

Anti-APEC protesters: defiant and united

Thursday 20 September 2007, by [MURPHY Emma](#) (Date first published: 14 September 2007).

Sydney,

Alex Bainbridge, chairing the Stop Bush/Make Howard History anti-APEC rally told the massing crowd that there were at least 10,000 people gathered at 11am at Sydney's Town Hall. Despite an intensive campaign aimed at keeping people away, and provocative policing on the day, up to 15,000 people come out on September 8, asserting their right to protest against US President George Bush and Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

Hundreds of high school students chanting "Troops out now!" joined with hundreds of trade unionists chanting "The workers united will never be defeated!" ensured that the crowd swelled onto George Street, sending the riot police scampering to take up new positions in front of their mobile prison buses.

Despite the efforts of a tiny group of masked neo-Nazis, the rally was peaceful. Police provocations included confiscating poles from banners outside the "declared zone" (where the APEC laws would have allowed them to do this), sealing the exits to Hyde Park after protesters had marched there, and grabbing protesters after the rally had wound up.

During the march, protesters followed the urging of rally organisers not to be provoked, and there were only a handful of arrests — including two people for nudity. After the rally, two activists on the list of "excluded persons" (despite their not being in the zone they were excluded from) were briefly detained before being released without charge.

In her welcome to country, Jenny Munroe pointed out that the federal Coalition government's military and police intervention into Northern Territory Indigenous communities would not only mean more uranium mining on Aboriginal land, it would also encourage plans for nuclear waste dumps in Indigenous communities. Referring to the lack of justice for the death in custody of Palm Islander Mulrunji in 2004, and the jailing of Lex Wotton for protesting against the murder, she said, "The legal system needs to be thrown out. We need to start working on a new one."

"George Bush arrived this week from the Green Zone in Baghdad to the Green Zone in Sydney", US Iraq war veteran Matt Howard told the crowd. He pointed to the irony of Bush invoking the Vietnam War given its true lesson which was, he said, that it was people power and GI resistance, rather than a vote in Congress by the US Democrats, that stopped the war. "The masses mobilised in the streets and soldiers put down their weapons and refused to fight", he said.

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle condemned Howard's APEC uranium deals, and described Howard, Bush and NSW Premier Morris Iemma as being "in bed with the coal industry". She said renewable energy was the only realistic solution to climate change, not phantom "clean" coal and "safe" nuclear energy. She also said all of Work Choices, not just bits of it, should be scrapped.

Keysar Trad from the Islamic Friendship Association said that a visiting man of peace would be

greeted by a city opening up, while for a man of war the city locks down. He said that if Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visits, he would not need to hide. He said that Bush needed such high level protection from non-violent protesters because he was haunted by the ghosts of the people he killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. "We are not a threat, we are their conscience!", he told the crowd.

The march off from Town Hall was led by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU). Warren Smith, MUA Sydney branch secretary, told the rally, "We're opposed to the war, to Bush and the neoliberal, economic rationalist, anti-worker policies pushed by APEC", adding that workers and unions had to speak out on all these issues. Smith said that whenever one of the organisations of global capitalism, such as the G8, the G20, the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation, met, they had to hide behind massive walls. Emphasising the importance of peaceful protest, he congratulated the rally for having the organisation and discipline needed to "throw Howard into the dustbin of history".

FBEU state secretary Simon Flynn linked the struggles of workers, Indigenous people, environmentalists and anti-war activists saying it was "time to unite in a new movement". He said that the discussions of the 21 leaders at APEC had nothing to do with democracy. "This is democracy!", he said, referring to the assembled crowd.

He condemned Howard for the war in Iraq and for Work Choices, and criticised the ALP for equivocating. The Labor Party was formed to represent workers and unions, he said, adding that "now is not the time for the tail to wag the dog".

At Hyde Park, Pip Hinman from the Stop the War Coalition told the crowd, "The likes of Bush, Rice and their trusty ally John Howard are nothing less than war criminals with the blood of hundreds of thousands of innocent people on their hands. We have truth, justice and morality on our side. And today we are a majority. A big majority.

"Howard and Bush have been forced to concede they are in a minority on the war ... That's why Bush has to 'enjoy' his visit to Sydney — in the biggest chicken run that's ever been constructed in this country!"

Melbourne Electrical Trades Union delegate and brother of one of the Barwon 13 Omar Merhi, who was unable to attend but sent a message to be read out, said: "Howard's fake war on terror has my brother in the High Security Unit in Lara for two or three stupid comments [he made] when he was 18. He has now been incarcerated for two years. Howard is the biggest terrorist, not my younger brother Abdullah Merhi."

P.S.

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