

Socialist Equality Party speaker addresses antiwar rally in Perth

Our correspondents
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A series of substantial antiwar protests have taken place in Perth, the state capital of Western Australia, since the US, Britain and Australia launched war against Iraq on Thursday.

On the same day some 8,000 people gathered in the evening to register their opposition to the attack on Iraq. Earlier in the day hundreds of construction workers on city sites downed tools in response to news of the first strikes.

The protest was marked by a deep anger over the war and the Howard government's decision to participate despite the opposition of a majority of Australians. Banners declared: "2003: the fall of democracy," "Not War—Murder," and "Howard, Bush, Blair: War Criminals".

After listening to speakers, the protesters marched through the city to the US consulate where people lay on the middle of the road as mock air raid sirens rang out. Police arrested eight protesters blockading the road outside the consulate.

On Saturday more than 10,000 antiwar protesters took part in the latest rally held at Perth's Esplanade. The official speakers repeated the theme that those taking part put pressure on Howard to force the government to stop the war and bring Australian troops home.

Construction union official Kevin Reynolds said that the unions would take further strike action against the war and appealed for the unions to be "more active and more aggressive". He demagogically called for a campaign to bring down the Howard government and "bring back a Labor government, but a Labor government with balls."

Reynolds avoided any mention of the record of the unions and the Labor party either on the invasion of Iraq or their support for previous Australian

involvement in military interventions over the last decade, including the previous Gulf war.

As at other protest rallies, the official platform was a stage-managed affair. But after a march through the city and musical entertainment, the rally organisers provided an "open microphone" for anyone to speak—for a few minutes.

Socialist Equality Party member Joe Lopez took the opportunity to argue for the necessity of adopting a socialist strategy.

"The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world condemn this criminal war being carried out by the US and its military allies, Britain and Australia, against Iraq," he said.

"This war and the broader US plans do have historical comparisons. The Bush administration's doctrine of preemptive war revives the militarist policy of aggressive war for which German imperialism under the leadership of Hitler became infamous in the last century."

Lopez explained that the US had embarked on an imperialist war of plunder aimed at securing control of Iraq and its vast oil reserves as part of its broader ambitions in the Middle East. The present war had to be understood as a product of the growing economic crisis of American and global capitalism.

"We welcome the protests taking place today in Australia and internationally. However, protests by themselves will not halt imperialist war. Millions of people have protested against this war, but it is being conducted by governments who no longer consider themselves in any way answerable to the democratic will of the people. The Bush administration, Tony Blair's Labour government and John Howard's Liberal regime are the political representatives of corrupt,

wealthy elites and act under their instructions alone.”

“What is needed is a strategy that tackles the root cause of militarism and war—the capitalist order itself. That requires the independent mobilisation of the working class to take political power and transform society along socialist lines, to meet the social needs of the majority rather than the profits of the wealthy few.

“What needs to be established is the political independence of the working class from all parties and political agencies of big business which defend the profit system that has created this catastrophe. Not ‘a Labor government with balls’ as raised by a previous speaker.”

The WSWS interviewed a number of protesters.

Melanie, a history student, said: “I think the protests are still worthwhile. I don’t think the protests were going to stop the war but it’s important as an expression of people’s feelings against the war. I don’t think US unilateralism is the way forward. I view it from the social effects on people. I think its necessary to drop the national barriers.

“We need to view the world as one humanity. We need to give voice to the working class and the poor and oppressed of the world. I agree that society needs to be based on human need not greed and profits. I fear people are going to get hurt. As people in Iraq are fearing for friends and families.”

Melanie was angry with the mainstream media. “They’ve made Hussein the next Hitler. They distract the people by putting forward Hussein as evil so people don’t recognise corporate evil and oppression in their own backyard.”



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