

Workers and youth in Australia oppose new Iraq war

Our reporters
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On August 31 the Abbott government, with bi-partisan support from the Labor Party, announced that Australian military aircraft under US command would be involved in air drops and supplying guns and ammunition to Kurdish peshmerga forces in northern Iraq.

Last weekend Socialist Equality Party teams distributed hundreds of copies of the SEP statement “Oppose the new imperialist war in Iraq!” in working-class suburbs and shopping centres in Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth.

Many of those who spoke with SEP supporters were hostile to any military intervention in Iraq and rejected the government propaganda to justify the air war against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Others warned of the dangers of a new world war and several pointed to the fact that the government was boosting the military budget at the same time as it was slashing social spending.

Shoppers in Fairfield and Lakemba in Sydney’s south west and home to many migrant workers, including from the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent, pointed to the long-standing US relations with Islamist groups like ISIS and the weapons of mass destruction lies told to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Faisal, an IT worker from Bangladesh, said: “I oppose Australian involvement in Iraq. They’re using the same things they did for the Gulf War in 1991 and the invasion in 2003. US said there were weapons of mass destruction but after a long war and 200,000 people killed officially, and many more unofficially, they found nothing. It was a big hoax.

“We shouldn’t be involved in this sort of destruction again but obviously the Australian government wants to have good relations with the US and the Europeans and whatever the big boss says, they do it... The population have been given no say in this because they know that the people will oppose it.”

In recent weeks, Lakemba has been the subject of anti-Muslim fear-mongering by the Murdoch-owned tabloid, the *Daily Telegraph*, which has falsely claimed that local residents support Islamic jihadists.

Faisal commented: “There are people from more than 100 different countries living in this area and yet the newspaper goes on about people here supporting terrorism. This is rubbish but it’s aimed at trying to whip up worries and fear in the whole community.”

Adam said the US, Australian and European governments had “supported ISIS so that they would kill [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad. They created ISIS because it was attacking Syria. How

can someone who is attacking Syria be fighting for freedom but once they go to Iraq be called terrorists?”

Commenting on the US-led provocations in Ukraine against Russia, he said: “They are heading towards war and this time it will be very bad. Compare what they are doing to Russia today and the Cuban missile crisis. When Soviet missiles were sent to Cuba, America said don’t put these weapons close to my home but look at where Ukraine is. It’s right next door to Russia and the US helped overthrow an elected government [in Ukraine].

“WWI started in Sarajevo with just the killing of a crown prince and it led to the killing of millions of people. War just needs to be lighted. Fires start from embers. And it can happen today.”

Sandra from Fairfield said: “They [Australia and the US] should just stay out of there [Iraq], it’s none of their business. If they want to help with food, fair enough but war-wise they shouldn’t get involved. They don’t care about religious minorities. If they want to help people they should help the homeless in Australia, and try to house everyone in Australia first.

“Tony Abbott’s government has cut money from so many things for so many people because we’re in debt, but they’re willing to spend billions on fighter jets.”

In Rockdale in Sydney’s south-east, **Masud**, 26, an international student from Bangladesh, was asked whether the new US-led intervention in Iraq had anything to do with protecting Iraqis. “No way!” he exclaimed.

“What’s the point of protecting Iraq? Iraq was good by itself. There was no problem before. The problem is the US. The only problem from 50 or 60 years ago up till now has been the US. I don’t know how many more years this will continue if we don’t stand up against it.”

Bertram, 21, from Blacktown in western Sydney, said US military attacks in Iraq had nothing to do with fighting terrorism but was for oil: “If you control resources, you control people,” he said.

Washington had a long history of working with terrorist formations, he added: “There’s been a lot of funding of Middle-Eastern militias groups, like the funding of the Taliban and the mujahedin going back to the 1980s. Now that ISIS is not supporting America’s interests, that makes them the enemy.”

Andre, unemployed and originally from the Philippines, said: “War is a business. The US has the biggest military budget. They have economic trouble, and want to get resources from other countries. In Iraq, they want to take the oil.

“There is no real democracy in the US. There’s president after president but nothing changes. They’re puppets of the capitalist system and they protect the businesses. That’s why I say war is a business. They don’t care about human beings.”

In Newcastle, **Mahamad**, whose family is from Iraq, said the US was “trying to save its crashing-down economy and feed money back into the banks. Nothing has been achieved for the Iraqi people except disaster, destruction and people fleeing their homes.”

The latest Iraq intervention, he added, was “like a TV show playing in front of me. I don’t buy into it and I’m fed up with all the garbage they try to feed us. War comes from seeking power and money and from greed.”

Angela, a community mental health nurse in Newcastle, recalled the first US-led war in Iraq in 2003. “There was a large march in Sydney opposing war in Iraq and any Australian involvement. It was one of the first demonstrations I’d attended. People overwhelmingly opposed the war and were outraged over the plans to invade Iraq. I was shocked at the time that the Australian government just went ahead with it but I would not be shocked now.

“All governments ignore popular opinion and go ahead with whatever they decide regardless. The Abbott budget that cuts social services and jobs and that no one supports is an example. I know in my area several programs have been cut such as counselling, and the community health services are now under lots more pressure.”

Callum, a young worker, said: “The US makes up all kinds of pretexts for invading and making interventions but it’s really about power and controlling wealth.

“I don’t have any faith in any of the official parties here,” he said. “Abbott should not be able to make decisions to go to war without any discussion with the people. The conditions of people are being cut but there is more being spent on the military and war. This money should be spent on what is needed for people to live and to have money to spend so there are jobs. Essential services should be provided for everyone, especially education and healthcare should be free.”

In Perth, **Mike**, who is unemployed after returning from Greece, was concerned about the government’s promotion of nationalism and war. “I’m really disappointed that at a time like this they’re selling patriotism. They’re using the fig leaf of ‘let’s support the troops’ to basically just cut off any discussion or debate and say yes we are for a war that nobody wants.

“Everybody I talk to knows that the West’s intervention has led to the situation in Iraq. War is not the answer for Syria, Iraq or Ukraine but people are being made to feel frightened to say no to war because they don’t want to look un-Australian. We have to be part of ‘Team Australia’.”

Referring to the World War I centenary celebrations he said: “When I was growing up in Australia we didn’t have ANZAC Day as big as it is now. It was remembering those who died but now it’s more like ‘let’s celebrate the act of war. Let’s go look at the new warships, the new tanks and the new fighter jets they are buying.’ It used to be a solemn occasion but now it’s being glamorised.”

Anne, a pensioner, said the renewed **Brisbane**, in Iraq, “all about America wanting to remain the number one power, and we’re meant to just follow them blindly... I don’t want to see ISIS gaining control, but it would never have happened if the US had not gone into Iraq in the first place, and given all that training to Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan during the 1980s.”

“By America, I mean Wall Street,” she added. “There’s a great underclass in America, as well, which people aren’t aware of, and which our government would like to produce here with its budget and so forth. When it comes to people that are unemployed here, they don’t get a fair deal, and it will be even less so if the budget measures go through.”

Maree, a Griffith University student, said she was appalled by the renewed intervention in Iraq. “I had an argument with members of my family about it. They said we have to stop ISIS, but I said that is not what this is all about. This is about the US having control over the Middle East.”

Having lived in California for a period, Maree wanted to point out that people in America did not agree with what was happening in Iraq either. “There’s a lot of opposition over there too, you know,” she said.

In the Melbourne suburb of Footscray, **Sam**, said: “I’ve visited the area between Iraq and Syria two years ago. My dad is still there and it’s a disaster. It’s rubbish about the US and Australia going in there. ISIS is the worst but if they want to stop ISIS they should stop giving them money and weapons. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have been supplying them since 2011. Now the US and Australia want to fight them. How does that work? ISIS should not have been funded in the first place.”

Tim, a retail worker, said he was concerned about world war. “It’s not our job to police the world. Australia is helping incite a war that is not our business,” he said. “All we are doing is following in the US footsteps like a lapdog. I feel very strongly about it. Why the hell is the US using Australia as a staging ground? It sounds like it is trying to start World War III.

“I’ve looked a lot into World War II—it was horrific—and look at how technology has evolved since then. Another world war would turn the planet into a wasteland.”



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