

Anti-Trump demonstrations across Australia

Our reporters
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Thousands of people took part in protests across Australia on Saturday opposing the inauguration of US President Donald Trump. Rallies were held in most capital cities, and were attended by students, young people, professionals and workers.

The protests were called at short notice and promoted as “women’s marches” by a host of feminist blogs and liberal pundits who made an appeal on the basis of gender politics, including in corporate outlets such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The demonstrations were part of a series of up to 600 protests around the world directed against the incoming Trump administration. The events were the largest internationally-coordinated marches since millions rallied against the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

As many as 5,000 people participated in the Sydney protest, while an estimated 6,000 joined in Melbourne. Smaller protests, numbering in the hundreds, were held in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra.

The organisers sought to limit the discussion at the rallies to gender-based issues, and other forms of identity politics, in line with their support for former Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton.

Many attendees, however, expressed broader concerns over the growth of nationalism and the dangers of war, the rise of far-right parties around the world, including in Australia, and the prospects of a stepped-up assault on democratic rights under the Trump administration.

Numbers of protesters in Sydney carried homemade signs with slogans such as “Fight for women’s rights,” “Girl Power vs. Trump tower” and “A woman’s place is in the revolution.” Other placards denounced moves to restrict access to abortion and contraception, called for the defence of healthcare, and appealed to international solidarity in the struggle against the new US administration.

A march organiser, Dr. Mindy Freiband, spoke first in Sydney, declaring, “We don’t live in an isolated world, we don’t want to see nationalist agendas, we want a global agenda with women’s rights high up ...

“We are concerned about Trump’s regressive policies, choice of cabinet members, the empowerment hate speech gives to people in the streets and we are seeing the effects of that already.”

Setting the tone for the other speakers, Freiband expressed her disappointment that Clinton was not elected president. Articulating the interests of an affluent layer of the upper middle-class, the speakers were silent on Clinton’s record as a representative of Wall Street, a hawkish proponent of US wars in the Middle East and confrontations with Russia and China, and a leading figure in the bipartisan assault on the social and democratic rights of the working class.

The political conformism and complacency of the platform was summed up by the master of ceremonies, “celebrity” news reader Tracey Spicer. She favourably cited Madeleine Albright’s statement last year that: “There’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other!”

Spicer was apparently indifferent to Albright’s record as a war criminal who oversaw devastating US interventions in Africa, the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia as secretary of state in the Clinton administration. Albright infamously declared that the deaths of up to half a million Iraqi children under Washington’s sanctions regime were “worth it.”

Other speakers denounced the oppression of Aboriginal Australians, the gutting of the healthcare system and funding cuts to the arts. Fleeting references were made to the growth of social inequality and poverty. However, all the speeches were within the framework of gender politics, which have been used over the past three decades to divide the working class and promote the interests of well-off sections of the

middle class.

The striving of this layer to “break the glass ceiling” and expand their influence in the corridors of political and corporate power was exemplified by a pledge distributed by the organisers calling on those in attendance to “support women in the arts, business, sports and politics.”

Socialist Equality Party supporters distributed the statement “The inauguration of Donald Trump: An event that will live in infamy.” In discussions with participants, they raised the major class issues, including the looming threat of a nuclear world war, the social counter-revolution being implemented by capitalist governments in every country, and the turn to police-state measures to quell social opposition. The SEP campaigners insisted that the only way forward was through the development of a socialist and internationalist movement of the working class, independent of the entire official political establishment.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those taking part in the Sydney march.

Nadi, a student from Peru said: “I want to support women around the world and help give women courage to keep going. We can feel afraid of Trump. We know that Trump is powerful. That’s the reason why we’re here.

“Trump was elected due to people’s lack of knowledge and information. People tried to find a quicker solution but they made a mistake. There are so many ways to get information today into the background of people.”

WSWS reporters explained that Trump had lost the popular vote and that his victory was largely due to a collapse in support for the Democratic Party, which is widely reviled as a pro-war instrument of the banks and big business.

Joel, an office worker who recently completed a history degree, came to the rally during his lunch break. “When I found out it was anti-Trump I thought I’d stay and listen because I don’t agree with his policies and I don’t like him as a person either. I think he’s quite arrogant and I don’t like what he stands for.

“I think he appealed to a lot of extremist groups to get himself through the door. There’s a lot of sympathy towards guns. I feel like his policies are strategic. He appealed to opposition to abortion, gay marriage—all

these things that are concerns of right-wing extremists.

“You have to ask whose America is being made ‘great again?’ Is it white America, is it his America, is it conservative America? Which one is it?”

“I think he is surrounding himself with a cabinet of borderline Nazis who have the potential to damage what America has worked for. Whether they like it or not, they have become a symbol for the way the rest of the world operates and if you get a group like this in power it condones the same actions and behaviour in other countries.”

“[Hillary] Clinton is quite aggressive—that’s probably a nice way to put it. I think it’s a good thing she didn’t get in, but I think it’s a bad thing Trump got in. I don’t think they had two very good candidates to pick from. It would have been better if they had a third candidate.”



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