Australia: Melbourne rally opposes US-backed Israeli war

Our reporters
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About 2,500 people demonstrated in Melbourne yesterday against the US-backed Israeli war against Lebanon in a rally and march from the State Library to Federation Square. Many in the crowd were families and young people, who arrived in groups from the nearby railway station, to show their opposition to the war drive.

Lebanese flags and homemade placards were held aloft, with slogans including "Israelis neo conquistadors!", "Stop the genocide!" "No to unjust war," "Free Palestine, Save Lebanon," "Stop killing my friends," "Israel /USA how many families are you going to destroy today," "Why is the world blind?"

The rally was called by an umbrella group of organisations, including the Melbourne Palestine Solidarity Network. Mahmmad Helmi, from the Federation of Muslim Students and Youth, opposed Australian Prime Minister John Howard's simultaneous condemnation of Hezbollah and refusal to condemn Israel's use of disproportionate force against Lebanon, but tied this to repeated calls on "our government" to pressure Israel to implement a ceasefire. Two Muslim clerics spoke, one of them Sheik Fahmi Imam, who promoted illusions in the United Nations, saying that the UN should be able to implement its charter, especially the first article to maintain peace and security.

David Glanz, a member of Socialist Alliance, spoke without indicating his political affiliation or mentioning socialism. Putting himself forward as a member of "Unity for Peace" he promoted the Labor Party, despite its open and unabashed support for Israel's aggression, calling for a "future Australian government under Kim Beazley to break the alliance with the US, to break with all the warmongers."

Supporters of the SEP distributed *World Socialist Web Site* statements and articles opposing the war and spoke with many of the demonstrators as they arrived.

Abdul attended with his 11-year-old son, Maysam. Abdul, a taxi driver, came to Australia from Tripoli more than 20 years ago. "I still have a lot of my family in Lebanon. I came today to support the Palestinian and Lebanese cause against the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon. I have some friends that have been killed in the south, but it is not just the south that is being bombed. It is the whole of Lebanon.

"These problems have been going on since 1948. Since then the Lebanese people and the Palestinian people have been fighting for their rights. The Israeli's keep on going because the Unites States is backing them. Rice and the US don't want a ceasefire, because they don't want to fix the problems.

"I'm not against the Jews but I am against the aggression of the Zionists and the imperialists. The Lebanese people are friendly people. All we are doing is defending ourselves. The world needs to hear our voice."

Mouhamad Elkheir and his wife Manal were carrying photos of the results of the Israeli bombing raids on Lebanese civilians, including pictures of dead newborn babies, downloaded from the Internet. Mouhamad said he wanted people to see the photos because the media wasn't making them available. Born in Lebanon, he came to Australia six years ago. Manal was born in Australia and they have been married 10 months. All Mouhamad's family are living in Tripoli.

Mouhamad told WSWS: "We came to protest against the barbaric war by Israel on Lebanon. Against the murder of families, old people and children. The only way we can help is to demand that the Australian government help the innocent people.

"Israel is bombing everywhere. They bombed the TV station that is only two kilometres from my house. This week I lost my cousin. He was killed when he was driving a truck to deliver food, medicine and clean water. He was killed by a bomb on his way to Beirut. Driving trucks is

his job. He was only 31-years-old. He has a wife and three children, and the youngest is only 10 months old.

"What Rice and the US government are doing is absolutely shocking and inhumane. How could they support Israel? Israel is the face of the US in the Middle East. The US is targeting Muslim countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The bombing of the UN people at the observation posts on the border is to tell the UN to stay away so that Israel can do what they want. The US has the final veto at the UN."

Manal said "We are keeping in touch with Mouhamad's family every day by phone. We are continually watching the TV. We watch everyday. The war is inhumane. We want to help but we can't because we are here. We feel guilty because we can't help. All we can do is protest, hope and pray."

Yousef, a taxi driver, said: "This is the first demonstration I have attended. I used to live in northern Lebanon during the civil war. I had basically a normal life as the trouble was in the south. But you were always worried about what could happen.

"I have family in northern Lebanon. They have seen bridges being blown up, but the main attacks have been in the south. The US wants to build a new Middle East—the US way. But no one can accept that. You can't make people happy by bombing them and using force.

"There was no ceasefire in Rome because they think after another week they will destroy Hezbollah. The US gave a green light to bomb, but Hezbollah is still fighting.

"We need peace. The UN is only working on one side. They want to take power from Middle Eastern people and give it all to Israel. The US gives Israel smart bombs that are used on civilians and in blowing up infrastructure. America has taken all the power over the UN."

RMIT university student Asmaa said: "The Palestinian people have reached a point where, especially the young ones who have been born into this problem, just don't have a future, they have absolutely nothing to lose. They have no education, nothing.

"As soon as someone says something against Israel, they're counted as anti-Semitic. We don't hate Jews—we don't hate the people. It is more about the government of Israel and what their end goal is.

"Hamas and Hezbollah are not terrorists, they're defending their own people. I hate it when they say, 'Hezbollah decided to bomb them.'

"Israel decided to bomb a beach—and shelled a whole family of 10, killing little children. I saw it on Al Jazeera—you didn't see it on the normal news. The death rate of Palestinians is going up, while the death rate of Israel is very small.

"As for the war on Iraq—it was so perfect [for the US administration] that 9/11 happened. They could use it as an excuse to topple Saddam Hussein. People were so upset at the time, they were prepared to believe it about weapons of mass destruction.

"The US protected Israel against condemnation when they killed the UN people the other day. If we had killed UN people, you know we would be condemned. At the end of the day, we're going to get blamed.

"After 1948—it has gone downhill from there. Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia—forget them. They just look at the dollar—look at all the things they do with the US. They're just sell-outs."

Yasmean and her friend Fatima are students at Monash University. They heard about the rally by email, and decided to attend. This is the first time they have been involved in a political demonstration.

Yasmean said: "What they are doing is inhumane. Palestinians have been struggling for over 50 years. Israel is going in there to kill, to destroy the country. Of course the US is behind it. What happens to the civilians being killed? John Howard says Hezbollah are terrorists, but he is the one who is a terrorist.

"They are forcing people out of their homes. It is sad. The Australians that go there can come back home. But if you live there, and your home is destroyed, where do you go?"

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