

Australian workers and youth speak out against US strike on Syria

By our reporters
10 April 2017

Workers, students and young people across Australia have reacted to the US bombing of a Syrian air base last Thursday with a combination of shock and intense opposition. Speaking to the WSWS, many noted the bloody record of US and Australian interventions in the Middle East over the past 15 years. Some expressed concerns that the direct targeting of a base at which Russian troops were present marked a dangerous turn towards a broader military conflagration.

The sentiments of ordinary people stand in sharp contrast to the response of the Australian political and media establishment. Liberal-National Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Labor Party leader Bill Shorten hailed the illegal act of aggression by the US.

The media, including its nominally “liberal” wing, has universally lined-up behind the fraudulent pretext for the US bombing—that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons last week—and has suppressed all information indicating that it was the US-backed Islamist opposition that had the most to gain from the alleged nerve gas attack.

WSWS reporters spoke to workers, students and young people over the weekend.

Amanda, a middle-aged healthcare worker from Newcastle, a regional centre in New South Wales, said: “The CIA is behind the bombings in Syria and probably the gas attack as well. They have their fingers in all pies. That is how they operate around the world. If they don’t like a government, they will change it.”

Amanda questioned the official pretext for the bombing. “I really doubt it was Assad [the Syrian president] who conducted the gas attack,” she said. “It is illogical. Why would Assad do that now, when he is regaining control over Syria? It doesn’t make sense.

“America has attacked every government in the Middle East that had gained some degree of

independence. Iraq, Syria and Libya, were some of the most civilized countries in the Middle East and all had secular governments. When they [the US] invaded Iraq in 2003, no one provided any proof about weapons of mass destruction.”

Asked about the dangers of a broader conflict, Amanda commented: “There is real likelihood for a major war here. Russia has never attacked the US and they have no overseas bases except in Syria. But the US has over 200 bases in every corner of the world. I imagine if Hillary Clinton had been elected US president she would have gone to war just a couple of days after the election.”

In the Latrobe Valley, in south-east Victoria, WSWS reporters spoke with residents about the relationship between the drive to war abroad and the assault on the social conditions of the working class. The region faces a deep social crisis, after decades of job cuts in the power sector, which will be exacerbated by the closure of the Hazelwood power plant last month and the destruction of 750 jobs.

Misty, a 22-year-old casual worker, said: “I think that war has gotten to the point where it’s not about protecting people. It’s about a selfish government.

“I wanted to go and fight in a war when I was young. I did 28 days of training. It’s only in the last two years I decided not to. I realised people are not fighting for freedom, but for money. I don’t think it’s right for some of us to suffer just for someone else to put money in their pocket.

“In Iraq, in 2003, there were no weapons of mass destruction. They said there were. It was a lie. I think this one in Syria is the same. There’s another reason they want to go to war in the Middle East. There’s a lot of money to gain from controlling the oil.”

Misty continued: “The government here spends all

the money on war and things that aren't necessary. They could be funding homes for people who are homeless. There isn't enough done for the people who need it. I don't see people as Muslim or Iraqi. We're just people. We all have to work, we all have to survive."

Jordan, a 24-year-old demolition worker, said: "I think this whole thing in Syria is caused by the US. It's just like Iraq. In 2003, it was all over oil. Saddam Hussein was a bad man but it wasn't a reason to take over a country."

Asked about the billions spent by the Australian government on war, Jordan said: "I believe money is spent in the wrong way. There's nothing much out here. I came here to live with my girlfriend's family. There are a lot of drug problems and there are no jobs. I find whatever work I can. I get work three out of seven days. It's not enough to get by."

Yvonne, a retiree, pointed to the illegality of the bombing. "The question in my mind now is, did Trump order the bombing?" she asked. "Trump has the formal title of president but he is not the government. I don't know whether according to the US constitution he can make unilateral decisions and have them executed."

Yvonne denounced the media, for uncritically peddling the claims of the major imperialist powers. "I know what the media is saying is tailored. It's tailored by what is not said," she commented.

Yvonne pointed to the persecution of refugees, many of whom are fleeing the Syrian conflict, by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments. "I just can't bear to watch the television," she said.

"I'm the daughter of refugees and I hate the appalling policies that our government carries out against asylum-seekers in the name of 'border protection.' They don't listen to us. They're Janus-faced. There's the public face on the television with all the trimmings. And then there's the reality which we never get to see."

Anuj, a 30-year-old IT worker originally from India but now living in Sydney, said: "I'm against the bombing, any bombing. It's not something that should ever happen. I think Trump is someone who doesn't really understand why he does a lot of things. He's doing it to show he has power.

"The media is supporting what he's done because he is president of the most powerful country in the world.

The US has attacked the Middle East a lot, like they did in Vietnam. They have a history of meddling in other country's affairs."

Stuart, a transport worker in Sydney, said that US bombing was "disgraceful." "There are so many machinations in this that you wouldn't know what's going on," he said. "Western governments have created a lot of this mess. The whole region was split up by Britain at the end of World War I which started a lot of the mess."

Stuart pointed to the anti-democratic character of US-led wars: "There is never any attempt to ask the people. It's just the leaders that make the decisions and the ordinary people have to do all the dirty work for them. They are the ones sent to war and dying. The generals sit back in their ivory towers and once it's all over, they move on to the next disaster and leave all the carnage behind them."

Stuart said that there was a deepening social crisis in the US and Australia. "The US worker has been in decline for a long time," he commented. "The steel industry has been decimated, they all lost their jobs and look at it now. It's even creeping up to the high-paid and skilled workers, like the pilots in America. It's hitting Australia as well and other Western countries. What do you do? You vote for Trump as a protest vote and you end up with a bigger disaster."

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