

HANDS OFF IRAQI OIL

Linda Rogers
and Phil Steele

Journalist and peace activist Ewa Jasiewicz returned to Bangor & Ynys Môn Peace & Justice group in November to report on big issues arising from the Iraq War - questions of oil reserves, foreign domination, climate change and human rights.



Ewa Jasiewicz

Ewa Jasiewicz knows Iraq and its trade union movement at first hand, campaigning for the Iraq Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU). She is familiar with the international oil industry and with the political and economic machinations of the great powers. She has the facts at her fingertips, and it is refreshing to hear them stripped of government spin and propaganda.

Many audiences that Ewa addresses assume that Iraqi oil has already been privatised and is now in the hands of the international corporations. Not so. This prime aim of the invaders in 2003 remains stalled.

That aim is encapsulated in US-sponsored draft legislation which would effectively hand over the development of Iraq's resources to the big multinationals, such as BP, Shell and Exxon Mobil. The proposed terms take the form of PSAs (Production Sharing Agreements), contracts lasting for 25 to 30 years. These are presented by Washington as revenue-sharing agreements, but in reality they deny Iraq sovereignty over its own resources. For example, the Federal Oil and Gas Council would allow 15 seats to representatives of Iraqi political parties, but would also allow foreign advisers, including representatives of international oil companies, to determine who does what in which

regions – a policy bound to reinforce sectarian divisions and entrench the military occupation. What is more, it will mortgage the entire Iraqi economy to oil production, at a time when it needs diversification. Employment of international workforces would obviate the need for the training of an indigenous workforce.

Of course international oil companies also operate in other emergent and developing regions, but they are not always allowed to get away with such rich pickings. In Saudi Arabia or Kuwait for example there are limited service agreements, whereby foreign companies are paid a simple fee for extraction, with no control over the wider process.

Since December 2006, the USA has imposed five deadlines for passing its proposed oil law, and yet opposition within Iraq has prevented this from even being put before parliament. Pressure on the IFOU is intense, indeed it has been declared an illegal organisation by Iraq's Ministry for Oil, under legislation deriving from the Saddam Hussein dictatorship. The resilience of Iraqi trade unionists faced with arrest warrants is an inspiring indication of the growth of a genuine civil society in Iraq.

What can we do here? Keep ourselves informed by signing up for *Hands off Iraqi Oil* updates (email: handsoffiraqioil@googlemail.com), lobby our MPs, put motions to our own trade unions to support the stand taken by the Iraqi oil workers, and show up the PR campaigns run by international oil companies (e.g. sponsorship of the arts) for what they are – attempts to conceal their predatory profiteering, their abuses of human rights and their environmental vandalism.

A National *Hands Off Iraqi Oil* Day of Action will be held on 23 February.

Book Review



Prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, 'No War for Oil' was a popular anti-war slogan. Just as routine have been the official denials that oil played any role in the decision to invade. Indeed, Foreign Office minister Kim Howells recently denounced 'conspiracy theorists' who had the temerity to suggest that Britain had used its position as an occupying power to 'skew' Iraq's draft oil law 'to suit western oil companies'. One of the reasons why such statements cannot be taken at face value is that we have been here before. Indeed, as Jon Sack describes in this excellent new comic book history, it was Britain's invasion of Iraq during WWI (and the subsequent occupation) that allowed western companies to seize control of the country's oil – control that was not fully relinquished until the early 70s. Then, as now, the British proclaimed loftier motives for their actions.

Spanning the period from Britain's 1908 discovery of oil in Iran, right up to the current day, this is a dense but cleverly laid out work that manages to present a complex mass of material – material that should be part of every anti-war activists' background knowledge – in as painless a form as possible. An ideal present for anti-war activists, or comic fans...

Jon Sack - *Iraqi Oil for Beginners*
Available at £3 per copy, or £2 for orders of 5 or more, + £1 p&p from Voices UK, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1 9DX. Please make cheques payable to **Voices in the Wilderness**.

Voices UK

Don't Attack Iran

Chester Stop the War Coalition's stall gets the message across.

Margaret Owen

Chester Stop the War Coalition, like local groups all over the country, ran a stall at the Cross in Chester town centre on November 24, presenting the arguments against attacking Iran.

We fixed the large posters produced by STW around the stall (with some difficulty – it was breezy), which proved really effective in bringing people up to us, asking 'Where do I sign?' We used the general petition and also asked whether they were willing to sign up to the pledge to take action on the day if the US do attack – from this we're able to add to our list of email addresses.

We were heartened by the number of people who came up demanding to sign the petition and were already very aware of the threat, and we had very few who were at all antagonistic. Talking to those with family or friends in the forces, we found they were concerned about the current situation and definitely unhappy with the idea of further involvement in the Middle East.



Woman in Black by the stall

Sally's appearance at the stall standing silently as a Woman in Black drew attention and provided a focus for a more serious and reflective view of the situation. Joan had also brought anti-Trident replacement material which attracted interest and led to

some useful conversations. Such a sympathetic response to the stall reinforced our feeling that there's really widespread opposition to the Iraq situation and horror at the possibility of any attack on Iran - it just needs to be mobilised.

Message from STWC

An attack on Iran would destabilise the Middle East further. Far from the promised surgical strike, an attack on Iran could kill thousands of innocent people. We are asking people to pledge to take action in the event of an attack.

You can sign the pledge at:

www.stopwar.org.uk.

Alternatively, contact STWC at:

27 Britannia Street

London

WC1X 9JP

Tel: **0207 278 6694**

or contact Chester STWC on:

01244 679051.

Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum considers the options for action.

Genny Bove

A new US intelligence report has declared that Iran isn't as big a nuclear threat as once feared. Is this going to make a US-led war on Iran less likely? Possibly not. As Charlie Brooker neatly puts it (*Guardian*, 10/12/07), "[Bush] says that since the report indicates that Iran halted its weapons programme in 2003, there's a clear possibility it could start it up again. The very fact that the Iranians don't have a nuclear bomb proves they might still develop one. Therefore, Iran is dangerous. That's a clever thing to say, because a) the future is unknowable, so it's impossible to tell him he's wrong, and b) the more he says it, the more likely it is to come true. Since Bush has shown that he'll view Iran as a nuclear threat regardless of whether it's got the bomb or not, the Iranians might as well build one. What have they got to lose?"

As with Iraq's phantom weapons of mass destruction, the truth is irrelevant to Bush's war plans. The question is what can we do to stop this war, or at the very least stop Gordon Brown from supporting it? Two million people marched in London in February 2003 before the Iraq war but Britain still supported the invasion. I wonder if the outcome would have been different if, instead of getting back on our coaches at 5pm to go home, we had refused to leave. What if we had walked out en masse from our schools, colleges and workplaces when the war started, and refused to return?

This time, the Stop the War Coalition is suggesting the following pledge: *In the event of escalation towards an attack [on Iran] we pledge to join a national campaign of action and civil disobedience, including city and town centre sit-downs, work stoppages and college and school walkouts. We also pledge on the day of any attack to join lunchtime protests and walkouts in workplaces, schools and colleges and mobilise for local protests in towns and cities across the country.*

American anti-war activist Mike Ferner who has been convicted of, amongst other things, painting 'TROOPS OUT NOW' on road bridges, asks: *What kind of civil disobedience would you choose? Refuse to pay part of your taxes this April? Sit in at a Congressional office? Organize a strike? Or will we be content to speak quietly, watching the petty criminals go to jail while the grand criminals continue the slaughter in our name?*

What should we do in Wrexham? What would you be prepared to do? We need to be thinking about it now and we need to share those thoughts so we can plan in advance. Please write or email with your ideas and personal pledges; our contact details are on the back page of this newsletter.