush is going to war because of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. I believe the US wants to control the oil in Iraq and also in the Middle East. I don’t know enough about the position of the Labor Party but I am opposed to a war under any circumstances. If the UN backs a war I would be disappointed and it would not make it right. I don’t think that any body should have the right to endorse a war on Iraq.”

Perth

Allan Browne, a primary school teacher, said it took a lot to get him motivated but he came to the rally because he was “angry at the hypocrisy and lies. This war drive is a tragedy. I’m interested in linguistics and language is being mangled—like a “war for peace”. I have a seven-year-old son [who is] asking deep questions. The future scares me.”

Maite said: “War is never a solution, it always creates ongoing problems that to this day require more war. America is not any better than terrorists, they demonstrate arrogance by assuming they are undefeatable. Bush has lost his mind at the expense of the earth and the people on it. Maybe we should give peace a chance for once.”

Mary attended the rally with her daughter and granddaughter. “This war has been on the agenda since Bush was elected and they are making up the reasons to justify it,” she said. Originally from Britain, Mary said that she was disgusted with the British Labor Party. “Tony Blair doesn’t represent the working class in Britain—this is a betrayal.”

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