

Antiwar rallies in Newcastle and other Australian cities

By our correspondents
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Antiwar demonstrations took place in a number of other Australian cities and towns over the weekend.

In the industrial city of **Newcastle**, north of Sydney, about 500 people attended the Palm Sunday rally. Those in attendance were horrified by the consequences of the US assault on Iraq. Many who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* said they were not fooled by talk of liberation and pointed to the cost in civilian lives

The official platform was dominated by various church groups as well as speakers from the Labor Party and the Greens. None of them sought to draw any political lessons from the war and the experiences of the antiwar movement over the last two months.

After the largest protests in Australian history, Green Senator Kerry Nettle continued to promote the illusion that more pressure would force the Howard government to change course. She said the protests had to be maintained to “wake up some of our political leaders to properly represent us in global forums for peace”. “Iraq needs to be rebuilt through the UN in cooperation with the people in the region,” she said, adding that, “the Australian government must play a constructive role”.

When a WSWS reporter asked Nettle why she thought the Howard government could be pressured to act for peace, she replied: “I know it seems to be a problem but we cannot expect to win first time round. We need to build a bigger movement that can have a greater affect”. Questioned about the failure of the UN to stop the war, she replied weakly that, “while it had been unable to stop the war this time at least the UN stood by its charter”. This, according to Nettle “was vital for it to play a future role”.

Australian Labor Party MP Kelly Hoare barely mentioned the war in Iraq and spoke mainly about the

Howard government’s plans to deport East Timorese refugees. Speaking to the WSWS, she defended the position of ALP foreign affairs spokesman Kevin Rudd that Australian troops should remain in Iraq. Hoare denied that the troops would be part of an occupation force but “would be only to maintain order” and “fill obligations to the Iraqi people”.

After condemning the war on Iraq, Jon Lamb for the Socialist Alliance said it was now necessary to build larger demonstrations. These had to be combined with demands on the ALP and minor parties in the Senate to block supply to bring on an election and “force Howard to face the people”.

When asked by the WSWS what he proposed in place of the Howard government, Lamb ducked the question, saying it was all part of building a mass movement. When pressed if the Socialist Alliance was advocating a Labor government, he blurted out “at least they are the lesser of two evils”. At that point, an older worker, who had listened to the exchange, abruptly declared: “They are no different from the Liberals.”

In the West Australian capital of **Perth**, about 1,000 people, including students, pensioners, families, and professional people from diverse backgrounds, demonstrated on Sunday against the war on Iraq. A rally was held in Perth’s Supreme Court Gardens followed by a march through the city’s main shopping area.

Speakers at the rally included the Greens, trade union speakers and representatives from Aboriginal and Muslim groups. Appeals were made for peace and UN involvement in Iraq. But none of them, offered any explanation for what had taken place or why protests and the UN had failed to stop the war.

Many of the marchers, however, were looking for answers. They were angry that the protests had been

ignored, the war had gone ahead and no one had a say. As a worker explained to the WSWS: “People are hungry for information, they want to read about this war and the opinions of political organisations.”

Olga, a student from former Yugoslavia, has been reading the WSWS for the last five years. “Your site has been on my favourites list ever since I found it. Many things attract me to your site. You are not one-sided but are prepared to discuss all the complexities, such as this war or what happened in Yugoslavia. That is something I needed. Protests are good but we don’t have enough power. Of course we need unity of the international workers to change things.”

Up to 3,000 people demonstrated in **Brisbane**, the Queensland state capital, where they heard Labor party, and church group speakers. In **Adelaide**, the South Australian state capital, an estimated 5,000 rallied to condemn the war. Banners carried in Adelaide included “Bush in Baghdad is like Saddam in St Peter’s Cathedral”, “Pox Americana” and “Donald Rumsfeld War Criminal”.

In addition to religious speakers, Adelaide protestors were also addressed by Jasmin Achmed of the Women’s Islamic Foundation of Australia and Kay Bilmy, from the David Hicks support group. Hicks is one of two Australians imprisoned by the US military in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He has been held without charge for over 15 months and in contravention of his democratic rights and the Geneva Convention since his capture in Afghanistan in December 2001. Bilmy said Hicks’ detention was part of a global attack on democratic rights.

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