

# WREXHAM PEACE & JUSTICE

# NEWS

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**WREXHAM PEACE AND JUSTICE FORUM** has been set up to replace WREXHAM AGAINST WAR, the voluntary group which has recently campaigned against war on Iraq. The change recognises the fact that we should be actively campaigning for peace and justice, not simply opposing wars. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, **"Peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the existence of justice for all people."**

We hope that other local groups working on similar issues will join the forum to build a strong, vocal movement challenging the roots of war and injustice wherever they occur.

Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum was launched at an open meeting on Thursday 15 May with guest speaker Jo Wilding. Jo is an Independent Human Rights Observer who spent much of the Iraq war in Baghdad.

Having first visited Iraq in August 2001 with Voices in the Wilderness and then again in late 2002, Jo gave a rare and valuable account of the recent conflict. Over fifty listened to this remarkable and articulate woman relate both her own story and tales of the ordinary Iraqi people she had met.

It was clear that before the war, Iraqi people wanted to take control of their situation. They certainly wanted to be rid of Saddam Hussein, but they wanted to do it themselves. With US and allied intervention, power was taken from them.

Jo recounted many harrowing tales of life and death in Baghdad during the conflict. After an ambulance leaving a hospital with three casualties was shot at by US forces, injuring the driver and his colleague and further injuring the patients, a US military officer suggested that the ambulance could have posed a threat to his soldiers, and then, when challenged, explained "These soldiers are young and nervous. They shoot at anything that moves."

Wilding told her audience of Iraqi civilians being killed, wounded, made homeless and losing their



*Jo Wilding, Owen Hardwicke and David McKnight at the inaugural meeting of WPJF.*

livelihoods. She told of farmhouses being bombed by US planes, killing and injuring ordinary people, when there were no possible military targets in the area, and nothing which could have been mistaken for a military target. Her descriptions of visits to Baghdad hospitals were distressing, but it was clear she had met people of exceptional courage and insight, and her accounts demonstrated over and over again the inner strength and dignity of the Iraqi people. One father, even while his son was being treated on the operating table, was able to say to her, "Over one million people marched in London. We thank the United Kingdom. We know that people are different from Governments."

Following Jo's talk, local peace activist David McKnight and veteran peace campaigner Owen Hardwicke led a discussion on the way forward for the peace movement. While the Iraqi people have been liberated from Saddam Hussein, they have been left lumbered with a \$130 billion debt and can expect decades of extreme poverty unless the debt is cancelled. It looks likely that they will have to pay personally for a war which they didn't ask for, which has in many cases destroyed their families, homes and livelihoods, and which hasn't brought them self-determination. Campaigning for the cancellation of the Iraqi debt is just one action we will be undertaking.

## **WREXHAM PEACE AND JUSTICE FORUM - OUR VISION**

**Our vision is of a just and peaceful world. We are a broad-based forum open to all who share our vision, making a difference globally and locally through sharing ideas and information, raising awareness and campaigning.**