

Solidarity with Iraqi workers – No Sweat Newsletter

October 2003



The UK campaign against sweatshops

The democratic movement or trade unions and unemployed organisations in Iraq have had to fight against Saddam in the past for democratic rights. They are now under military occupation. The US and UK government would want us to believe that their presence in Iraq is to further the interests of democracy. But as the articles in this month's newsletter show they do not support the forces that can build democratic rights for Iraqi people. They need your support!

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Let's help rebuild Iraq's labour movement

Trade unionists around the world must help Iraqis create one of the vital building blocks of a free society - whatever the US corporations think.

Harry Barnes, Kevin Curran and Tony Lloyd

Harry Barnes is Labour MP for North East Derbyshire; **Kevin Curran** is GMB General Secretary Elect and **Tony Lloyd** is Labour MP for Manchester Central.

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/iraq/story/0,12239,973202,00.html>

Reconstruction in Iraq is often compared to rebuilding Germany and Japan after the Second World War, where the occupying powers helped rebuild democratic institutions including trade unions.

The UK and the USA have now accepted formal responsibilities under international law as occupying powers in Iraq. Hopefully the UN will play a larger role once Iraq is stabilised.

Occupying powers must provide humanitarian relief and not prejudge the governance of the country. Tony Blair might like an Iraqi third way and President Bush might prefer a US-style free market economy. Blair might plump for a Westminster parliamentary system and Bush might push for a presidential system.

Such decisions are for the Iraqis. But the occupying powers can begin to allow the Iraqis themselves to construct a new civil society. Trade unions are a vital part of a free society.

We didn't hear much about trade unions under Saddam. Yet Iraq's labour movement was once a vibrant part of society. In 1959, one million people joined the May Day march in Baghdad. The population of Iraq was then 14 million and this illustrates the tremendous social weight of its working class.

But Saddam demonised independent trade unions and hundreds of union leaders were imprisoned, tortured and executed. The regime modelled itself on the Nazis and imitated Hitler by establishing state-run Labour Fronts, which were in its pocket. This applied to organisations of youth, students and women. Membership of these bogus unions became compulsory and its leaders were obliged to be Baathist members and follow its instructions. Many

No Sweat is an activist, campaigning organisation, fighting sweatshop bosses, in solidarity with workers, worldwide.

Sweatshop labour is modern, global capitalism stripped bare. From the small, backstreet sweatshop to some of the biggest corporations in the world - child labour, forced overtime, poverty wages, unsafe conditions, harassment of women workers and intimidation of trade unionists are commonplace.

No Sweat stands for workers' solidarity. We are for:

- A living wage
- Safe working conditions
- Independent trade unions

We seek to build common, united, campaigning action against exploitation and the sweatshop bosses.

Come and join us, help us, get active!

<http://www.nosweat.org.uk/>

genuine trade unionists had to try and work within its labyrinth.

Independent trade unionists, however, organised an underground movement from 1977 and the Workers' Democratic Trade Union Movement in the Iraqi Republic started to clandestinely organise in 1980, at great risk to its activists. It established fraternal links with trade union centres including the TUC and gave symbolic solidarity to the British Miners in the strike of the early 1980s and maintained links with unions such as the FBU and ASLEF.

Most union members opposed Saddam but can only now express themselves freely. The independent trade union movement is seeking to re-establish itself. It supports a unified, federal and democratic Iraq that transcends religious, ethnic and nationalist divisions and also guarantees political and trade union rights.

It backs the transfer of power from the occupying forces to an interim and broadly based coalition government that could remove the remnants of Saddam's dictatorship and prepare a permanent constitution. This would provide the basis for free and fair elections under UN supervision.

But there is one major fly in the ointment. The reconstruction of Iraq is to be led by American companies, which often have poor union records globally, and in America, where only 9% of the private workforce is organised. All foreign companies in Iraq should observe the highest standards of union rights. American progressives have already noted the irony that the US administration supports a universal healthcare programme, something which Americans lack.

But democracy, including union rights, is best built from the ground up. Iraqi unions want a new Iraqi constitution to include rights of free speech, assembly, union organisation and strike action. There has already been a successful strike in the oil industry in Basra. It removed a Baathist boss and increased the size of the workforce.

The labour movement in Iraq does not start with any great advantages. It has just emerged from decades of repression and needs urgent solidarity.

The Iraqi movement has established a Baghdad headquarters but desperately needs practical support. It wants training in office organisation as well as bargaining, health and safety, organisation and trade union legislation

skills plus essential equipment such as computers and faxes.

It also says that there is an urgent need for industrial training of the workforce and points out that key sectors of the economy such as the railways and oil as well as electricity, water and telecommunication supplies are woefully backward after decades of neglect and the deaths of many qualified workers in Saddam's wars. The trade union movement in Iraq urges the immediate lifting of the UN sanctions regime.

The British trade union movement should help provide such material and moral support to Iraqi trade unions, and organise a delegation to visit Iraq to see at first hand the economic and humanitarian situation.

The top priority is practical solidarity to end the isolation and needless poverty of a potentially rich nation that was the cradle of civilisation.

Oppression will not make the unemployed people give up their demands.

Rebwar Ahmad (Worker-Communist Party of Iraq)

Five months after the collapse of the Baath regime, the process of break down of the Iraqi society is getting faster. Poverty, unemployed, and high prices tighten the grip on the people's throats. Mere survival is an enormous problem for millions of families.

The demonstrations by the unemployed people, which spread all over the country during the last 6 months is only a tiny portion of the force of the hungry masses in Iraq. Under the situation brought by the USA War, the masses have lost their daily livelihood and their jobs. Hunger and poverty have forced them to flow onto streets. The Union of Unemployed in Iraq and Worker-communist Party of Iraq have organised and led these demonstrations during last several months. However the USA civil administration and its followers feel no responsibility toward the hungry and unemployed masses. Moreover, they do not satisfied with procrastination but they conspire against the unemployed people and oppress them by detaining their leaders and activists.

This is the responsibility of the USA (democratic) civil administration and the (representatives) of the Iraqi ethnicities and tribes toward the issue of hunger and toward the hardships which face the masses. This is the real meaning of the "Freedom" they brought through "Iraq Freedom Operation" as a present for the people in Iraq.

For many months, the properties of the Iraqi society is been stolen in thousands of way by the authorized gangs, however the USA administration does not believe that it's the right of millions of families deprived of jobs as the result of the USA deeds have the right to be paid what keep them alive and cover their basic needs.

The widespread poverty, which increases day-by-day and dramatic deterioration of living conditions, causes enormous suffering for the masses. The oppression will not be able to prevent the army of hungry people from flooding onto streets. Therefore, last week another wave of mass protest spread over most of the Iraqi cities. Again the USA civil administration dealt with them in the same way i.e. not listening to their demands and oppressing their protests. The demonstrations in Baghdad, Basra and many other cities end up in violent clashes and opening fire on demonstrators, which result in the death of two demonstrators in Baghdad and Basra at the hands of the Coalition forces

In its cover for the event, the right-wing media portrayed the demonstrators as guilty, negligent and ungrateful toward the USA favor. Even those who claim that they sympathize with the unemployed people accept the account that (Baath's loyalists sneaked among the demonstrators) and turn the demonstrations violent by starting the clashes, the action which forced the coalition forces to shot on the demonstrators. It must be clear that such account is not only an empty justification for the way the brutal USA forces dealt with the demonstrations but also it is a ready and false excuse to oppress the mass demonstrations in future.

The demand of the unemployed in securing their lives by realizing the demand of the Union of Unemployed in Iraq of \$100 a month for each unemployed person is a basic demand for millions of people in Iraq and must be met. The only way to realize this demand is by insisting and continuing the struggle and widening the mass demonstrations. The Union of Unemployed and the Worker-communist Party of Iraq are tools to organize and lead this struggle.

USA responsible for the latest violent protests and severe deterioration of situation in Iraq

Qasim Haadi, the president of the Union of Unemployed in Iraq October 11, 2003

The USA authority has intentionally resorted to provocation and neglecting the demands of the unemployed people since the early demonstrations by the Union of Unemployed in Iraq said Haadi. He added during the demonstration of July 29, we the demonstrators were surrounded by the USA troops; who installed bayonets on their rifles and put muzzles on our backs.

During next demonstration the USA soldiers tried to pull some out of the demonstration to arrest them, but the demonstrators engaged in a scuffle with them and prevent them from arresting anyone. The provocative methods the USA troops used also pushed many demonstrations to ask leadership to let them attack these troops even if this meant their death. On one occasion the frustration pushed a demonstrator to try and attack these troops with hands, but I hugged him and prevent him from doing that said Haadi. In all demonstration such things were happening but the way these demonstrations were organised and the abilities of the UUI's leadership prevent such clashes with the USA troops from happening. However, can this discipline be maintained forever? The president of UUI asks.

The indifference of the USA authority toward the basic needs of the workers will cause much turbulence. We have warned the USA authority in many meeting during the negotiation between the UUI's leadership and the USA administration. They used the lack of security they caused as an excuse for these provocations and for not meeting the unemployed people's demands.

We hold the USA administration responsible for the lack of security and the latest events. We also hold it responsible for any increase in tension and escalation of violence in future, if it did not work seriously on solving the unemployment problem in Iraq.

Both of above articles from:

Forward, Political Paper of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq