

Interviews with students at the Sydney “Books not Bombs” protest

Our correspondents
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spent several hours speaking with groups of students as they assembled for the “Books not Bombs” day of action at Sydney’s Town Hall, and later as they were rallying in Hyde Park.

The mood at the demonstration was exuberant with lengthy chanting and cheering. Nevertheless, students were eager to discuss and express their views and feelings about the impending war against Iraq.

Below we are publishing a selection of the interviews.

Julia and **Jenny Shami**, from Parramatta High, spoke with the WSWWS at Town Hall.

Julia: “This war is for oil and it’s discriminatory against Muslims. Saddam Hussein is disarming missiles and yet the US, Britain and Australia still say this is not enough. I want to know why Howard sent Australian troops to the Persian Gulf without the consent of the Australian people. Now that they’re there, there is no way he is going to bring them back.”

Jenny: “This is going to destroy everyone’s life in the Middle East. We know that Saddam is not the best ruler for the Iraqi people but the US war is aimed against completely innocent Iraqi people. Bush, Howard and the others don’t care about them at all. There is a big difference between Americans and their government. Lots of people in the US don’t agree with this and most of the others don’t really know what is happening and are confused by media indoctrination.”

Julia: “It makes me very angry when I see the television each night. The media is completely unfair. All they ever present is what the Bush government says. They refuse to show the other side of this story. Everything is done to present the Iraqis in a bad light and praise Israel and the US. They are constantly trying

to indoctrinate the population to their point of view.

“We attended the last demonstration. It was important to show that millions of people around the world don’t agree with this. We came with our parents and we were all very proud of what we had achieved. It demonstrated to John Howard that we don’t want war.”

Year 12 students **Kylie**, **Hannah** and **Josh** traveled to the demonstration from Colo High in Richmond, a small town to Sydney’s west, in the Blue Mountains. Only three of them had come, but they indicated there was wider discussion in the school about the looming war. While unsure about many things, they were representative of young people who are being provoked by the US actions in the Middle East to begin to think about the issues of history and the social consequences.

Kylie: “Young people have an opinion. A lot of people say that young people don’t think, but we’re the generation coming up and we’re the ones who are going to be affected by what is happening.

Hannah: “Our generation is going to be the one affected by this. Think about World War I and II. People said then ‘it will be over by Christmas time’ and they went on for years and killed millions. We are the ones who are going to deal with the aftermath of war.

“I’m not sure about the UN. I don’t know much about the UN’s role in the present situation. I just can’t see the purpose of a war. To me it looks like a waste of human life, and of resources that could be put to much better uses. Like education, which is already in enough trouble as it is. We know the amount of money our school needs! We’ve already had to pay for the Olympics. Now we have to pay for a war.”

Josh: “I’m angry at the policies of the governments. But the main thing I want to say is that we’re at the start of the 21st century and we still can’t find a way to

have peace. Why can't we listen to the people who have experienced war and know that it solves nothing? We haven't learnt from the mistakes of the past."

Sarah, a 16-year-old student from Wiley Park Girls High and originally from Indonesia, said: "I'm really offended by what the US and the Howard government is doing. They talk about weapons of mass destruction but it is obvious to everyone that this is a war for oil.

"I feel very sorry for the innocent people that will be killed by this attack. People will be sitting in their homes and suddenly bombs and missiles will come crashing down on their homes and kill them. It is horrible to think about.

"The Australian government is a puppet to the US. Howard simply does what he is told and there is nothing he is not prepared to do. I come from Indonesia and there are lots of problems but what Howard is doing is making this a very dangerous place to be. I want to live in a safe country.

"I know that protesting against the war is not going to stop it but we wanted to voice our opinion on this. There was a lot of discussion at our school. Girls have been handing out pamphlets around the school and girls visited us from other schools explaining what was going on. I don't know what the Labor Party is doing but I don't agree with any war against Iraq. It doesn't matter to me whether it is supported by the United Nations or not."

Ebrahim Nateghi, from Randwick High, said: "The 1991 Gulf War caused half a million dead and the sanctions have killed a lot more. This war will bring many more deaths. It will bring nothing but misery and hardship. Iraq is a land of oil and it obvious to everyone that this is what it is all about.

"I originally came from Iran and now it has been listed as part of the axis of evil. Again, this is because the US wants to take control of the oil. The media talks about nuclear weapons in Iran, but the nuclear reactor in Iran is used for electricity. Everyone knows this, including the US government, but they keep on trying to create fear and suspicion."

As the rally dispersed from Hyde Park, WSWS reporters spoke with **Jess** and **Liz**, who came as part of a group of 40-50 Year 10 and 11 girls from Santa Sabina, a Catholic secondary college in Strathfield.

"We wanted to make our voices heard. We can't vote, so this is the way we can show we don't agree with the government. Australia is only in this war because Howard doesn't listen. He doesn't care what the people think, actually. I heard him say he wasn't going to listen to the protests.

"This is a power game. It's about oil too. Even if Iraq has got weapons of mass destruction, America has got a lot more. Who is going to disarm them? America doesn't have enough oil so it wants to take Iraq's.

"Our school didn't really want us to come today. They didn't want us to come in our uniforms. We wanted to make up a banner but they wouldn't let us. Our parents support us though. There are enough of us now at the school to start a group like they have at other schools. This is not the end. This war is going to happen. Bush doesn't know how to compromise."



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