

PEOPLE POWER WORKS

Mass movement forces Berlusconi to withdraw troops We can do the same to Ahern with Shannon.

By RORY HEARNE

SOME ARGUE that marching changes nothing. But the international anti-war movement, which marched in its millions on streets across the globe on Feb 15th 2003, is now causing severe problems for Bush and Blair. Just look at Italy and Spain.

These two countries had the largest demonstrations against the war. After the Madrid bombings the huge Spanish anti-war movement brought down their right-wing government and forced a withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq.

Now, in another major victory for people power, Silvio Berlusconi's Italian government – George Bush's main warmongering ally after Tony Blair's New Labour – has been forced to announce the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq.

The withdrawal comes in the wake of the controversy surrounding the assassination of an Italian intelligence agent by American troops in Baghdad. He had just handed over the ransom money to Iraqi hostage takers to free the left-wing journalist Nicola Sgreno, who was also wounded in the incident.

But this controversy would have petered out were it not for the fact that the massive Italian anti-war movement,

forged in marches of up to three million strong, reaches into every community and workplace in Italy. The shootings galvanised this enormous movement and the Berlusconi government caved in, fearing a wider revolt.

We need to continue building the same type of broad mass movement in Ireland. That means organising large-scale marches and big events like this summer's Shannon Peace Festival. It also means that everyone, no matter how limited their time, has a part to play in our movement. We can all share the job of carrying the anti-war arguments into our classrooms, workplaces, trade unions, and community organisations.

On The Winning Side

Remember, we are on the side that is winning. Despite the bravado, the Bush regime is in crisis. Bush was recently forced to tour Europe, cap in hand, to try and win support for the Iraqi occupation. Now one of his key allies, Berlusconi, has been forced to withdraw support.

The occupation of Iraq is in a mess. Both the popular resistance inside Iraq and the anti-war opposition in the US are growing.

The Pentagon admitted recently that at least 5,500 US military personnel have

deserted since the war started in Iraq. Internationally respected Filipino author and activist, Walden Bello, claims the US have already lost militarily (see www.focusweb.org)

At the heart of every mass movement are organisations of activists consistently organising and arguing for the politics of people power. The Socialist Workers Party is such an organisation. We believe that another world of peace justice and democracy is possible. Join us if you want to help to build that world.

Rock This Space Shannon Peace Festival

Shannon Airport has become one of the key stop over points in Europe for the US in the war on Iraq. Just as they did in Italy and Spain, we can end our government's participation through ending the use of Shannon by the US military. To do this will require a mass movement that has the support of the majority of people of Ireland. It was the huge anti-nuclear festival, held at Carnsore Point, that kept Ireland nuclear-free. A similar peace festival is being planned for Shannon at the end of the summer. Through such large popular actions we can end Ireland's collaboration with the US war machine.



RESISTING BUSH'S GLOBAL WAR

Voices from Iraq, Syria, Iran and USA

Inside Iraq and the Middle East: Iraq resistance

Dahr Jamail



DAHR JAMAIL, one of the few independent journalists reporting from occupied Iraq

"Day by day... more people have been enraged by the occupation and are joining the resistance".

"The Western media claim the resistance is made up of Baathist diehards and foreign jihadis. Although these groups do exist, the majority of those who take part in the resistance attacks are just average Iraqis. These are people who have had family members detained, killed or humiliated by occupation forces and want revenge.

I have interviewed many members of the resistance, and they say that there are people coming to fight from other Arab countries, but they are a minority. The majority of resistance fighters are ordinary Iraqis who just don't want their country to be occupied and are going to keep fighting the occupation forces until they've gone.

There are so many groups taking part in the resistance that it is wrong to think

of it as being one organisation.

Many have different strategies, and even different political agendas, but the one thing they all have in common is they want an end to the occupation. There is no cohesive unified plan or ideology driving the resistance beyond the desire to end the occupation."

You can read Dahr Jamail's reports from Iraq on his website. Go to <http://dahrjamailiraq.com>



Writer and activist TARIQ ALI spoke on the growth of the Iraqi resistance to the occupation

"Every resistance movement against imperialism has been categorised as terrorist — the Mau Mau in Kenya were demonised and brutally tortured by the British; the Algerian FLN by the French; the Vietnamese by the French and the Americans.

Today Israel's Ariel Sharon refers to Palestinians as terrorists, Russia's Vladimir Putin crushes the Chechens in the name of fighting terror and Tony Blair is assaulting traditional civil liberties in this country in the name of fighting terror. It's hardly surprising that the Iraqi resistance is characterised in the same fashion.

Obviously the means used to drive

out imperial occupiers are determined by the nature of the occupation. The brutality of the US troops and systematic torture they have used has been well documented. So how can the resistance be beautiful?

During the Algerian war a leader of the national liberation front, the FLN, was asked about using terror against French civilians in café bombings in Algiers. He replied, "If we had an air force I promise you we would only target French barracks, but till then..."

Lebanon and Syria: Why Hizbollah will keep up the struggle



Hizbollah spokesperson MUSTAFA HAJ ALI

"The US intentions are clear. They want to crush the resistance in Lebanon, and they want to crush the resistance in Palestine. They also want to cow Syria so that they can embed their rule over Arab lands.

We do not believe their talk about spreading democracy in the Middle East — the Americans do not have our welfare at heart.

We demand that the Palestinians have

the right to return to their homes and we demand an end to US and Israeli interference in the Middle East.

Only this can create conditions for peace in our lands."

Foreign intervention in Iran will bring disaster

SHIRIN EBADI, a Nobel peace prize winner and founder of the Centre for Defence of Human Rights in Iran, wrote recently:

"American policy towards the Middle East, and Iran in particular, is often couched in the language of promoting human rights.

"No one would deny the importance of that goal. But for human rights defenders in Iran, the possibility of a foreign military attack on their country represents an utter disaster for their cause... foreign military intervention in Iran is the surest way to harm us and keep that goal out of reach."

Above voices of resistance from www.swp.org.uk

From inside the USA:

Socialist Worker spoke to DESMOND GARDFREY, an activist with a student campaign against army recruiters on campus.

We asked him about their campaign and its impacts. (See www.campusantiwar.net).

D.G.: "The (US) Army missed its February recruitment goal by 27 percent, the first time they've fallen short in 5 years. So, the campaign to ban recruiters from our schools is of central importance.

"Most of our actions target recruiter's when they set up stalls at our schools. We have loud protests, with large groups or a smaller number of students. Other times we confront recruiters by distributing anti-recruiter literature, petitioning, displaying signs, and 'talking' to

recruiters to occupy their time. When we do this, we often meet troops or military families opposed the war.

"We are definitely having an impact. At several of our actions, we forced recruiters to leave early, or entirely disrupted their outreach. Because of this success, schools are trying to punish us, but we are fighting back."

On US army desertions:

D.G.: "Most reports claim there are around 5,500 deserters. A main reason why people desert is that they feel the military betrayed them. They were lied to about the war and the reality of military life.

"They realise Iraqis see them as occupiers, when Bush said they would be liberators. So, many wonder, 'why are they still over there?'"

"They hear all of this talk about loyalty, but are forced to question why they don't have enough body armour or armour for their vehicles. Bush has no reason at all to be confident.

"A recent poll shows that most Americans believe the war was not worth fighting, 57 percent disapprove of Bush's handling of Iraq, and 70 percent said the number of U.S. casualties is unacceptable. He's just trying to pretend there isn't a crisis."

On March 19th global protests:

D.G.: "I am going to a regional demonstration initiated by antiwar military families, and veterans.

"The march is near Ft. Bragget the largest military base in the US. People are coming from all over the US to support antiwar troops, and demand an immediate end to the occupation.

"We feel this protest, and others around the US, could mark an upturn for the movement here. To the Irish antiwar movement, keep up the fight. US military out of Shannon now"

The lies and hypocrisy behind Bush and Blair's crusade for democracy in the Middle East

By DAVE LORDAN

Bush and Blair's latest buzzword is "democracy". According to the new spin, the invasion of Iraq can be justified, despite all the lies and the corpses, by the January elections, which have ushered in a new era of democracy.

Furthermore, apparently, the "liberation" of Iraq has inspired the "cedar revolution" that is demanding Syrian withdrawal from the Lebanon. With no sense of irony, the US is calling for "freedom from foreign influence" for Lebanon – but not for Iraq or Palestine! World opinion is being softened up for more wars with talk of the lack of democracy in Syria and Iran.

But there is no genuine democracy in Iraq. The January elections did not transfer power to the representatives of the Iraqi people. Real power remains in the hands of the American colonial administration.

The key sectors of the economy have already been handed over to US multinationals like Halliburton. Freedom of expression and association are severely curtailed.

The elections were actively boycotted by at least 40% of the Iraqi population; an alliance made up not only of the Sunni religious minority, but of women's, workers' and students' groups too.

The Shia coalition that won the election campaigned explicitly on the basis of calling for immediate withdrawal of foreign troops.

They have since reneged on this campaign promise, but an estimated 80% of Iraqis remain in favour of the US leaving their country immediately. The latest opinion polls in the US show that 57% of Americans also want the occupation ended.

Support for corrupt regimes

The truth is that the empire-builders couldn't care less for democracy. They will do deals with any rotten criminal regime, no matter how brutal, as long as their interests are looked after.

Saudi Arabia is the West's major Arab ally, and one of the world's most vicious dictatorships. Less than 1% of the Saudi Population control more than 80% of the countries vast oil wealth. Vicious police repression keeps the resentful population in check. Women have no rights whatsoever. Public executions are commonplace and torture is routine.

In another much-vaunted example of his commitment to 'democracy', Bush is claiming to have pressurised the Egyptian dictator Mubarak into allowing free elections. But for thirty years the American government has been supplying Mubarak's 200,000 strong police force with the plastic bullets, pepper spray, and electrified batons required to keep the Egyptian populace cowed. In reality Bush and Rumsfeld fear that the Iraqi resistance is inspiring a growing revolt against their client regime in Cairo. They want stage-managed elections to take the



Up to a million people took to the streets in Beirut last week against US policies

Photo: Hisham Ashkar/hishmish@caramail.com

wind out of the Egyptian opposition.

The west's support for regimes like Saudi Arabia and Egypt is no aberration. It is tied in with the history of global capitalism. As capitalism developed in the late 19th Century, industry and the military became much more reliant on oil. The arms race and the First World War accelerated this process. After this war, the defeated Turkish empire collapsed and the victorious powers rushed in to take its place. Britain occupied Iraq, Jordan and Palestine. Syria and the Lebanon became part of the French "Mandate".

Anti-colonial movements

Popular uprisings, along with declining economic and military strength, forced Britain and France to retreat from the area shortly after the Second World War. By this time the US had taken over as the leading Western power.

Together with Britain they sponsored the setting up of the state of Israel at the expense of tens of thousands of massacred Palestinians. A million more were driven from their ancestral homes.

The strength of anti-colonial movements made direct occupation of other Arab nations impossible for this whole period. Instead the strategy was to rely on Israel as a "watch-dog state" and to prop up brutal client regimes like the Iranian Shah and the Saudi Royal family.

When the Iranian revolution overthrew the Shah in 1979, threatening western oil interests, the US and Britain backed Saddam Hussein's murderous eight-year war against Iran. When dog bit master and Hussein annexed Kuwait, he too had

to be chastened. But the Americans held back from overthrowing him in 1991 for fear of bringing to power an Iran-supporting Shia government in Baghdad. A weak Saddam, no matter how cruel he was to his own people, was preferable to an emboldened Teheran.

The neo-con strategy

The coming to power of Bush and the Neo-cons signaled a further shift in strategy. They wanted to tighten control over world oil supplies in order to guarantee the smooth functioning of the US economy and to allow the US to remain in pole position ahead of China, the EU and other economic rivals.

This meant wiping out any potential opposition to the US in the region. The invasion and occupation of Iraq are part of this strategy. So is the total and unquestioning support for Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, as well as integrating Israel's regional ambitions into the neo-cons' overall plan for the region. Forcing Hezbollah to disarm, and regime change in Teheran and Damascus, are next on the list.

The Bush gang have been fine-tuning the (for them) extremely useful technique of corporate-sponsored revolt. In Georgia, and more recently in the Ukraine, they poured huge amounts of money and expertise into backing carefully selected factions within the broad opposition.

Their aim was to manipulate the genuine desire of people for democratic change in order to bring to power a ruling group who would implement favoured policies of economic liberalisation while aligning themselves militarily with the West. This technique has the added propaganda advantage of making the

Western rulers look like the good-guys. This is the framework we need in order to understand the recent US interference in Lebanon.

Lebanon and Syria

Lebanese sectarianism is a legacy of Imperialism. France created Lebanon after the First World War, drawing the borders to ensure a country divided along religious lines, and with a slim majority for their main supporters, the Christian Maronites.

In 1976, with the support of the US and Israel, Syria invaded Lebanon to put down a rising of the Palestinian and Lebanese left. But after Israel's bloody invasion of Lebanon in 1982 the Syrians began to support the Shia resistance movement Hezbollah, which eventually drove Israel out of Southern Lebanon in 2000. Since then, Syria has refused to support the American occupation of Iraq and has recently signed mutual defense treaties with Iran.

After the unsolved assassination of the Lebanese billionaire Rafiq Hariri, the US moved swiftly to gain advantage against the Syrians and Hezbollah. The American ambassador helped disaffected sections of the Lebanese political establishment to organise demonstrations calling for Syrian withdrawal. While socialists do not support the Syrian occupation, it is clear the anti-syrian protests in Beirut's Solidere square are being used by the US backed opposition to garner support. The leader of the opposition, Walid Jumblatt, has confessed in the past to "ethnic cleansing".

The US is also calling on Hezbollah to disarm. But most Southern Lebanese see Hezbollah as their guarantee against Israeli occupation. Hezbollah are not terrorists.

They are a legitimate resistance movement supported by the vast majority of Lebanon's – mostly working class – Shia population. They run schools, hospitals, and social centres and have nine MP's in the Lebanese parliament. They are being targeted only because they are a symbol of a successful resistance admired by tens of millions across the Middle East.

Building the resistance

Hezbollah is refusing to disarm in the face of US intimidation and is mobilizing its support in enormous militant demonstrations. Meanwhile, in Iraq, the resistance is inflicting serious damage on the US military's ability to carry out the mission of the neo-cons.

All across the Middle East revulsion at the actions of the US military – in Fallujah, Abu Ghraib and elsewhere – is ripening into a widespread mood of revolt. A regional explosion is possible if the Americans attempt an invasion of Iran and Syria.

The outcome of the confrontation between imperialism and the Arab masses could decide the future of world politics for many years to come. If the US succeeds in crushing resistance, it will tilt the balance of power in favour of the forces of reaction everywhere. If, however, they are defeated – and given the ferocious persistence of the growing Iraqi resistance, this currently looks the more likely scenario – it may inspire a worldwide anti-imperialist movement that could topple much more than statues with moustaches. This is why activists must be 100% behind the resistance to imperialism in the Middle East and why we must build the largest possible revolutionary movement in our own country.