

# 50,000 antiwar protesters march through Sydney

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For the second time since Thursday, tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered in Sydney to protest against the US-led war on Iraq. At least 50,000 people marched through the streets of the city from Belmore Park to the Domain. Marchers, including families, Arab people, youth, students and workers, chanted angrily, condemning the murder of innocent Iraqi's by the largest military power in the world.

Banners included "Troika of the Killing", "Shock and Awe/Blood and Gore" and "No blood for oil!" An elderly protestor carried a placard "Rich man's war, poor man's blood" and another hand-made placard read, "Each cruise missile costs one million dollars... Why is there always enough in the budget for bombs?" A large placard carried the well-known photograph of naked children running after being strafed with napalm during the Vietnam War and the words "Lest We Forget".

While many demonstrators saw themselves as part of an international movement, the official speakers made no mention of the antiwar protests occurring simultaneously across Europe, the US and Asia. The speeches of building union official Andrew Ferguson and Hannah Middleton, a leading member of the Communist Party of Australia, were preoccupied with national interests and pressuring the Howard government to end Australian involvement in the war.

While prominent Labor right-wing politicians Laurie Brereton and Mark Latham headed the march through the city, neither they nor any other Labor MP addressed the rally. The Labor Party, which supported the 1990-91 Gulf War, has taken no principled stand against the current US-led invasion of Iraq. Sensing the distrust in the audience, union official Ferguson did not own up to his Labor Party membership, saying only: "I'm a member of a certain political party but I will not

vote for any party until it begins to actively oppose the war."

Others on the platform included Gerry Binder, a Vietnam Veteran and Greens supporter, who told the rally he was handing back his war medals to Prime Minister Howard in protest against Australia's participation in the invasion of Iraq. Later he told the WSW: "I totally disagree with our current engagement with Iraq. It's American aggression and we shouldn't be part of it. I also have come to the conclusion that the Vietnam War was wrong anyhow, so there's two reasons for handing those medals back.

"I think they're after oil. I think it's a long-term strategic move they're making. And they're using us and they're lying to us. I would like to say if I'm on tape, that my beef is not with the Australian troops, it's not their fault. John Howard hijacked them. They're just obeying orders. I wouldn't like to see people turn on the troops the way they did when we came back from Vietnam. It's not their fault. They're too young and stupid to know what they're doing."

Binder said his reassessment of Vietnam began about eight years ago. "Years of thinking about it. Initially arguing about it, debating with people, listening to their side and reading more books and things that I hadn't read back then. We were wrong. It was about anti-communism, the Asian geo-strategic political thing. It was about America trying to maintain dominance. It was part of the Cold War."

WSWS reporters spoke to a number of those attending the Sydney march.

Antoinette Aboud, a 27-year-old community education worker, said that she was marching "because I am against killing innocent people and saying it's being done in the name of freedom, when it's being done in the name of oil and greed and power and to

establish America as a world power again.”

About said that the government was not representing the people. “It is not a democratic society. We’re really living under autocratic rule.” She said she was familiar with the WWS. Asked what she thought about the need for an international struggle for socialism, she replied, “Yes. We’re living in quite crazy times but it also opens up possibilities for people to come together and start considering alternatives like that one more seriously.”

Dagny, a 25-year-old student from Norway, said: “The war is about strategic purposes. It’s about geopolitics. It’s been coming for a long while, even before September 11 happened. I’m opposed to the war because it didn’t have an international resolution but I also see it as not morally justifiable.

“This movement is something quite new. It’s a worldwide movement. I think it has postponed the war a little bit. If there hadn’t been so much resistance, it would have happened many months ago. For the future I see it as being very positive. Maybe we are going to a world democracy, rather than just national democracy. It seems like democracy is failing, for example how President Bush was elected in America. I don’t see that as being representative.”



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