

Perth, Australia

Student protestors march on the US embassy

Joe Lopez
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An estimated 2,000 high school and university students, workers and youth attended the antiwar protest strike in Perth, the Western Australian state capital, on Wednesday. The exuberant rally, which was organised by Youth and Students against War, began in Forrest Place at midday and marched on the US embassy. Banners carried included: "You can bomb the world into pieces but you can't bomb it into peace", "Disarm US", "War Fuels Terror", "Books not Bombs", "No blood for oil" and "Howard does not represent us".

Students from at least 30 government and private schools attended with large contingents from Shenton College in Perth's western suburbs, John Curtin College in the south and Governor Stirling High School in the east. Hundreds attended in uniform, many having defied threats of suspension or detention by school authorities. According to one press report, teachers at a suburban train station prevented students from one school from attending. Numbers of students also came from Murdoch University, University of Western Australia and Notre Dame catholic university in Fremantle.

While many students were attending their first political demonstration, they were not given any serious explanation about the impending US-led war against Iraq or its long-term implications by organisers. Among those addressing the rally was David Kelly from the Australian Education Union. Kelly said: "Bush, Blair and Howard are planning to begin the war next week. We have to keep up the pressure and protests and influence the political leaders".

National Union of Students Western Australian President Talina Mascaranis provided no analysis. She described Saddam Hussein as a brutal dictator but then said, "John Howard and George Bush are bigger

wankers."

The WSWS spoke with numbers of students. Verity from Shenton College said: "We feel that there shouldn't be a war and it's important to stand up for what you believe in. America wants Iraq's resources. He's [Bush] always wanted a war and is using the terrorist attacks of September 11 as a motive."

Nick, 19, a visual arts student from the Perth Central College of TAFE connected the Howard government's unconditional support for the US-led war with its attack on living standards. "I've come to show my opposition to the war on Iraq and John Howard's backflips on promises to our country," he said. "He is now attacking Medicare and he introduced the GST. He has no credibility and no concern for what the public thinks. This war is about power. It's for oil but there's more to it. I'm not anti-American but I'm against America as a superpower."

Jade, Natasha and Melissa, 16-year-olds from Aranmore Catholic College, defied school authorities to attend. "Our school wouldn't let us go, Jade said, "but we just walked out. They've sent teachers out to find us but we're staying here."

Zoe, one of 50 to 60 students at the demonstration from Como Senior High School, said: "Howard has already said yes to Bush for the war, he's just not telling the public about it. We want our voices to be heard as members of the community not just as children."

Fourteen-year-olds Rose and Claudia were part of a group of around 100 students from John Curtin College of the Arts. Rose said, "Howard says that all the people on the boats [refugees] are terrorists and that we go to war for peace, but it's all about oil." Claudia was particularly angry with the press and its underestimation of earlier protests. "The media want to

make it look like we're a minority," she said, "when we're not."

Daniel, 16, from Kent Street High said Howard and Bush were "war mongers" and although oil was "a huge motivation", it was also to divert from Bush's domestic problems. "It's like 1998 when Clinton bombed Baghdad to distract peoples' attention. The only students who support the war believe the media and don't research it themselves."

Alec, 16, from Greenwood High School spoke to WSWs reporters after the rally. Commenting on speakers from the official platform Alec said: "It's got to be more informed. Instead of just saying Bush is a dickhead we need a more informed movement." Sam, 14, from Shenton College echoed these sentiments: "We need more understanding. You can't just say Howard and Bush are wankers." Several students took WSWs leaflets to distribute at their schools.



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