

Wandsworth Stop the War Coalition



Newsletter Spring 2005

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NB. The articles in this newsletter have been chosen as they address some of the key issues facing us. However, they do not necessarily reflect the views of all in the Stop the War Coalition, which is a very broad based group.

The War on Civil Liberties

Babar Ahmad, a resident of Tooting, is currently imprisoned in Milton Keynes, awaiting extradition to the US under draconian new "anti-terror" laws. His family have been speaking at StW meetings all over the country. All that they ask is for Ahmad to be given a fair trial in the UK. The following story regard his case.

A Tourist brochure could lead to Guantanamo

Ashfaq Ahmad, father of British hostage Babar Ahmad, made this statement at the European Social Forum.

"Not so long ago British hostage Ken Bigley was killed. His brother Paul said that the British government was responsible for his death.

The same people responsible for Ken Bigley's death are holding my son hostage since kidnapping him in August 2004. In December 2003 my son, Babar Ahmad, was arrested by British anti-terrorist police at his south London home.

He was beaten, tortured and brutalised, suffering over 50 injuries including bleeding in his ears and urine. Photographic and medical evidence is available.

The police ransacked my family's homes, causing one member of the family to have a miscarriage due to the trauma of the ordeal.

Babar was held for six days whilst police searched for evidence of criminal activity. No such evidence was found and he was released without charge.

On 5 August 2004, the day his complaint was passed to the Crown Prosecution Service, Babar was kidnapped on his way home from work, by British police acting on the orders of the US government. Various newspapers have also claimed that my son was plotting something against the Empire State Building.

Their "evidence" to support this is a 1970s tourist brochure of the building.

I would like to mention that firstly, it was not found in my son's residence, as report-



ed, and secondly, that the brochure belongs to me. I was the one who visited the Empire State Building in 1973.

Unfortunately, our legal team have told us that under the new 2003 Extradition Treaty between the UK and the US, we are not allowed to contest any so called "evidence" against my son as a bar to the extradition.

The fact that my son has been permanently resident in Britain since his birth here 30 years ago is irrelevant.

My son still does not face any charges in the UK, although the British and international media has already declared him guilty of the US allegations.

He faces life imprisonment in America and physical, mental and sexual abuse in the manner of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib.

I end with a quote from foreign secretary Jack Straw on the death of Ken Bigley:

"To kidnap a man, subject him and his family to the agony of prolonged uncertainty, and then to murder him, and in this way, is inhuman."

I served the British government as a civil servant for over 20 years of my life.

Is the way my family and I have been treated any less "inhuman" than this?

For more information, go to these websites
www.freebabarahmad.com

www.stoppoliticalterror.com

Babar appreciates letters. The experience of imprisonment is intended to isolate and demoralize him. Please help to overcome this and write to:

**Babar Ahmad, British political prisoner,
MX5383, HMP Woodhill Tattenhoe Street,
Milton Keynes MK4 4DA.**

Problems for the US after Iraqi elections

"Is the prime minister finally emerging from the shadow of Iraq?" asked James Naughtie on Radio Four's Today Programme on Monday morning. The media briefings pouring out of 10 Downing Street are clamouring in answer: "Yes!"

The message has been taken up by many journalists. For example, James Blitz wrote in the Financial Times last week, "Fortune has started to smile on the prime minister again—and now we can be forgiven for wondering what Labour can do wrong... After the success of last month's elections, Iraq seems—at least for now—to be a more hopeful place."

[...And yet] Bush did not want these elections. He and his former proconsul in Iraq, Paul Bremer, wanted a hand-picked assembly to choose a government and draw up a permanent constitution for Iraq.

The elections were forced on the occupation regime by mass protests called by the leading Shia Muslim cleric in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, in January last year. Bush and Bremer were forced grudgingly to concede elections, but tried to put them off as long as possible.

But, despite all their efforts to prod and manage the Iraqi people, Bush's and Blair's preferred candidate, Iyad Allawi, won just 14 percent of the vote.

The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), backed by Sistani, won 48.5 percent after it campaigned for the US to set a timetable to withdraw from Iraq. The largest single bloc of seats won by the UIA belong to supporters of the radical Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr, last year wanted dead or alive by the US.

The Washington Post commented on Monday, "In one of the greatest ironies of the US intervention [in Iraq], Iraqis ... went to the polls and elected a government with a strong religious base—and very close ties to the Islamic republic [Iran] next door. It is

the last thing the administration expected from its costly Iraq policy—\$300 billion and counting, US and regional experts say.”

More important still, the turnout in the elections was only 58 percent. This might be a high figure in the US and Britain. But it is low by the standards of liberal democracies generally, and particularly compared to countries where the right to a real vote has only recently been won. When apartheid ended in South Africa in 1994, 85.5 percent of those of voting age took part in elections.

The low turnout in Iraq reflects, of course, that there was a massive boycott of the elections in the centre of the country, where armed resistance to the occupation is strongest. Had these provinces voted as well, then the shares won by the successful lists would probably have been significantly lower.

The final point to note about the elections is that democracy is meant to be about self-government. But there is no way that Iraqis will be allowed to govern themselves as a result of these elections.

Bush and Blair have made it clear that the occupation will continue. “You don’t set timetables,” Bush said after the elections. The US Army recently revealed that it plans to keep its troops in Iraq in the same numbers as at present—120,000—for at least the next two years.

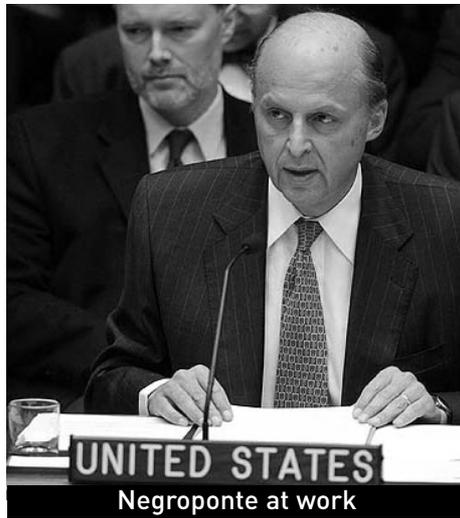
The outcome of the election is a highly fragmented National Assembly. The UIA will be just short of a majority and is itself a coalition.

This will give Iraq’s real ruler—US ambassador John Negroponte—a considerable amount of room for manoeuvre in cobbling together a cabinet that will continue to accept the White House’s orders. The fact that as shop-worn a figure as Ahmed Chalabi is being talked of as a possible prime minister gives an indication of how things are moving.

Chalabi, an embezzler and crony of US neo-conservatives, helped to supply the phoney intelligence used to justify the war, but later fell out with the US and is now a leader of the UIA.

The occupation regime is also trying to restructure Iraqi society along lines that entrench the dominance of American free-market capitalism. Thus in April 2004 Bremer issued Order 81, which bans Iraqi farmers from their millennia-old practice of freely planting and storing seeds that have now been declared the “intellectual property” of transnational corporations. The big problem that Bush and Blair face in pursuing these policies is the opposition of the Iraqi people. The elections reflected a division among those resisting the occupation.

Many, particularly in the predominantly Shia areas in southern Iraq, saw the elections as the best way of ending the occupa-



tion. Others, mainly but not exclusively in central Iraq, where most Sunni Arabs live, preferred to boycott the elections in solidarity with the armed resistance.

The occupation authorities have encouraged communal divisions between Shia and Sunni Arabs and the Kurds in the north. But it would be a mistake to follow them in seeing Iraqi politics in these communalist terms.

For example, just in the past few days there have been contacts between supporters of Sadr, who espouse radical Shia Islamism and took part in the elections, and the Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars, which supports the resistance and boycotted the elections.

In any case, there is absolutely no sign of any abatement in the armed struggle against the occupation. Why should there be? The reason why Iraqis are fighting is because their country is under foreign occupation, and the elections won’t change this.

This puts a huge responsibility on the shoulders of opponents of the war in the rest of the world—and particularly in occupying countries such as the US, Britain, Italy and Poland.

The only way to put a stop to the fighting and give democracy a real chance in Iraq is to end the occupation and get the troops out.

The next step in achieving this goal—and wiping the grins off Bush’s and Blair’s faces—is to ensure that the worldwide protests against the occupation on 19 March are as massive as possible.

Alex Callinicos,
Socialist Worker February 16 2005



Unleash the death squads

US military reveals its vision for Iraq after the elections

THE OCCUPATION forces in Iraq are to deploy Central American style death squads, under plans drawn up by the US.

The Pentagon is already calling it the “Salvador option”—a reference to the fascistic murder gangs the US spawned in that country against a popular movement for national sovereignty in the 1980s.

US magazine Newsweek reports, “Then, faced with losing a war against Salvadorean rebels, the US government funded or supported ‘nationalist’ forces... to hunt down and kill rebel leaders and sympathisers... Many US conservatives consider the policy to have been a success—despite the deaths of innocent civilians.”

A senior military officer told the magazine similar calculations are at work in Iraq: “We can’t just go on as we are. We have to find a way of taking the offensive against the insurgents. Right now... we are losing.”

Pentagon officials close to US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld believe the CIA, which ran the 1980s death squads throughout Latin America, has been soft about organising them in Iraq.

A secretive Senate committee is hotly debating extending the role of US military units trained in assassination. Rumsfeld has dispatched a retired US general to Iraq to “review” military strategy.

There he will rub shoulders with the US “ambassador” to Baghdad, John Negroponte, who as “ambassador” to Honduras in the early 1980s helped mastermind the terror squads in Central America. He concealed murder, kidnapping and torture by CIA-trained Honduran military units.

The New York Times credits Negroponte with “carrying out the covert strategy of the Reagan administration to crush the left wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua”. Death squads in El Salvador, funded via Honduras, murdered 40,000 people in one year alone.

According to Newsweek, the new plan will involve “Iraqi squads, most likely handpicked Kurdish fighters and Shia militiamen, to target Sunni insurgents and their sympathisers”.

A major investigation by Iraqi journalist Ali Fadhil, broadcast this week, found that the US during the destruction of Fallujah “also increased the chance of civil war in Iraq by using their new national guard of Shias to suppress Sunnis”.

Tony Blair says the occupation is all that stands in the way of mayhem and civil war—yet it is breeding both. That’s why it should end now.

CALENDAR FOR PEACE

Sat 12th March: SOUTH LONDON

Open Top Anti War Bus

An open top bus will tour South London to publicise the demo on the 19th. There will be a band and various speakers on the bus. Come and join us on the bus.

Ring Isobel on 0208 675 4744 for more details

Sun March 13th, 5pm WANDSWORTH STW PUBLIC MEETING

With George Galloway, Sadiq Khan Babar Ahmad's wife and others.

At the Lola Jones Suite, Tooting Leisure Centre, off Garratt Lane.

Ring 0776 154 0718 for more details

Sat 19th March NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

Called by StW, CND and MAB

Assemble in central London at 1pm. March 19th will be an international day of action against the occupation, called for the second anniversary of the war on Iraq.

This will be a mass mobilisation before the general election.

Please advertise it as widely as possible as early as possible.

March/April 2005: PARTY FOR PEACE:

fund raiser for Wandsworth StWC and the StWC nationally

The question they dare not now ask

Polls carried out for the occupation authorities have consistently shown that Iraqis reject the occupation on principle and have little faith in US-appointed rulers.

In November 2003, 63 percent of Iraqis said that they had some confidence in the US-appointed governing council. By April the following year that figure had fallen to 23 percent. The Iraqi ministries also fared badly, with confidence falling from 63 percent in November 2003 to 31 percent in April 2004.

Confidence in the occupation authorities also fell sharply. In November 2003, 47 percent of Iraqis polled said they had confidence in the authority. By April 2004 this had collapsed to 9 percent. A major poll carried out in March 2004 also showed a remarkable similarity in responses from Sunni and Shia areas.

Eighty percent of Iraqis in both Sunni and Shia areas said they thought of the coalition as occupiers. More significantly, many Shias have changed their mind in the space of a year: only 47 percent said that at the time of the invasion they thought of the coalition forces as occupiers compared with 64 percent in Sunni areas.

According to another poll conducted in May 2004, 81 percent of all Iraqis thought that the occupying forces should leave. By November 2004 polls stopped asking Iraqis if they supported the occupation.

But the call for unity is still strong. On 16 January 2005 thousands of Shias marched through Sadr City chanting, "[Iraqi] Christians are your brothers in this country."



Quote Unquote

If we did half the shit back home we've done here, we'd be in prison. Where did Jesus say it's ok to kill people for your government?

US Marine sergeant, Baquba, Iraq

The war cannot be won. It won't be won, not now, not ever. We're getting maimed for bullshit.

US army sergeant Fred Bemis

We think Bush is an asshole for starting a war over nothing, trying to get money and oil.

Craig Lowe,

from the British Black Watch regiment

I can't understand what it is we are supposed to be doing here. Iraqis don't want to kill each other, they only want to kill us.

British trooper Tim Clews,

Camp Dogwood, Iraq

It's fun to shoot some people. I'll be right up front with you, I like brawling.

Lieutenant General James Mattis,

who commanded the 1st Marine Division in Iraq

We're hearing things from possible recruits like, "Well let's wait and see how this thing settles out in Iraq." For the year ahead it's going to be tough to meet our goal.

Lieutenant General Franklin L

Hagenbeck, US army personnel chief
On recruitment problems for the US armed forces

War and violence never give fruitful results

Jack Straw, discussing relations between India and Pakistan



The following extracts are taken from the website of

Military Families Against the War

www.mfaw.org.uk

A father's anger: 'I would kill Geoff Hoon'

The father of two Black Watch soldiers serving at Camp Dogwood in Iraq threatened to kill the defence secretary, Geoff Hoon, yesterday because he was a "two-faced lying git".

James Buchanan, whose sons Gary, 27, and Craig, 24, both corporals, were due to return home but then redeployed north to reinforce the American assault on Falluja, said: "This man has got me so angry. If I see him in the street I would kill him. I would kill that man. I would cut his throat."

The former RAF warrant officer's outburst came at the launch of Families Against the War, a group of families who will campaign for British troops to be pulled out of Iraq. They include parents of sons who were killed in Iraq as well as parents of those currently serving.

In their letter to the prime minister, the families said: "When enlisting, service men and women sign an oath of allegiance to Her Majesty's government.

"All these people ask in return is that their government act in an honourable, truthful and honest manner and only deploy troops into the theatre of war to risk their lives when absolutely necessary, when all avenues of diplomacy have been exhausted.

"To deploy troops based on deceit of WMD is totally morally unacceptable. The blame lies firmly at your doorstep. This was a contrived war, a war of option not of necessity."

Audrey Gillan, *The Guardian*
Thursday November 11, 2004

An appeal for Conscientious Objectors

If you disapprove of this war and believe (along with millions round the world including UN secretary General Kofi Annan) that this war is illegal, it is possible to become a conscientious objector.

Conscientious objectors are people who object to a war on principle. They cannot be sent in to active combat. To become a

conscientious objector you have to contact your commanding officer and tell him you disapprove of the war. If he refuses you conscientious objector status you can then appeal. Your appeal has to be considered seriously.

We have been advised by specialist lawyers that there would be a strong case for any one who wants to object to serving in the war on Iraq.

We are currently putting together more information on how to go about becoming a conscientious objector. This will be posted on the website soon.

In the meantime if you want advice please contact us by e-mailing contact@mfaw.org.uk



Extracts from a

Letter to Tony Blair By Maxine Gentle 19.08.04

To Prime Minister Tony Blair,
My name is Maxine Gentle and I am 14 years old.

I am the sister of Fusilier Gordon Gentle who died in the war in Iraq on the 28th June 2004.

I want my thoughts and feelings to be heard and known.

My feelings are that I think you are rubbish at your job. You don't care about the British public, armed forces or anyone in fact.

My big brother died at the age of 19, and what for?

A war over oil and money, that's what I think the war is all about. There was no such thing as weapons of "mass destruction", if there were Saddam Hussein would have used them at the start of the war.

I think that you should withdraw all of our soldiers from Iraq. After all, it is not our war, it's America's. So why did we, the British, have to get involved? I think that you just don't want to get on the wrong side of George Bush.

Gordon had only passed out in April, and yet by May YOU sent him and many others to a war zone.

What I find strange is that in order to be a qualified plumber or electrician you need to train for 3 or 4 years, but to be a qualified soldier, and learn to KILL someone, you

only need to train for SIX MONTHS!

We are all hurting badly, but I don't just blame Gordon's death on the Iraqis that made the roadside bomb, I blame YOU as well because it is your fault that our soldiers are over there in the first place, by agreeing with George Bush that we HAD to go to war, when we didn't!

It is okay for you sitting there with all your money and power, ruining people's lives by the decisions YOU make.

I cry myself to sleep most of the time because Gordon has gone and is never coming back.

This is my personal feelings towards you and George Bush, but I have less respect for you than him because YOU are the British Prime Minister, well supposed to be, and I am British, although sometimes I am ashamed to admit to being British when I have got such a bad prime minister as you.

I hope you have pleasure reading this as I have had pleasure writing it.

Yours Sincerely
Maxine Gentle

Army blames Iraq for drop in recruits

Senior army commanders have expressed fears that the increasingly vocal anti-Iraq war movement is discouraging thousands of young men from considering a career in the armed forces.

They blame high-profile campaigns against the war, often led by bereaved parents and supported by celebrities and political figures, for worsening recruitment problems, particularly into the infantry.

According to military sources the high media visibility of bereaved parents, such as Rose Gentle, whose 19-year-old son was killed, and the unpopularity of the war have made recruitment and retention a problem, exacerbating an already acute recruitment crisis in areas such as Scotland. The problem is now also spreading to the north of England and Wales, forces officials say.

As well as a shortfall in young men volunteering, army officers have reported a wider reluctance to support a career in the army with parents refusing to sign consent forms for junior soldiers to sign up and, in some cases, local authorities with a strong anti-war sentiment refusing permission for recruitment officers to put up stands at local venues.

The impact of the anti-war movement has also made itself apparent in the United States, where there has been a sharp decline in volunteers from communities - such as the black community - that have traditionally supplied soldiers. In the US this has been tied to a sharp increase in desertions - a problem so far not seen in the UK.

Lorna Martin, *The Observer*
Sunday December 19, 2004