

# Sydney protesters denounce US-led slaughter

By Laura Tiernan  
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Up to 15,000 people marched in Sydney on Sunday to protest the war on Iraq, condemn the US-led military slaughter and demand withdrawal of Australian troops.

Marchers carried a variety of placards highlighting the real aims of the US-led invasion. These included: “Oil Wells are Protected! Hospitals are Ransacked and Looted”, “Found: Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction—Bush, Blair, Howard”, “Dead People Don’t Cheer Mr Howard”, “First: the coalition of the killing—Later: the corporations make a killing” and “Jeb Bush has won the contract to conduct the Iraqi elections”.

Those attending included Christian, Buddhist and other religious organisations, delegations of Greens, Australian Democrats and Labor Party members but the rally was largely dominated by numerous local community peace groups that have sprung up across Sydney in recent months.

Representatives of asylum seeker groups also demonstrated, some travelling from Baxter in South Australia and other remote areas parts of Australia to condemn the Howard government’s brutal treatment of refugees. “Liberate the Asylum Seekers,” read one large placard. A man carried a sign with the words, “Howard Rejects Refugees, Now Creates Them”.

Notably missing, however, were large groups of Middle Eastern youth and high school students. Their absence follows a series of political attacks on young protestors by the local media, the state Labor government and the trade union bureaucracy over the last three weeks.

While the military assault on Baghdad and other Iraqi cities over the past weeks has revealed starkly the inability of protest politics to halt imperialist war, speakers at yesterday’s rally continued to promote various political fictions. These included claims that the UN represented a counterweight to US imperialism and that the Howard government could be pressured to

withdraw Australian troops.

Former Australian intelligence agent Andrew Wilkie, who resigned from Office of National Assessments last month in protest over Australian involvement in the war, denounced the Howard government but told the rally: “Let’s be clear about one thing: the UN’s sidelining was not the UN’s failing. It was the failure of the US, the UK and Australia to conform with the UN’s processes.”

Donna Mulhearn, a “human shield” who has just returned to Australia after six weeks in Baghdad, said that Iraqi hospitals were unable to cope with the dead and wounded and warned that millions of Iraqis would now suffer disease and death.

Federal Labor MP Carmen Lawrence was introduced as “one of Labor’s most outspoken critics of the Howard government’s refugee and war policies”. But Lawrence issued no call for the withdrawal of Australian troops. She carefully avoided any mention of the 1991 Gulf War, when the Hawke Labor government sent warships to the Gulf, or the estimated one million Iraqis killed as a result of UN sanctions, which the ALP also supported.

Amalgamated Metal Workers Union national secretary and ACTU vice-president Doug Cameron received loud applause when he condemned Australian companies who planned to profit from the war on Iraq. But he then called on the UN to take the lead in the post-war reconstruction of the impoverished nation—the very demand being made by European leaders seeking to bolster their own position in Iraq against the US.

*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with some of those in attendance at the rally.

Frank, who came with his wife and daughter, said: “The reason I’ve come here today is because I think it’s important to stand up and be counted. I want the government to know there are people who care and I don’t want to see Australia involved.

“We should all be worried about American foreign policy. This is only the beginning so I encourage you to go and have a look at that rightwing website the *New American Century*. Have a look at their aims and look at who’s signed—Dick Cheney, Wolfowitz, Jeb Bush, Rumsfeld—and you’ll see what we’re dealing with. It is just outrageous. They’ve become the world’s policeman and they think they can go and do what they like. American policy has to be stopped because this is just the beginning.”

Richard Molton, a spray painter, traveled to the rally from Kempsey on the NSW north coast. He said: “I’m proud to be marching against this war. It grieves me greatly that Australia is now an aggressor country. The US is in there for oil and this war has been on the cards for the past 30 years. Unfortunately I think the general public sees it as a revolt against Saddam Hussein but I think it runs a lot deeper than that. For me it boils down to dollars for the US and I think this conflict has only just begun.”

Molton said he feared a wider war. “This is the first move by the US, even if they don’t mean it to be. The people of Iraq are in for a very, very hard time. The Turkish government is going to be dragged in over the Kurdish movement and this could spread quite easily over the rest of the Middle East. I can’t see the US moving out under Bush. I think he’ll want to move further on. I’m really afraid for my children. I have children who are at the age where they could be conscripted for war.”

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