

London protest against bombing of Serbia and sanctions against Iraq--'I'm disgusted with the Labour government'

Barbara Slaughter
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Last Saturday, over 3,000 people marched from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square to protest against the NATO attack on Yugoslavia. The demonstrators also called for an end to the bombing and economic sanctions against Iraq.

The rally was organised by a coalition of ad hoc committees originally set up to oppose the sanctions against Iraq. The crowd in Trafalgar Square was very mixed, with many young people as well as those who had lived through the Second World War. The protest also included Yugoslavs, Arabs, Americans and Australians.

Among the speakers at the rally in Trafalgar Square was Harold Pinter, the well-known British playwright. He gave a powerful reading of a poem he wrote during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The verse, poignantly entitled "American Football", begins with the lines, "Hallelujah! It works! We blew the shit out of them".

He went on, "Ladies and gentlemen that seems to me to be the real voice of America. This is what we are faced with--absolute military might and arrogance.

"And I'd like to say one last thing and it's about the man 'round the corner down there in Whitehall, our Prime Minister Mr. Blair, who the other day said this about the burning of the convoy. The first thing he said was, 'It wasn't us. It was them! Right?' Then he said, 'Well OK, it was us, but it's all their fault!'

"These statements are not only pathetic, but contemptible. The responsibility for all of this lies right down there in Whitehall and Downing Street."

Another speaker at the rally was Denis Halliday, who resigned from UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission), in protest against the sanctions levelled against Iraq.

Halliday said, "NATO violence and ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, UN economic sanctions in Iraq, all are wrong. All are killing thousands of innocent people.

"I am honoured to meet with you today in Trafalgar Square because I greatly respect the concerns that have brought us all here together, to make a statement in protest at the international injustice and military violence throughout the world.

"I speak today only in regard to Iraq. The continued killing--after eight long years--of the children and people of that country. Over one million men women and children have died since 1991--600,000 children alone--the killing of children, just like yours and mine. How? By means of economic sanctions, imposed by the member states of the Security Council of the United Nations.

"It is a new form of warfare that targets civilians, in breach of the Geneva conventions--a sanctions policy that is deliberately extended despite the full knowledge that Iraqi children and adults die every day, every week and every month. It is not passive, it is not through neglect. It is active aggression. It is by the conscious decisions made in London and Washington. The sanctions against Iraq kill the innocent, the young, those not even born.

"The rest of the member states of the UN do not want it to continue. The world does not want it to continue. We cannot continue to punish the people of Iraq because the US and Britain do not like President Saddam Hussein. London and Washington refuse to listen to the international demands for ending the sanctions regime, and for stopping the bombing that is continuing in the 'no-fly zone'.

"The illegal activity of bombing and the economic

sanctions must be stopped. The sanctions policy causes the destruction of the culture, the society, the very lives and future of the Iraqi people. There is no justification for the slaughter of Iraqi children. This is a democracy and we are responsible if we do not stand up and demand that our government take the right course of action. It is urgent. People are dying as we meet today. Sanctions must stop immediately. Over one million Iraqis have died unnecessarily. Let us stand up and be heard. Let us stop the genocide by means of economic sanctions in Iraq today."

A literature stall put up by the *World Socialist Web Site* was surrounded by people taking leaflets and anxious to discuss the NATO bombing of Serbia. There was anger and disgust over the role of the Labour government and the mountain of lies and distortions being churned out by the NATO propaganda machine.

Ellen, a 78-year-old widow from London, said, "I came because I'm against the war in Yugoslavia and I'm disgusted with the Labour government that's taking us into a war. I remember the Second World War. My father was killed in the bombing in London.

"NATO should get out and mind their own business. They have made more refugees than there was in the beginning, in my opinion. And they only let us see one side of it on the television screen. I'm working class--a hard working woman. I'm now a widow. I've always voted Labour, but no more. In future I won't vote."

Roger Franklin, a retired science teacher, told the WSW, "It's a terrible situation both in Yugoslavia and Iraq. There's so much killing and you don't bomb people into peace. My own feeling is that the world has gone back to the days of the Roman circuses. The military want to test their weapons.

"They are so worried about public opinion that they don't want any of their side to be hurt, but they don't care how many people on the other side are slaughtered. I've no particular enthusiasm for Milosevic. But you can see that no country ever concedes to being bombed. In the Second World War all the bombing did was to build up hatred. Vietnam didn't submit to the bombing.

"They are trying to say that Japan was bombed into submission by the use of atomic weapons in the Second World War. It's absolute baloney. By 1945, the odds were stacked against them. Russia was coming in. They had every reason to see the writing on the wall.

"I'm disgusted with the Labour ministers who used to be part of the CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] movement. It's a real example of the way power corrupts. I'm a member of the Green Party and I'm a bit worried that the same thing is happening to them. I read that the French Greens are supporting the bombing. In Germany too the foreign minister is a Green. I gather he is putting forward various plans for negotiations, but he is still supporting the bombing.

"The Americans are training their troops for an invasion. They are utterly ruthless. They are using this war as a marketplace for their armaments. Iraq was the same thing and they are going on with the bombing. I've been as critical about what they have done to Iraq as anything else. They set up somebody as a hate figure and then they work on them until they produce some sort of excuse to attack. One can suspect that behind the scenes in Iraq they led Saddam on and said, 'OK, you can get away with that.' And when he tried, they had a wonderful time with all their horrible weapons.

"They did the same in the Second World War. They went on and on about unconditional surrender, and bombed them to pieces. They would have surrendered. There would have been revolution in Germany if they had made the terms a bit easier. I have read quite a lot about the German resistance. There were some very good people involved, but they got no response from the allies, once Churchill and others had decided that they had to exterminate the Germans, more or less.

"Once a war starts a momentum builds up. At the beginning of the Second World War, they were dropping leaflets and pretending they were trying to be careful about precision bombing. By the end they were eliminating cities and killing tens of thousands of ordinary people."

The terrible impact of sanctions on Iraq: An interview with journalist Felicity Arbuthnot
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