

Report from the Amicus NEC delegation to the International Peace Conference (London, 10th December 2005) by Ian Allinson

Over 1200 people attended the conference, and many more were unable to book places. Delegates came from around the world, but mainly UK, US and Iraq. The conference was conducted in English and Arabic with simultaneous translation.

I missed Tony Benn's opening speech due to transport problems. As well as Amicus, PCS, NATFHE, TSSA and CWU sent national delegations. Billy Hayes urged trade union solidarity but stressed that *"if a country is occupied, sending trade unionists a few typewriters is no substitute for campaigning to get those troops out of that country"*.



Iraqi speakers included Sheikh al Khallisi from the Iraqi Foundation Congress, Hanna Ibrahim from the Women's Will Organisation and Hassan Jumaa from the Iraqi Oil workers' Union. US speakers included Judith le Blanc from United for Peace and Justice and Cindy Sheehan.

The conference heard (by phone) from Anas al Tikriti, who had been in Iraq trying to obtain the release of kidnapped peace activist, Norman Kember, and issued a statement calling for his release. Walter Wolfgang argued against troops staying to "clean up the mess", saying that *"if your house is burgled and in consequence the lounge needs redecoration, you don't call up the burglars to do it"*.



One of the most moving and inspiring sessions heard from Military Families including Rose Gentle and Reg Keys. Earlier in the year Cindy Sheehan had reinvigorated the US anti-war movement by camping outside Bush's ranch, demanding the right to ask the president why her son died. She urged defiance of restrictions of the right to protest, commenting on the recent arrest of Brian Haw and the conviction of Maya Evans for reading the names of the 97 dead British soldiers outside Downing St.

The military families were joined on the panel by Iraq veterans including ex-SAS man Ben Griffin who quite after serving in Iraq. He described how *"what's going on there is like a gold rush town in 19th century America. The indigenous people are having a way of life forced on them on the one side, on the other multinational corporations are plundering resources and making money out of the people's misery"*. Kelly Dougherty who spent a year in Iraq as part of her eight years in the US National Guard described how when she was in Iraq she spent a lot of her time protecting Halliburton convoys, including protecting broken down Halliburton vehicles - waiting for them to return to get them and then when they didn't return burning them. She described how soldiers wanted to help Iraqis but *"we could not help but see how our bombs hurt"*. She described how military convoys are ordered to never stop and how this results in Iraqi civilians being killed by convoys driving over them. She says her friends coming back from Iraq are missing limbs, can't sleep, abuse alcohol and drugs, commit suicide because they cannot reconcile what they did in Iraq. She concluded: *"Occupation does not make us safer. Our humanity is on the line. Freedom in Iraq cannot really start until the U.S. forces leave"*.

Amani Deghayes, the sister of Guantanamo detainee Omar Deghayes, told delegates about how her brother had been blinded in one eye by the US military. Ashfaq Ahmad, the father of London IT worker Babar Ahmad, spoke about how his son was being threatened with extradition to the US on terrorism charges. New extradition laws meant that no evidence was required.

The main statement from the conference called on the anti-war movement around the world to:

- Organise international demonstrations on March 18-19 2006, the third anniversary of the war and invasion, calling for the immediate withdrawal of troops and an end to the occupation.
- Campaign for a full international public inquiry into the assault on Fallujah last year.
- Give full support to the campaigns of military families in the US, Britain and the other occupying countries.
- Develop an international coordination from this conference to plan further events.
- Campaign against the privatisation of Iraqi oil.
- Oppose any attack on Iran or Syria.

Further reports can be found from the Stop The War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk