

Protests in Perth, Brisbane and other Australian centres

Our correspondents
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Antiwar protests took place last weekend in all of Australia's major cities.

In **Perth**, the state capital of Western Australia, a crowd of more than 10,000 packed into Forrest Place Plaza in the largest political demonstration since the Vietnam War. The rally, organised by the No War Alliance, attracted families, the elderly, students, trade union contingents, church groups and Kurdish and Iraqi groups. Protesters marched through the central business district before returning to the plaza.

Speakers denounced US President Bush and the war. But the message from the official platform was to put pressure on the Howard government to bring back the Australian troops, to rely on the UN and to give the weapons inspectors more time. The state Labor government was criticised for allowing the US Navy to use the port of Fremantle in a Sea Swaps program for US crews.

Greens politician Dee Margetts told the rally that an unelected US President and his administration wanted to control Iraq's oil. She said the Australian government was supporting Washington to gain a free trade agreement with the US. She urged the UN to follow Germany, France and China in opposing the war.

Socialist Equality Party supporters handed out several thousand WSWS statements and received a warm response from those who stopped to talk.

Jarrad, a 17-year-old high school student, said: "I've come to protest against a war which I think is unjustified. It's America's war. They say it's to get Hussein out and disarm him. But it's really about profits and oil. The Australian government should not have sent troops. At school we are now talking about opposition to this war." He took leaflets to hand out to school friends.

Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, in over 100,000 people participated in the protest at the Roma Street Forum on Sunday. Workers, youth, students, senior citizens, immigrant workers and parents with their young children joined the largest demonstration ever held in the city.

Many people brought their own placards and banners reading: "Howard's war, not in our name", "No war for oil" and "No blood for oil". The rally started at 11am but by noon hundreds of people were still joining the rally, which spilled out onto adjacent roads.

The main speaker, federal Labor Party leader Simon Crean, criticised Prime Minister John Howard for failing to listen to the protests. But he was shouted down when he said Iraq had to be disarmed, possibly requiring a war backed by the UN.

Sizeable antiwar demonstrations were held in many regional centres.

In **Newcastle**, a major industrial city north of Sydney, 15,000 to 18,000 people marched on Saturday in one of the largest demonstrations in the region's history. Hundreds of youth chanted: "No war, no war". Banners read: "No blood for Oil", "Bush, Blair, Howard—Axis of Evil" and "Fight Poverty, not Iraq".

Speakers from various churches dominated the official platform. Others were from the Newcastle Trades Hall, the Australian Labor Party, the Greens and the Socialist Alliance. When the WSWS asked Labor MP Jill Hall at the close of her speech if she would cross the floor against the party line and oppose a UN-sanctioned war on Iraq, she replied: "I would not vote for it." When pressed on the issue, she said she would make a decision on the day.

The Socialist Equality Party handed out thousands of copies of the WSWS statement. One marcher, Lindsay, approached the SEP campaign table saying: "I am so

happy to find socialists here. This war is about profit and oil. I don't believe in the UN or that it will stop the war. The Labor Party will agree with a US attack on Iraq if the UN says go ahead." She took and distributed copies of the WSWS statement.

A WSWS reader in the northern New South Wales city of Armidale, sent the following report of protests in his area.

"Both **Tamworth and Armidale** staged the biggest political rallies in their histories in opposition to the imminent invasion of Iraq. In Tamworth, home of country music and often seen as a 'redneck' stronghold, 500 people marched last Thursday night.

"The nearby university town of Armidale came to a halt on Saturday as the streets were packed with 1,500 marchers (from a population of 25,000!). In both towns, the local Federal MP, Tony Windsor, an independent conservative, addressed the crowd. As one would expect, he put his faith in the UN whilst strongly opposing unilateral US invasion. But he revealed that, when the three independent MPs moved to have Australia's entry into the war debated, they were voted down by the rest of the lower house of parliament. That is, the Labor Party ganged up with the conservative Liberal/National coalition to gag debate!

"Most moving was the speech by a local doctor who had volunteered to work with 'Médecins Sans Frontières' after the last Gulf War. He spoke of the terrible effects of depleted uranium weapons around the town of Basra, which have vastly increased the rates of child cancer and leukemia on a population already weakened by the effects of sanctions. In both towns the entire population appeared to be united in their horror of the imminent war and the bombing of civilians. Even the local Returned & Service League, usually a strong voice for right-wing and militaristic ideas, expressed its disquiet at unilateral US action and the toadying of Australia's leaders to Bush's war plans."

Protests also took place in the national capital, Canberra [16,000]; Hobart, the state capital of Tasmania, [10,000 to 20,000]; Adelaide, the state capital of South Australia [100,000] and Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory [2,000]. Among the other regional centres to stage demonstrations were: Wollongong, NSW [5,000, a week ago]; Launceston, Tasmania [1,000]; Albany, Western Australia [1,000]; Mount Gambier, South Australia [300]; Wagga Wagga,

NSW [500]; Byron Bay, NSW [4,000]; Lismore, NSW [3,500]; and Kempsey, NSW [300].



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