

# Anti-racist, anti-fascist march in town

Wrexham Trades Union Council organised an anti-racist, anti-fascist march and rally in Wrexham on Saturday 12 April.

Genny Bove

It was encouraging to see so many local people taking part in this march and rally which will hopefully mark the start of a resurgence of anti-fascist, anti-racist activity in the area.

With Gordon Brown saying things like 'British jobs for British workers', with the mainstream media promoting bigotry and hate, and with a draconian and punitive immigration policy which treats victims of torture and other asylum seekers as criminals and locks them up in detention centres under appalling conditions, the BNP is seeing more and more of its views 'legitimised' in the mainstream.

On the day of the march, the BNP was in the middle of Wrexham with



an election campaign stall, which was protected rather than closed down by the police.

The march ended at the Miners' Welfare Institute in Grosvenor Road. Speakers included Peter Jones of Wrexham Refugee and Asylum Seekers Support Group, who was scathingly critical of New Labour's attitude to immigration, which has helped create an environment in which the BNP can operate.

Following the march and rally, a sizeable group of the marchers went back to the BNP stall in town to counter-campaign. A banner reading 'End Fascism Now' was held up in front of the stall, shoppers were engaged in conversation about the racist policies of the BNP and hundreds of anti-BNP leaflets were given out to passers-by.

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## Iraqi oil workers need your support

From the Hands Off Iraqi Oil website:

*Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein al Shahrstani recently decreed that eight prominent trade union activists from the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU), plus four senior managers from the Southern Oil Company in Basra be transferred from their workplaces in Basra to Baghdad and Nassiriyah.*

*These politically motivated transfers are the latest attack against trade unionists and other opponents of oil privatisation in Iraq.*

*The IFOU, which labelled the move 'a human rights crime', fears the transfers might have dangerous implications for the workers and their families, who face being uprooted from their communities and the prospect of moving to more violent areas where occupation forces and US-controlled militias are active.*

*Thanks to the struggle of the unions and people of Basra, and despite recent government attacks, the city has been relatively safe for trade unionists to be active.*

*Sharistani has repeatedly ordered the shutdown of union offices and facilities and de-recognition across the sector. Arrest warrants were*

*issued against IFOU leaders last summer and Iraqi troops were sent into Basra's oil fields.*

*Other public sector unions such as the dock workers union in Um Qasr are also under attack, facing mass lay-offs as part of the US- and UK-backed privatisation drive in Iraq.*

*Trade unions are still illegal in Iraq - Saddam Hussein's Decree 150 of 1987 banning all unions in the public sector has been kept on the statute books by both occupation and Iraqi authorities for the past five years. Despite this, Iraqi unions have continued to organise and have gained de facto recognition due to their industrial and social strength.*

*Yet the attacks on Iraqi trade unionists are mounting - and they need our support.*

### What you can do to help

You could write to the Iraqi Embassy making the following points:

- Protest the removal by the Oil Minister of the eight union leaders and activists from Basra to Baghdad, where they face great risk of injury or death.
- Point out that this action violates the workers' human rights.

- Ask why, when Iraq is a signatory to the UN Conventions of the International Labour Organisation, the government continues to violate workers' rights. These violations include banning unions and collective bargaining for public sector and public enterprise employees.
- Ask why Iraq has failed to adopt a basic labour law (as required by its own Constitution) to protect the rights of all workers.
- Demand that the transfer order on these eight workers be rescinded immediately.
- Demand an end to harassment of unions and union activists in Iraq.
- Demand that Iraq should recognise and respect the right of its workers to form unions of their own choosing.

Union branches and local anti-war groups could also pass urgent motions of solidarity.

You could ask your MP to raise questions in parliament over the attacks on trade unions and to challenge the well-documented British governmental support for privatisation of Iraqi resources.

More information can be found at [www.handsoffiraqoil.org](http://www.handsoffiraqoil.org)

# Trade Unionism in Colombia

Mike Newman

Wrexham played host to a brave and extraordinary woman at a meeting on June 7th at the Memorial Hall. Ana Lucia Pinzon is the leader of the largest public sector trade union in Colombia, Fenaltrase, and was in the UK on a speaking tour organised by the Justice For Colombia group.

Photo: Kai Andersen



Ana Lucia Pinzon (centre) explains how trade unionists in Colombia are in constant fear of their lives

In Colombia over the last 15 years an average of four trade unionists are murdered every week by right-wing death squads, often with links to the government of President Uribe and, as Ana said at the meeting, the number of murders has been increasing this year. Amnesty International says that Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade union member.

The British government doesn't come out of its links with Colombia well; in fact the UK is one of the very few countries that provide military aid while the killings continue. Even army units proven to be associated with assassinations have benefited from UK military aid.

A war has been raging in Colombia for over 50 years now, the roots of which are based on the social and economic inequalities rife in that country. Over 1 million people have been displaced in the fighting between the government and its paramilitary allies on one side and left-wing guerrilla groups on the other. In between, peaceful movements for change calling for basic freedoms and social justice have been waging a brave campaign against almost insurmountable odds.

Ana reported that whole trade unions and political parties have been crushed and effectively 'disappeared' by a government that will allow no

opposition to function freely. In fact, while Ana was in the UK, President Uribe announced that legal proceedings will be launched against 12 leading opposition figures, in a further blatant attempt to crush dissent.

Like other leading opponents of the government, Ana lives under constant threat of murder, imprisonment or of simply disappearing, and she has previously been the subject of an assassination attempt in which she was shot in the back.

In the face of such brutal repression in Colombia, it is even more important that groups and individuals outside of the country do all we can to provide support to the peaceful opposition. Ana spoke about how much inspiration and hope is gained by the support they receive from around the world, and how encouraged they are by developments in other South American countries, Venezuela for example, which have successfully overthrown their own repressive regimes and elected progressive governments.

The meeting was called by the Socialist Labour Party Wales. As well as Liz Screen from the SLP speaking about the role of Coca Cola in Colombia, Steve Ryan spoke on behalf of the Wrexham Trades Council and Genny Bove for WPJF.

It is true to say that everyone at the meeting felt humbled by the quiet determination of Ana, and left determined to do what we can to assist in the quest for the victory of the democratic opposition in Colombia. Whatever problems we face in the UK were firmly put in perspective by the account from Ana.

## Projects supported by Justice for Colombia

One of Justice for Colombia's principal activities is the support and sponsorship of projects on the ground in Colombia. These projects are implemented by Colombian partner organisations and are normally sponsored by British organisations affiliated to JFC.

The projects make a huge difference – for example JFC's agricultural workers' project has directly led to innocent trade union members being freed from prison, while projects to help torture victims have benefited literally hundreds of people. JFC supports female political prisoners in Colombia by providing humanitarian aid. Another project, REDVIVIR, was set up to help displaced trade union activists by creating co-operative business initiatives that provide them and their families with a viable and sustainable income.

In all there are eight projects currently supported by JFC. See the website for more information.

## How you can help

Please contact **Justice For Colombia** for more information on the situation there and what you can do to help.

[www.justiceforcolombia.org](http://www.justiceforcolombia.org)

or phone **020 7794 3644**.

For information on the work of the Socialist Labour Party in Wales, contact:  
**mike@fourdogsmusic.co.uk**  
or phone **01570 470270**.