

Australia: Workers and youth oppose war in Iraq

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party supporters recently campaigned in Melbourne's northern suburbs for SEP public meetings on the imperialist debacle in Iraq and the struggle against war. Teams in Coburg, Glenroy, Broadmeadows and Meadow Heights invited workers, retirees and young people to attend the meeting and discuss the escalating war crisis in Iraq.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has said he would "take it very seriously" if US President Barack Obama requested Australian troops be sent back into Iraq. There is a vast gulf, however, between the attitude of ordinary people and the media and parliamentary establishment. Those who spoke with the SEP teams universally opposed US imperialism's predatory wars in the Middle East, and Australia's involvement.

Melbourne's northern suburbs are home to many people from the Middle East, with a quarter of Meadow Heights residents born in Turkey, Iraq or Lebanon. The area suffers recession-levels of unemployment due to the destruction of manufacturing jobs, including the closure of South Pacific Tyres, Pacific Brands and many other factories. Now the Broadmeadows Ford plant is scheduled to end production in 2016. Several workers compared the austerity cuts in Australia to the social crisis in the US.

Vicky said: "What's happening in Iraq is due to America going in there 11 years ago. It was going to implode eventually and now it's happening. America shouldn't have gone in. There were no weapons of mass destruction ... They blamed September 11 and they used that as an excuse. They were going to go in to take over Iraq and take their oil. It's all money and oil, and control."

Vicky commented: "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The politicians are all the same. They're all a pack of liars and out to line their own pockets. At the

end of the day, the poor people mean nothing to anybody and we'll be dragged into war, which seems likely, going by the situation today."

Ayaaz condemned US and Australian involvement in the Middle East and the current government and media campaign to use the debacle in Iraq to scapegoat Muslims. "It's all politics," he said. "Australia needs America on their side. They're out there doing it with America like a big brother on their side."

"What you see in America is they associate Muslims with terrorists and bombings. Australia is following America, so there's going to be all the same sort of stuff in the newspapers and on television here. I think the aim is to bring the same sort of fear to Australia. They want to bring that fear to the whole world. It's like a whole plan to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. There's not going to be any middle class here. It's not going to get any better."

Outside the Broadmeadows department of social security office, SEP campaigners pointed out that the recent federal budget included another substantial boost in military spending.

Charlie, an ex-meatworker, said: "I didn't know that the military got an increase in funding. I watch the ABC all the time and I wasn't aware of that. Australia shouldn't be in wars at all. No one is coming to attack Australia. Why should Australia attack other countries? I feel sorry for all the children and old people in Iraq. The US is there for its own benefit—it's petrol and nothing else."

Charlie explained his situation: "I don't like the budget at all. I go without a lot of things now, such as less food, no entertainment. I worked in a meat processing plant for ten years and my shoulders are injured seriously. That's what constant repetitive work has done to me. I can't work anymore and I can't even

hang out the clothes on the line now. After expenses are taken out, I'm left with \$200 a week to live on."

Charlie added: "It's going to look like we are in a third world country if it keeps going. It's like that because of all the wars. The US workers are on \$6 an hour in some places. It's terrible there."

Losa, a 20-year-old student teacher, receives no government income support. "I'm living off what I saved when I was working at McDonalds and as a teacher's aide," she said. "I am digging into my small savings. I think the new rules with welfare payments—young people receiving no support for six months if you lose your job—is ridiculous. It's all about defending the rich and they don't need to be defended. How are most of the people to survive?"

Losa immigrated to Australia from Iraq 15 years ago. "My mum and my sister were going to fly back and see my grandad this month. My mum has not seen her father for nearly 20 years, but she can't go back to Iraq now—it's such a complete mess, it's chaos."

Losa commented: "I don't know why we are spending more on the military. Why do we keep going to Iraq and just keep killing people? Here we spend millions and millions of dollars on keeping refugees out of Australia. Why don't we stop doing that? Let refugees come here and use the money for other stuff, jobs, something else. Those in government need to think about what's good for everyone, not just the rich. I think what is happening is we are becoming like America. People, you know, in America are really, really poor. They have celebrities that are rich but all the rest are really poor."

Chris, a project manager, spoke about the US justification for war. "To get into Vietnam the US staged the Gulf of Tonkin incident," he noted. "This came out when they declassified documents about 15 years ago. They fly a false flag to put boots on the ground into another country."

"America will always press for war, because it's a money spinner as well. It's so transparent now. It's not like they are going in to stabilise a region. They are going in because they have a vested interest or because they want to get their hands on natural resources."

Chris said the banks were responsible for the sub-prime mortgage disaster and the global financial crisis. "Those big bankers have never been put to trial for that. The same people are still in power. America is a first

world nation that shouldn't have people living on the streets and living in slums. I've seen that when I was over there with friends."

Sev, originally from Turkey, said: "In 2003, the US went into Iraq for oil, not WMD. They created Saddam Hussein too. They are not helping the Iraqi people ... Look at what they've done in Syria. They create the terrorism, and now it's going back to Western countries. We don't want war. We want to live in peace. We can see all the refugees coming to Australia. Why are they coming? Because of war."



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