

## FILMS AND VIGIL FOR FALLUJAH

In November, as part of an international month of action, WPJF remembered Fallujah with a film evening and a vigil.

The first of the two films we showed on November 10th was Hamodi Jasim's *Testimonies from Fallujah*, which has been brought to the West by independent US journalist Dahr Jamail. Jasim's film included footage taken during the US assaults on Fallujah in November 2004, vividly depicting the panic and desperation of civilians in the face of arbitrary attacks on their homes, schools and hospitals. At the time the film was shot, the US had announced that all civilians had fled the city and that everyone left would be treated as combatants, although this was clearly not the case. Over two thirds of the bodies recovered after the November 2004 siege of Fallujah were those of women and children. Jasim also visited refugee camps outside Fallujah, documenting the appalling conditions and deprivation, and capturing the raw feelings of the displaced people of the city; this was powerful but shocking footage which was not easy to watch. Many of those interviewed were distraught, having lost members of their families, their homes and their livelihoods. This film offered ample evidence of how the brutal intervention of the occupying forces in Iraq is causing the unrest which we are encouraged to blame on 'insurgents'.

The second film of the evening was Jo Wilding and Julia Guest's *Letter to the Prime Minister*. This film begins with Jo Wilding's legal challenge to economic sanctions placed on Iraq well before the 2003 invasion, covers her time spent in Iraq before and during the invasion, and then again during the first siege of Fallujah in April 2004. Much of the film makes grim and depressing viewing: a family torn apart by a bomb dropped on their house far from any military targets; a clearly marked ambulance disabled by a US sniper in Fallujah; injured civilians being treated in makeshift clinics without electricity, let alone adequate medical supplies. In the midst of all the death and disaster there are hopeful moments: Jo and her colleagues eventually manage to deliver medical supplies to Fallujah and ferry injured civilians to hospitals in Baghdad on the return journey; traumatised children in refugee camps are seen responding enthusiastically to the *Boomchucka Circus to Iraq*, of which more opposite. The film documents the experiences and suffering of the people of Iraq with empathy and compassion, with outrage and indignation, and with a strong sense of shared humanity. After the films there was a discussion and we made a collection for *International Peace Angels* who are doing humanitarian work with the people of Fallujah.

On November 14th, we held a vigil at Plas Coch to remember the November 2004 massacre, displaying banners and placards on this busy roundabout during the evening rush-hour. We were encouraged by the number of drivers who waved and beeped their horns in support of this action; the media had just picked up the story about the use of white phosphorus in the November 2004 attacks on Fallujah, which must have had an impact on public awareness of the situation.

The situation in Fallujah is still a desperate one, a year after the massacre of November 2004. According to US State Department estimates, 50% of the buildings of the city have been severely damaged or are uninhabitable.

A BBC report in July of this year states that only 20% of each compensation claim is being paid to residents, and only after long delays. By August 2005, it was estimated that a third of Fallujah residents were still living outside the city, many in Internal Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Some of these people have to travel long distances for basic medical care because they don't have the US-imposed biometric ID cards required for admission to Fallujah. There are reports of greatly increased numbers of cancers and other illnesses for which the damaged health system is unable to offer proper treatment. There is no reliable electricity supply, and many people do not have access to clean water. Unsurprisingly, there is still much unrest.

Dahr Jamail and Jonathan Steele make this observation:

*"One thing is certain: the attack on Fallujah has done nothing to still the insurgency against the US-British occupation... Thousands of bereaved and homeless Fallujah families have a new reason to hate the US and its allies."* Guardian 27/4/05.



WPJF Placard at Plas Coch Roundabout

### A New ID

As far as I know, I don't have any Cousins in the Middle East, tho' I seem to have acquired their blood.

We all have coped with aftermath of flows From wounds received at home. Cloth and bleach would quickly clear the stain.

Not now. I can no more wash the blood Of Iraq from my British thumbprint Than hose down the inside of my head.

Gerry Doe

*Written after watching the two films at the WPJF film evening on November 10th.*

# CIRCUS2IRAQ GOES TO PALESTINE



*Jo Wilding, Devilstick Peat and friend*

The amazing *Boomchucka* Circus, featured in *Letter to the Prime Minister*, which brought so much fun and laughter to the traumatised children of Iraq, is off to Palestine. These extracts from the *Circus2Iraq* web site show what can and has been achieved:

*"If you gave the kids drawing stuff, they always drew planes dropping bombs on houses, tanks shelling, things exploding. After seeing the show they drew clowns and jugglers and magicians..."*

*"We took a huge round, red bit of fabric with us to play parachute games..., did shows, taught the kids a few circus things and generally played with the people we met. The effects were amazing – time after time people told us they hadn't seen the kids laugh like that, from their bellies, since before the war..."*

*"In Iraq the kids had never seen anything like us. The girls, especially, were amazed to see a 9-foot-tall multi-coloured woman. It brought out the clown in them again when a lot of them had forgotten how to be children..."*

*"People told us the kids hadn't laughed like that since before the war. Sometimes you felt high on the sound of them all laughing, on seeing the weight visibly lift off their parents' shoulders. No matter how bad we felt when we got out of bed., the first "**Boomchucka**" of the morning, yelled back at us by dozens or hundreds of little voices, picked us up."*

The Circus cannot return to Iraq at present because of the security situation, so it's going to Palestine instead, to play with children there and to do some work bringing Israeli and Palestinian children together. Jo Wilding has made an appeal for funds to support the trip. She says:

*"Kids [in the refugee camps] face heavily armed check-points routinely, on their way to and from school. Sometimes they're under curfew, 24 hours a day for days on end. Sometimes homes are destroyed. Their fathers and other men are liable to be arrested and held for months on administrative detention at any time."*

*"Jenny spent quite a bit of time in Palestine and talked about teaching some kids to juggle using stones. It was the first time the children had seen stones as toys instead of weapons. As we saw in Iraq, play can transform objects, places and situations and we hope to do that again in Palestine."*

Members of the Circus will raise funds to cover their own air fares, food and accommodation, but the Circus will still need extra money to cover travel within the country, translation expenses and equipment including play parachutes to leave for the children to use after the Circus has moved on.

Please consider donating to support *Circus2Iraq* in Palestine. More information on the web site: [www.circus2iraq.org](http://www.circus2iraq.org).

Their bank details are:

Account name: Circus2Iraq  
Co-operative Bank, UK  
Account number: 65131574  
Sort Code: 08-92-99

Alternatively, you can send cheques payable to "Circus 2 Iraq" to:

Sheila Hanney  
22 Hillside View  
Peasedown St John, Bath.



*Iraqi children enjoying parachute games*

## WPJF CALLS FOR UK TROOPS TO BE WITHDRAWN FROM IRAQ



WPJF held a stall in Wrexham town centre on Saturday 15th October calling for the urgent withdrawal of UK troops from Iraq. Around 250 signatures were collected on a petition (pictured), which was then handed in to MP Ian Lucas. A number of people stopped to talk about concerns for their relatives who are in the armed forces, and a collection was made for Child Victims of War.