
WELSH PEACE WORKERS REPORT FROM PALESTINE

Alice Gray and Steve Collings have been working for the YMCA in Beit Sahour (Bethlehem). Steve is still there. Here are some extracts from reports they have been sending back to their friends in Bangor.

Injustice and Deceit in the Ahmad Valley

Close to the city of Bethlehem and the northern Aida refugee camp lies the Ahmad valley. Palestinians have farmed this land for thousands of years, cultivating olives, figs, pomegranates, grapes and a few vegetables. During this time a rich culture has evolved, with its own mythology and ideology, strongly rooted in the relationship between the farmer, his land and his trees. Now the very existence of this culture is threatened by the expansion of Israeli settlements and the construction of the Apartheid Wall.

This valley in particular is threatened, because it lies between the Israeli settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo. Both of these are expanding, and more than 80% of the land in the valley has already been annexed or confiscated for 'security reasons'. There used to be Palestinian villages in this valley, but most were destroyed long ago. Now many of the farmers live in the Aida refugee camp, and must pass the Beit Jala checkpoint in order to access their land... they are subject to harassment from Israeli soldiers whilst attempting to work. A few farmers still live on their land, but their numbers are dwindling.

While many farmers have had their land confiscated to make way for the Wall, there remain a small number whose land does not lie in its path. There is a small village community at Al Walaja and a few scattered small holdings. The presence of these people here is inconvenient to the Israelis, and a more subversive war is being waged on them to shatter and disperse their community. Their farms are frequently raided by Israeli security forces and their trees set alight and uprooted. They are then offered money for their land. If they refuse they are threatened, and more raids follow. Many, afraid that they will lose everything and be left destitute have cut their losses and sold out.

These underhand tactics of intimidation are deeply divisive within the community and, furthermore, lend a cloak of legitimacy to what is essentially the brutal destruction of an ancient culture. If land is 'voluntarily' sold to the Israelis, then on paper, its acquisition is both legal and irreproachable. Thus the injustice being enacted against this community is smothered under a barrage of lies and deceit, allowing the expansion of the settlements to bear the face of respectability as land is 'legally' purchased, and its owners forced back into the refugee camps...

The Ahmad valley lies well within the 1967 green line which defines the borders of the 22% of their original land that is recognised as Palestinian Territory. The Israeli presence here is illegal under international law, and the expansion of the settlements absolutely unacceptable... so also is the construction of the so-called security fence, which has resulted in the destruction of so much Palestinian property, and caused great suffering to many thousands of Palestinian people... The settlements must be dismantled and the construction of the wall halted and reversed. The existence of both of these things is in flagrant contravention of International law, and hence represents a travesty of justice...

In the midst of all this destruction and in spite of the grave injustice being done them, the farmers of Palestine are striving to adopt a positive stance, peacefully resisting the Israeli Occupation's appropriation of their land, and building constructively towards a better future. With the help of international aid organizations, several programs are now being implemented to salvage some hope from the situation and to restore that which has been destroyed. The YMCA and YWCA Olive Tree Campaign aims to plant 50,000 olive trees in places where they have been uprooted and destroyed, and also to salvage mature olive trees which are in the path of the Apartheid Wall and transplant them to safer locations. The PARC program offers help and support to farmers who want to stay on their land, providing a consultancy service for agricultural development, and offering resources to repair damage. These initiatives exist as a result of International Solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians, and also Palestinian determination to resolutely build towards peace in the face of adversity and injustice.

Alice Gray, British Peace Activist, Aug. 2004

Appeal for Solidarity with the people of Gaza

All weekend the sound of F-16 fighters has been filling the air day and night. Reports this morning show that the Palestinians have taken 300+ casualties since Wednesday of last week... Of the recent 300 in Gaza at least 70 are dead. I fear the fight is being taken to a new stage and is sure to spread to the West Bank soon enough. The Palestinians here have launched another series of solidarity strikes with the Gazans. Israel is not best pleased to say the least...

Despite its population of 1 million, 40% of Gaza's land is owned by 7000 Israelis. Most of these no longer live there and many have never lived there. They saw which way the wind was blowing and wanted to cash in on the compensation deals being offered to land owners. Gush Shalom say that this 40% is almost entirely military bases with a negligible civil population.

In Gaza itself, a UN man told me, tanks are now being used for traffic control. If the turret moves in the direction you want to go, you go. If it wants you to stop, the turret is pointed at your car. If the driver makes a mistake or misinterprets this surreal form of communication, the results are quite deadly...

As if Israel had not already destroyed her reputation abroad, she is now accusing the UN of smuggling rockets for the Gazans. She is revealing herself for what she is: a religious fundamentalist state.

To all the Peace groups in Wales - PLEASE PLEASE show acts of solidarity. The people here are scared and don't believe anyone cares about them. Show them they are wrong and they have friends out there.

Individual acts of protest, occupations, speeches, solidarity hunger strikes, embassy marches, open letters in newspapers, boycott actions, pressure on European MSP to support the Spanish initiative, leafleting - It doesn't matter if it is co-ordinated or not, small scale or large, individual or group. - Please PLEASE help the people of Gaza.

Steve Collings, British Peace Activist, Oct. 2004

WELSH MP LEADS CAMPAIGN TO IMPEACH BLAIR

Tony Blair based his case for war on Iraq on four premises - compare his words with the facts:

1. Weapons of Mass Destruction:

Joint press conference with President Bush, 8 April 2003: "On WMD, we know that the regime has them." The recent report of the Iraq Survey Group has confirmed what has been known for a long time - that in March 2003 Saddam did not possess any WMD.

2. Iraq flouted International Law:

Speech after the Bush/Blair/Aznar Azores Summit, 17 March 2003: "A clear ultimatum to Saddam that authorises force if he continues to defy the will of the whole of the international community set out in Resolution 1441." United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, 16 Sept 2004 BBC News: [When pressed on whether he viewed the invasion of Iraq as illegal] "Yes, if you wish. I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN charter from our point of view, from the charter point of view, it was illegal."

3. Iraq supported Al-Qaeda terrorists:

Television address to the nation, 20 March 2003: "A new threat: of disorder and chaos born either of brutal states like Iraq, armed with WMD; or of extreme terrorist groups...My fear...is that these threats come together and deliver catastrophe to our country and world." Donald Rumsfeld, US Defence Secretary, 5 October 2004: "To my knowledge, I have not seen any strong, hard evidence that links the two."

4. Regime change to get rid of Saddam Hussein:

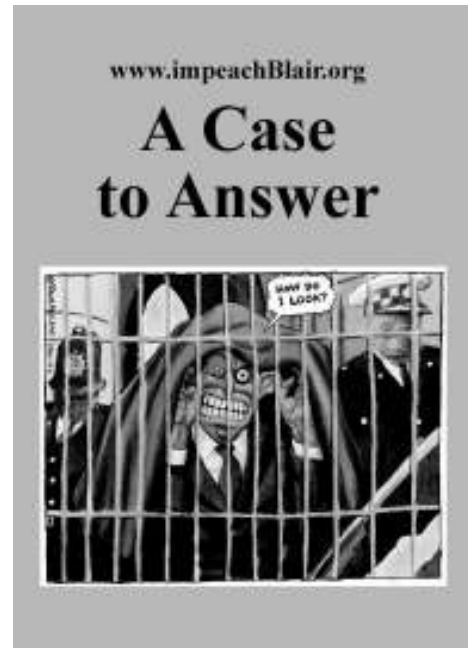
But in the House of Commons, 26 February, 2003, Blair said: "I detest his regime. But even now he can save it by complying with the UN's demand." But the UN's demand was for Saddam to disarm, and he had already complied with this, which we would have known if only we'd allowed the weapons inspectors time to complete their work.

THE CAMPAIGN TO IMPEACH BLAIR

Adam Price, Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, launched the Impeach Blair Campaign in August, supported by a cross-party group of MsP, who published a report setting out "compelling evidence of deliberate repeated distortion, seriously misleading statements and culpable negligence on the part of the Prime Minister." In an article in the Guardian (26th August), Price wrote:

"Accountability is the lifeblood of democracy. Why should the public bother getting involved in politics if ministers can lead us into war on a false prospectus and not even utter a single word of apology? So what remedy do parliament and people have in these desperate circumstances? Historically, impeachment has been used by parliament against individuals to punish 'high crimes and misdemeanours'.

"One MP is all it takes to make the accusation of high crimes and misdemeanours against a public official for an impeachment process to begin... Today a number of MPs, including myself, are declaring our intention to bring a Commons' motion of impeachment against the prime minister in relation to the invasion of Iraq.



This is the first time in more than 150 years that such a motion has been brought against a minister of the crown, and it is clearly not an undertaking we enter into lightly. We do it with regret, but also with resolve. For our first duty is to the people we represent, who feel they were misled, whose trust was betrayed, who have been placed in harm's way by the irresponsible actions of this prime minister. It is in their name that we impeach him." Adam Price goes on to urge the Prime Minister to do the decent thing and resign now.

A group of senior parliamentarians has been appointed to head a drafting team to draw up articles of impeachment against the Prime Minister. The articles will be circulated to MPs and will be tabled early in the New Year. You can read more about the Impeachment campaign in a new book (jacket design above) written by Glen Rangwala and Dan Plesch: **A Case to Answer: On the potential impeachment of the Prime Minister for High Crimes and Misdemeanours in relation to the invasion of Iraq.** (ISBN 0 85124 704 0, price £5). The book can be ordered from:

www.spokesmanbooks.com/Impeach%20Blair.htm

You can also find out more by visiting the Impeach Blair web site at: www.impeachblair.org

A BIG THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO DONATED TO WPJN AFTER OUR APPEAL IN SEPTEMBER.

Your donations, together with proceeds from sales of WPJN in Wrexham Town Centre, amounted to an impressive £140, which we have used to buy stocks of the 100% recycled paper WPJN is printed on (cheaper in bulk), plus some coloured paper for leaflets and flyers and a year's supply of envelopes. But we still need to raise the funds to pay our printing bill each issue.

If you haven't donated so far and you enjoy reading our newsletter, please consider making a donation now. Form on p.11. THANK YOU!