

Melbourne: 15,000 take part in antiwar rally

Our correspondents
14 April 2003

In a display of determined opposition to the Iraq war, about 15,000 people attended the antiwar rally in Melbourne on Sunday despite torrential rain. Contingents came from a number of regional centres in Victoria to join the protest. There were only three official speakers, all of whom appealed to the audience to focus their efforts on the United Nations. The Labor Party and the Greens were notably absent from the platform.

Felicity Hill from the United Nations Fund for Women claimed that in an unspecified way imperialist conflict can be averted through bringing pressure to bear on the United Nations. Referring to the February 14 demonstration in Melbourne, she shouted, “Your feet on the street made a difference. You emboldened the UN Security Council to say no!”

Andrew Hewitt from Oxfam Community Aid Abroad said that the war was drawing to an end and that it was critical that the “UN lead the humanitarian effort so that impartial assistance is given.” He went on, “The transitional regime must be seen as impartial. It must have a mandate from the UN Security Council.” He finished by saying that we must “reinvigorate the UN”.

In contrast to previous demonstrations, the applause was far less rapturous. There was a sense that the speakers provided no way forward and a recognition that the protests had not prevented the outbreak of war. The WSWS spoke to a number of those who came to the rally.

Grace Gorman, an unemployed worker and a member of the “Refugee Action Collective” said: “The first conclusion that I have drawn over the past few weeks is that ordinary people are totally disempowered. In February over a quarter of million people marched here in Melbourne and said no to the war. Howard totally ignored the people and said we are going to do it anyway and then referred to us as a mob. At the moment I am so angry with what is happening that I

find it difficult to come to any conclusions or rational decisions for the future.

“I believe that the Iraq war is a sign of the capitalists’ crisis. If they can’t achieve their pot of gold by peaceful means then they will kill to do it. When the capitalists are that desperate they show their colours, which makes it more obvious to the people. It seems to me the mainstream political parties are a spent force. You can see this with the shift by people to the Greens, their votes are doubling all the time.”

Many protesters felt a deep distrust towards the media and the banners revealed a growing awareness of the role of the US in the Middle East. One banner stated: “Saddam Hussein was only one of many dictators that can be traced back to the US/UK meddling in foreign countries.” Another declared: “Bush, Saddam, Blair, criminals murderers thieves,” while a third noted, “The war is going to bring more terrorism and civil war in Iraq.”

John Wilson, a chemical engineer, said: “There are many echoes of this in the past. The US invasion of Vietnam was to ‘liberate’ the people from an oppressive regime. That wasn’t the case. That was a war on communism. Even Hitler with Czechoslovakia was going to ‘free’ people. The war on Iraq is a war of aggression. Historically these wars never work. Sure they might occupy Iraq but in five to ten years time what will happen? It’s repugnant that one country should invade another country because they think there should be a change in the leadership.”

Marisa Choguill travelled from Ballarat with a carload of her friends. “I don’t want war, any war,” she said. “The US is saying that they are going to rebuild Iraq after the war. What they will build is a structure of absolute poverty, like in Africa, Asia and Latin America. When I was a teenager in Latin America, in the 1960s and 1970s the CIA carried out a number of military coups, which ended with the killing of Allende

in Chile. The war in Iraq is not a new policy—they are becoming more desperate.

“The media has to be independent of the government but it is completely part of the propaganda of the government. The role of the WSWS is fantastic. I have been looking at several web sites but your web site has a different interpretation. It is more lucid, more independent. We can’t stop the war with just the peace movement. At the moment the media is showing the war in Iraq. If the media forgets, will the people forget? The movement has to be against imperialism. Imperialism is the reason for the war. It can’t just be an antiwar movement.”



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