



SCHOOLS *bulletin*

**ATTENTION: AEU SUB-BRANCH REPRESENTATIVE
(please distribute)**

PEACE NOT WAR **A Message to AEU Members**

Statements by George Bush and John Howard place us on the eve of war. This action is not sanctioned by the United Nations. If war happens, you will have to deal with a range of reactions/questions/concerns from students. Certainly, most of them will be exposed to saturation media footage which will continue for some time. This will intrude into the classroom and some individual students will require more intensive support.

Your response will depend on many factors – the age of your students, their social/cultural background, the political/social context of the war, the attitudes of the broader school community etc.

Of prime importance to you, as educators, will be to do the best you can for your students. You may also hold very strong personal opinions on the war.

The purpose of this bulletin is to assist you with your dual roles/responses. The AEU at both state and Federal level is opposed to war in Iraq.

As educators, we teach ways to resolve conflict between people (including our students) without violence. The AEU believes that war is always a last resort: it kills people, destroys homes/schools wreaking untold personal, structural and economic damage which continues beyond the critical devastation.

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AEU Members are urged to support the call for peace. Such a call is not a message of support for Saddam Hussein – far from it. It is a call to pursue alternative actions rather than an attack which will cause widespread death and destruction, increase insecurity and poverty and threaten a wider conflict.

YOUR STUDENTS

You know your students well – your support for them will be based on that knowledge.

They will most likely be inundated with war images via the media, similar to September 11.

It is important to respond to their questions – but keep the response age-appropriate; reassure them but be prepared to discuss their concerns.

We urge AEU Sub-branches/Schools to discuss the most appropriate response(s) for their school community. The AEU proposes all members should suspend normal classroom instruction to read a statement to their classes and present or undertake a peace activity in the event of the outbreak of war in Iraq.

This statement can lead into general discussion or an appropriate classroom activity.

A STATEMENT ABOUT WAR

"Today is a day which you may remember forever. Our country has joined an attack against Iraq, a country in the Middle East.

As educators we teach ways to resolve conflict between people without violence. The Federal Government says that we must join the attack on Iraq because it will prevent war and terrorism in the future. Many people in Australia and around the world think that diplomacy should be given more time. Diplomacy means that it is better to talk to achieve a peaceful solution.

We must join together to work for peaceful resolution of conflicts around the world and the building of strong bonds of friendship with people from other countries within our own community.

If there is anything you don't understand or want to talk about, we now set aside some time to think about it and discuss it."

A CLASSROOM APPROACH

Students in our schools are as affected by global events, including war, as any other member of the Australian public. Some advice from psychologist Clyde Smithwick for teachers about dealing with troubled students is on the AEU website and in the AEU News (25/10/01 – Vol. 7 No. 3). While the original News article was written in response to the events of September 11, 2001, it would be helpful now. Classrooms may be the only vehicle for students to voice their fears about the impending/actual war, and to participate in serious discussions about the issue. How might teachers incorporate this important issue into the classroom and the curriculum? The following activities are some starting points to facilitate the discussion. You should adapt them as appropriate.

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- Discussion: War is about conflict. How does conflict happen? What are its different forms? How does it develop at different levels?
- Discussion: Small family disputes versus major fights. Resolution techniques.
- Discussion and research: What generally happens in situations where violence is used as a solution? What other options do we have? Are there models of non-violent conflict resolution?
- Consider the kids: What are the best ways you can support students who are distressed by the outbreak of the conflict? What on-going approaches may help support students, and how can they look at positive rather than violent approaches to problems?
- Discussion: What access do we have as citizens to peaceful and non-violent ways of objecting to issues in our society? What options do we have to resolving issues peacefully on a more personal/school/workplace level?
- Use and create 'peace' resources: compile well-known anti-war and protest speeches/poems/songs for students to read, encourage classroom writing of same.
- Class story and history lesson: Introduce the classic story, "Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes" (based on the bombing of Hiroshima) to teach children about the power of one person to create change and the long term consequences of war.

YOU

Also, on the day the war starts, members in the metropolitan area are urged to come into the city after school to a rally at 5.00pm outside the State Library. Those who are close to the city are also asked to come at lunchtime the next working day to a union rally outside Trades Hall to show their opposition as unionists. The AEU is not asking members to stop work but members are asked to come during their lunchtime if free of assigned duties. The rally starts at noon and Trades Hall is on the corner of Victoria and Lygon Streets, Carlton. There will also be a further community rally on the following Saturday at 1.00 pm at the State Library.

AFTER THAT

The AEU and other unions will be involved in a range of protest activities to oppose the war and urge you to do the same. On March 27th all Victorian unionists will be involved in workplace activities to express opposition to the war. Details of what you can do will be in the next Bulletin.

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