# Thousands march in antiwar rallies in Australia and Asia

**Our correspondents**
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Protesters in Australia and Asia took part in antiwar rallies and marches over last weekend to mark the third anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq and to demonstrate their continuing opposition to the subjugation of the country.

In Japan, about 2,000 people rallied on Saturday in a Tokyo park, carrying signs saying, "Stop the Occupation" as they listened to a series of antiwar speeches. The crowd later marched about 3.5 km toward Tokyo's main Ginza shopping district. On Sunday, about 800 people marched on the US embassy chanting "No War, Stop the War".

In Pakistan, protesters held antiwar rallies in several cities, chanting slogans such as "Down with America!" About 300 people marched through Multan, a main city in the eastern Punjab province, with some burning US flags, and about 200 gathered in the southern city of Karachi. Some 1,000 people took part in a demonstration in Lahore.

On Sunday, around 2,000 protesters took part in a rally in Seoul to demand the withdrawal of South Korean troops from Iraq. South Korea has the third-largest contingent of foreign troops in Iraq after the US and Britain. A demonstration also took place outside the US Embassy in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur.

In Australia, whose government joined the US and Britain in the 2003 invasion and still has some 1,300 troops in and around Iraq, about 1,000 people in both Sydney and Melbourne demonstrated, with smaller rallies in other cities.

Protesters marched through central Sydney on Saturday, chanting "End the war now" and "Troops out of Iraq". Many campaigners waved placards branding President Bush the "World's No. 1 Terrorist" or expressing concerns that Iran could be the next country to face invasion.

Two days earlier, visiting US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was heckled by campaigners in Sydney, who accused her of having "blood on her hands". During Saturday's march, Rice was secluded in a high-security location. A tripartite meeting involving Rice and the Japanese and Australian foreign ministers was convened in an inaccessible former naval base.

At Melbourne's rally on Friday night, the banners included, "Medicare not missiles," "End Terrorism" and "Troops out now".

Significantly, the demonstrations in Sydney and Melbourne included many young people, mainly university and secondary students, looking for ways to express their disgust at the war and hoping to find political answers about what lies behind the turn to militarism.

However, the platforms organised by coalitions of radical and trade union groups provided no analysis whatsoever, and their only perspective consisting of keeping up protests in an effort to pressure governments, and opposition politicians, into pulling Australian troops out of Iraq.

The featured speakers in Sydney—Greens Senator Kerry Nettle, Teachers Federation president Maree O'Halloran and a Uniting Church minister, the Reverend Ann Wansbrough—described the war as immoral, inhumane and based on lies, but offered no explanations for why it had been launched. None even mentioned the oil reserves, let alone the drive for US hegemony over the Middle East and Central Asia, and Washington's underlying economic crisis.

In fact, not one speaker, including various radicals, uttered the word capitalism, or even big business. No one referred to the working class or suggested a socialist alternative.

Nettle underscored the platform's nationalist outlook, appealing to Prime Minister John Howard to "bring home" the troops so that they had no role in "fuelling sectarian violence" in Iraq. Neither she nor anyone else mentioned the Labor Party's bipartisan support for the Howard government on the "war on terror" and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The official leaflet advertising the Sydney rally promoted the dangerous illusion that the quagmire in Iraq made it harder for the US to attack Iran and that the Howard government could be pressured to withdraw troops. It also made the claim that Labor leader Kim Beazley's call for an "exit strategy" reflected the growing anger about the Iraqi disaster. In reality, Labor has criticised the government from the right for not bringing troops back to fight "terrorism" closer to home.

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The relatively low turnout in large part reflects the deadend of the politics advanced by the protest leaders. There are many indications of the widespread opposition to the US occupation of Iraq. A speaking tour this month by British journalist Robert Fisk, known for his criticism of the Bush administration's policies in the Middle East, drew packed audiences in Australia and New Zealand.

The results of a survey published in today's *Sydney Morning Herald* showed that a majority believe that Australian troops should be withdrawn from Iraq—28 percent immediately and another 37 percent once the Japanese engineers guarded by Australian soldiers leave. The research conducted by UMR Research for the consultancy Hawker Britton also found that 49 percent of respondents believed that the invasion was "to protect oil interests". By contrast, only 3 percent thought the war was to promote democracy in the Middle East and 8 percent believed it was to fight terrorism.

In both Sydney and Melbourne, *World Socialist Web Site* supporters distributed hundreds of WSWS articles and leaflets advertising the upcoming WSWS-Socialist Equality Party public meetings on "Socialism and the struggle against imperialist war".

Aidan, a Sydney University student, told the WSWS: "I hate everything about the war, and I think that it's wrong, but it is a product of our government, which is part of the capitalist system and props it up.

"It is a new period of war. The US is trying to gain a toehold in the Middle East, so that it can have some kind of advantage over Europe and also control the oil reserves, given India's and China's increasing development and reliance on oil. So I don't think the wars are going to stop.

"There is no question that the financial side of the US is extremely weak. The entire economy is built on foreign debt. Maybe this is a gamble to keep control of the oil reserves and the two largest emerging energy markets, to keep the US on top.

"At the same time, I don't know if the overthrow of capitalism is the answer, or at least I don't think it's achievable in the medium- or short-term. Socialism has such a bad name; it is widely seen to have failed. Socialism in its purest sense has never been adopted, although the Soviet Union came close, so there's never been a trial run."

Melanie, a young engineer in Melbourne, said: "I think this war is totally unnecessary. The major victims are women and children. I think the cause of the war is to protect investments—the US and its allies want to hold onto their oil and also to prevent the oil from falling into hands that the US doesn't control.

"Howard should leave Iraq alone. It's greed. They have money on their minds with the oil reserves. Saddam Hussein has been arrested, the regime is down and they haven't found any weapons of mass destruction. What reason do they have to be there?

"Why does it take an army to rebuild a country? That isn't supporting the people there. A positive contribution would be to build schools and hospitals, which would actually lift the morale of the country."

Tony, a 26-year-old student from Sweden, has lived in three countries since the invasion of Iraq and, along with his friends, has attended antiwar demonstrations in each. Whether he had been in Stockholm, Oslo or Melbourne, "everyone I know is opposed to the war," he said.

"It's still unbelievable that America would just run over the UN. The UN said it's illegal. They said you have to confirm that Saddam Hussein's got weapons of mass destruction. They [the US] didn't get rid of him when they attacked Iraq the first time [in 1991]. If he'd been a threat, why didn't they do anything about him for ten years?"

Tony raised the issue of the Danish media's anti-Muslim campaign, which occurred just before he came to Australia. "The cartoons were a provocation so after the riots they [the Danish Government] would be able to point with their fingers and say, 'Look at those Muslims, they are crazy.'"

He was disturbed by the anti-Muslim campaign in Australia. "I saw a TV show with all this black and white footage—it was all, 'Here come the foreigners to take your jobs.' It's like it was in the 1930s and 1940s. Back then it was the Jews, just now it seems to be the Muslims."

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