

Australia: Thousands demonstrate against war on Syria

Our reporters
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About 2,500 people, mostly from the Syrian community, protested in Australia last Saturday against the planned US-led military assault on Syria. More than 1,500 demonstrated in Sydney's Martin Place and up to 500 outside the Victoria State Library in Melbourne, with smaller rallies in Brisbane and Perth. Protestors carried Syrian flags and banners and a range of handmade placards, including "No US military intervention in Syria," "Syria will not kneel" and "War on Syria built on lies."

Socialist Equality Party Senate candidates Mike Head and Patrick O'Connor addressed the demonstrations in Brisbane and Melbourne respectively, outlining the need for a unified movement of the international working class on a socialist program to fight militarism and war.

Saturday's rallies, which were largely organised through Facebook and other social media, received no preliminary coverage in the mainstream media and were only perfunctorily reported on television news services later that night.

Those at the demonstrations carried signs pointing to the involvement of Al Qaeda and other Islamic jihadist in the so-called Syrian "opposition." The so-called Syrian "rebels," which are dominated by these Islamist groups, have been armed and financed by Washington and its allies.

Many of those addressing the rallies referred to Washington's "weapons of mass destruction" lies against Iraq in 2003 but defended the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and called for peace talks. An Australian-Arab Council speaker in Sydney appealed to the Rudd government to "stand up to the big American bully." Earlier that day Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared, without providing a shred of evidence, there was "overwhelming evidence" that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons. Australian foreign minister Bob Carr pledged Australian government support for any US action against Syria. (See: "Australian government backs unilateral US attack on Syria")

In Melbourne speakers included representatives of the Australian Syrian student union and Australians for Mussalaha [Reconciliation] in Syria. The WikiLeaks Party's Senate candidate in Victoria, Binoy Kampmark appealed for a "diplomatic solution" in Syria. Julian Assange's party had previously called for a parliamentary debate to assess the evidence on the chemical weapons attack and decide whether a military intervention was in "Australia's interests." (See: "WikiLeaks Party mired in crisis")

Socialist Equality Party Senate candidates Mike Head and

Patrick O'Connor opposed the US war plans and explained the economic and political factors behind Washington's military aggression, and the dangers facing the international working class.

O'Connor warned that a US military attack on Syria "would have incalculable consequences across the Middle East and the world—and almost certainly be followed by an Israeli attack on both Lebanon and Gaza, and a US-led war against Iran." He said the eruption of US militarism was driven by the worsening crisis of the global capitalist system, the most serious since the Great Depression. National governments around the world, he continued, were attempting to use war to divert mounting social tensions at home outward and cover up their social austerity cuts and attacks on democratic rights.

O'Connor pointed out that the CIA directly and via US allies such as Saudi Arabia had been funding and arming Islamist militias over the past two years in a regime-change operation against the Assad regime. He also explained that the SEP did not politically support the Assad regime but that this issue was an issue for the working class and "no business of US imperialism."

The SEP candidate said the Labor government and the entire political establishment, including the Greens, were implicated in the US threats against Syria. Obama's "pivot to Asia" and the establishment of the US Marine base in Darwin and other facilities, as well as Pine Gap in Central Australia, were part of Washington's preparations for war against China.

Head told the Brisbane rally that the alleged chemical weapons attacks in Syria were far more likely to be perpetrated by the "rebels," who had access to the US armoury of such weapons via the CIA and US military agencies. As well as providing a pretext for long-prepared war plans, the timing of the operation was an attempt to distract attention from the exposure by Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning of US imperialism's war crimes.

SEP supporters distributed hundreds of copies of the *World Socialist Web Site's* "Why the United States is waging war against Syria" and the party's federal election manifesto at all the demonstrations.

In Sydney **Abee**, a young mother, said: "Just like in Iraq and Libya, the US says that it's for freedom but they really don't care about anyone. They just care about their bank accounts and their pockets. I know it's not the American people, it's the big powerhouses and banks that will profit from an invasion of Syria."

Nahla, 44, an environmental health officer, said: "My question to Obama is, 'Why are you supporting Al Qaeda? You went to

Afghanistan and Iraq to supposedly stop Al Qaeda. Why are you supporting them in Syria?” A US military attack, she said, would bring major destruction to Syria and that US support for the so-called rebels had already begun to destroy Syria’s rich society, culture and history as well as its education and health systems.

“Ten years ago, the US said they were going into Iraq to fight for democracy. Now we see bombings every day,” she said. “You can’t destroy a country to bring freedom and democracy—it’s impossible. Who is going to pay [to rebuild] the hospitals, the schools?”

Mishlene, visual communications student, said she came to the protest, not because she supported Syrian President al-Assad but to “oppose war and injustice, in-equality and oppression in all its forms, and most of all to demand truth and honesty, especially from our leaders and our media. I believe the USA has absolutely no right to interfere, and that it should always be up to the people of Syria to decide what is best for their own country.”

She carried a copy of George Orwell’s novel *1984* and held it alongside a handmade placard denouncing US military aggression. “In Year 9, this book changed my perspective on everything. I won’t allow myself to be brainwashed and I won’t allow myself to accept what the media is telling me unquestioningly.

“What happened with Edward Snowden really uncovered a lot about the US. If that’s a taste of what they have got, how much more do they have? Everything with Snowden and Bradley Manning are signs that there is a dictatorship. Not only in Syria and other countries, but in the US as well.”

Errol, an RMIT student in Melbourne, said: “The Syrian intervention is a continuation of the Zionist-US backed initiative to destabilise countries within their vicinity. Rather than taking on the sort of casualties they did in Iraq and Afghanistan, they’re using artificially-created rebel fighters ... They’re mercenaries. It’s like what happened in Libya to overthrow Gaddafi, which was about oil and to have more control over the region.

“The US wants control over as many parts of the world as it can; keeping a watchful eye on everyone. It’s the same as in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Hiroshima—even the stuff they were doing in Haiti [in 2010] after the national disaster. US wars are always portrayed as the ‘greater good,’ but it just keeps repeating itself. It’s a relentless pursuit of global surveillance and control ...”

Originally from the Balkans, Errol compared it with the NATO intervention in that region: “In the grand scheme of things, that was a war that suited the West. The British and the Americans had already drawn up plans to divide the region. Before then, there were people from all different religions and ethnicities.”

In Perth, **Rowade** attended with his friends:

“I’m here to support Syria. If we let the US go in, Syria will end up like Iraq. I’ve seen Syria in the last few years and it was a good and peaceful place ... I was there at the beginning of the conflict and I can tell you now it is no place to live.

“The rebels consist of criminals and convicts from many other countries, which shows the US will work with anyone to get what they want. Having been in Syria before the rebels, we had friendly neighbours and we all got along—Muslim Shiite, Sunni, Christian, Jewish all together. People are divided against one another but we need to stand as one ... The Syrian people want to stop this war but

the US wants us to fight ourselves, they are provoking us. When this conflict is over many people will be leaving—and now Australia is saying they won’t take refugees.

Ryan in Brisbane said: “I came to support the people of Syria against the violence of capitalism. It is being brought by large countries like America against other countries that cannot really put up a fight against that kind of overbearing might ...”

“It’s all about more money, more power. Capitalism can’t really be voted out. It’s an overbearing cancer that’s growing and growing, and doesn’t really matter who you put in power, whether it’s Barack Obama or George Bush or a Clinton or a Kennedy, the cycle will continue ... The Rudd Labor government has been basically brown-nosing the American government, looking for a handout, during whatever the American government wants them to do.”

Simon, a building worker, said: “People are starting to wake up and realise that there’s a bigger agenda going on. This is another war being started, based on lies, and for the same reason: world domination and ensuring that the petro-dollar keeps its power.

“Labor’s role doesn’t surprise me in the slightest. It’s just what they do. They are America’s lapdogs ... They’ll be making their money as well. It did surprise me that the UK parliament said no, but I think that’s just for the meantime. If America goes in, then there’ll be new evidence, ‘oh America got attacked,’ therefore now we have to go in. It won’t stop the war.”

Em commented: “I’m against war, and I’d rather see people at peace than using guns against each other. People are too caught up fighting for their countries, when we need to fight for the planet. If everyone goes to war and there’s one country left standing, there won’t be an earth to live on.

“People think that governments are there for us, but they’re just so caught up on money,” he added. “It makes me sick to my stomach. Oil and gas and all of those things, it’s all about money ... People thought Obama was against war. Politicians all have their little rants to begin with, and say they’re going to change things, but they don’t. They’re all exactly the same.”



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