

Submission to the Senate

I was at Villawood on 25 April 2011 and can confirm that the rally in support of asylum seekers was peaceful, except for one incident when a passing motorist appeared to express displeasure about the event by knocking into a demonstrator on Gurney Road. The police took the view that the demonstrators' security officers were not doing their job, i.e. keeping demonstrators out of the way of traffic, and therefore they did nothing to reprimand the motorist in question.

I did not witness any fences were stormed. Speakers and their supporters climbed onto the 1 m perimeter brick wall separating the 'facility' from Gurney Road to address the crowd (about 250 people). These speakers included Mark Goudkamp, relatives of inmates, a Prince of Wales Hospital psychiatrist (Mike Dudley?), a Greens election candidate, a senior NSW Teachers' Federation person and Frances Milne, a Christian advocate for refugee rights.

In short, speakers collectively put forward arguments to counter the predominant discourse promulgated by the mainstream media, and succeeded in doing so by using cogent arguments supported by facts. However, their views have not been as widely publicised as they deserve to be. For example, I could not find a single mention of yesterday's proceedings in the 26 April 2011 edition of the Sydney Morning Herald.

The crowd began to disperse around 3 pm, after which an Iraqi (?) spoke to the crowd outside the Miowera Road entrance to the 'facility', which was closed off by guards. He informed us of the plight of a child with special needs housed in the 'facility', alleging that this child is being denied access to essential medical attention.

I proceeded to make the longish trek to the main Birmingham Avenue entrance, hoping to be able to visit the inmates I had seen on a previous visit in January 2011. However, a pleasant guard from the Republic of Ireland informed me that I would have to wait till 4 o'clock. His less pleasant colleague told me to move away from the gate as I was blocking traffic. I pointed out that since he was not letting anybody into the 'facility' my position in front of the gate did not constitute an issue. He got cranky with me. I then turned to the Irish guard and asked him whether he had come to Australia to work in the 'facility' because no such employment was available in his own country. He replied that he could not get any kind of job back home. Several other people attempted to gain access to the facility while I was there, including Frances Milne, who had made an appointment on the grounds that she had legal matters to discuss with inmates. Having rung the number given to her after 4 o'clock as the Irish guard had instructed her to do, she, like the rest of us, was informed that the 'facility' was in lockdown because of the disturbance that the demonstration was causing. Despite this, she behaved with exemplary civility towards the guards,

End of submission

Nicholas Wood

