

CEASE FIRE

Newsletter of the Nottingham Student Peace Movement
Email: sunspm@nottingham.ac.uk Website su.nottingham.ac.uk/~nspm

Issue 9 - Feb 2007
Printing Cost 50p

THE PEACE MOVEMENT

We are a group who campaign for peace and social justice, at the individual, local, national and global levels.

Meetings are held in D137 of the Portland Building, every Wednesday at 4pm. Join the NSPM planning mailing list for planning news and events. You can do this by emailing us at: sunspm@su.nottingham.ac.uk

JOIN THE CEASEFIRE FORUM!

An informal gathering for anyone interested in being involved in this magazine, or just interested in lively, stimulating discussions about politics, activism and culture.

Every Friday at 5pm, outside the Glass Atrium, Portland Building

CEASEFIRE

Editor:

Hicham Yezza

Editorial Committee:

Richard Hindes
Sam Walton

Contributors:

Penny Dale, Sam Walton, Andrew Gibson,
Richard Hindes, Hich Yezza, Clarissa Hughes-
Parker

Please send comments, letters and articles to
Ceasefiremag@yahoo.co.uk

Peace in Poetry

Clarissa Hughes-Parker

Morning Lecture

Why bother with clumsy
Love when Hate is
So easy?

Why build a dream when
Greed's gravity rebels
Against every tired brick?
But breathing is so simple
When time is on your side
Words are melting pebbles
In this crimson maze of clouds
And yes this morning
We believe in healing
And in rebelling
Against... the rebellion

CEASE FIRE

Newsletter of the Nottingham Student Peace Movement
Email: sunspm@nottingham.ac.uk Website su.nottingham.ac.uk/~nspm

Issue 9 - Feb 2007
Printing cost 50p

The US/IRAN Showdown: The End of History?

Hich Yezza

Will they? Won't they? It seems the question of whether the Neo-Con zealots at the White House will be reckless/brave/stupid/steadfast (circle as appropriate) enough to attack Iran is now on the lips of everyone who's been paying attention to the mounting sinister dance of "dare & bluff" the two regimes of Tehran and Washington have been gamely engaging in for the past three years.

Analyses and assessments vary but a consensus seems to be converging around the unthinkability of a ground-force invasion. No matter how virulent the sabre-rattling emanating from the Neo-Imperialist right-wing media gets, the plain truth of the matter is that Iran is not Iraq. Not only is the former significantly bigger and more populous. The Iranian regime still enjoys fairly solid levels of loyalty (if not popularity) amongst its population, a very crucial difference to the pre-invasion Iraq of the (almost) universally-hated Saddam. Furthermore, the brilliant use made domestically by Ahmadinejad of the Nuclear Inspections saga has helped further stir up nationalistic feelings amongst the populace and, ironically, has helped give a new lease of life to the Mullahs' grip on a new generation of Iranians who now feel compelled to support their leadership out of nationalistic pride rather than religious fervour (as was the case in the Khomeini-led 1979 revolution).

However, it is quite clear, most observers agree, that the current status-quo is unsustainable. Something has to give, and either the Iranians will voluntarily agree to some sort of strategic realignment that will stop the US from seeing them as a clear threat to its hegemony, or the US will have to review its ambitions in the region and cut them down to a more realistic and manageable size. A third option, of course, is that the US would attempt the use of force to drive events its way. Indeed, the most common prediction currently made is that a "surgical" attack will be carried out, either by the US itself or by proxy (Israel is seen as the obvious candidate but last summer's defeat against Hezbollah has changed things a bit). This too, however, is unlikely to an extent. Iran has been quite vocal in asserting its intention to retaliate vigorously against any attacks. This might, indeed, be just verbal fireworks for internal consumption (everyone remembers how the Iraqi leadership maintained its public bravado to the very end, and beyond) but the crucial difference is that Iran actually DOES possess the means to inflict serious damage to US interests, whether by directly causing military losses or via the more fearsome weapon of economic and political pressure, after all, Iran not only has enormous leverage in the region regarding the production, transport and distribution of Oil, it also holds a few pieces of choice on the regional chessboard, notably via its enormous influence on (and sponsorship) of dominant, motivated and well organised Shia movements in Iraq and Lebanon.

It seems the coming year will be a test (yes, another one, please bear with us) of the UN's relevance in international affairs. Any further erosion to its already-shattered credibility could quite spell the end of the organisation as a serious body with a meaningful level of authority. If the US goes ahead with its attack on Iran (The US-led media campaign aimed at "softening up" world opinion on this matter in order to "prepare" it for this eventuality has been well-under way for months now) we would essentially be going back to a pre-WW2 political mindset, a comeback to the "Might is Right" paradigm would essentially mean the last 70 years of slow and painful efforts by the international community to leave behind the horrors of the 20th Century would have been an idealistic but ultimately utopian and unsuccessful adventure. For anyone who believes in a future of universal humanism based on embracing richness in diversity, taking part in the global effort to stem the US behemoth from taking the madness of imperialism a step too far is literally (beyond the clichés and the soundbites) a matter of civilisational survival.

IN THIS ISSUE

Fair's Fair: How ethical is the "Ethical" movement?

IN FOCUS: The Arms Trade

Activism on Campus: Good News, at last!

Peace In Poetry

...and more

Arms Companies out of our Students Union!

Penny Dale

On Thursday 15th February, a motion was finally passed in Nottingham's SU council banning any affiliation with, or promotion of, arms companies, and to lend support to students opposing the presence of arms companies on campus.

After months of collaboration with the Environmental and Social Justice Committee, members of NSPM, Amnesty International and the Young Greens attended the SU council meeting to support the motion. Following the criticism as to the exact wording of the motion at the previous council meeting, the second attempt to pass it was swift and successful, with only one vote in opposition.

The passing of this motion now means that Nottingham has followed the example of Universities such as York and Edinburgh in adopting an ethical policy, and has given us a platform to eventually push arms companies out of our University altogether. The Union has now noted that companies such as BAE Systems are responsible for unethical business deals with numerous oppressive and poor countries, and many students are opposed to any affiliation with such companies. The next stage, however, is to stop arms companies from attending University career conventions, where jobs in these unethical businesses are promoted, and

further changes are needed to stop societies from affiliation with them. The final aim is to get the University to disinvest from arms companies altogether, and while this may seem a big target, our victory in SU council showed that student pressure can be powerful.

A full copy of the adopted motion on arms companies can be seen at: <http://members.spboards.com/viewtopic.php?t=25&mforum=unen>

Potential buyers examine a tank at the DSEi Arms Fair 2003. (Source CAAT)



EDITORIAL

Hich Yezza

The Left: A Bankrupt Idea?

What's the point of the left? It might seem peculiar to have this rather blasphemous question gracing an editorial of the Peace Movement's magazine but the truth is that, more than ever, the very concept of the Left is being challenged and questioned. Of course, this is nothing new in itself, but for decades the attacks came from the usual quarters: the right wing, the establishmentarian elite and the "reactionary bastions". However, this is no longer the case. Indeed, for the past ten years, a flurry of sometimes mild but often virulent denunciations have been emanating from unexpected sources: Either eminent luminaries of the left including some rather high-profile spokesmen or from ex-leftists who now carry with them a deeply disturbing, "evangelical" halo preaching their new-found religion, whether be it Neo-Conservatism or just good old fashioned tory-ism.

Why this questioning, this soul-searching even, now? The simple answer (as set out plainly in the latest such meditation-cum-gentle-rebuke, the recent book by Nick Cohen "What's Left?") is that the vast majority of the causes, demands and goals of the left as defined at the turn of the 20th century have now been achieved to a large extent, at least in the UK and most advanced post-industrial states. A National Health Service, a Minimum Wage, Voting rights for women, Decent workers' rights and the right to universal education. All these landmark demands that the Left pioneered are no longer distant utopian goals but significant achievements to the credit of generations of workers and activists.

This essentially means, the argument follows, that the current Left is no longer a movement held together by the noble principles of its

inception but by a set of rather less noble attitudes and illnesses that used to exist at the fringe but have now come to the fore now that there is nothing of substance to fight for (their argument not mine).

What are these new-defining lines? Well, better take a seat first. Ready? Good, here goes, in no particular order:

According to many of those attacking it, the Left of today is a vast nebulous hydra-like movement infected to the bone with irrational, obsessed anti-Americanism, hence its belief that Bush is a bigger threat to world peace than Osama Bin Laden, a left that can barely hide its virulent anti-Israeli stance that borders (and often crosses over into) straight, ugly anti-Semitism. A left that is simply holding itself together through a noxious glue of hatred, bitterness, class-envy and whose members are at best idealistic simpletons who often serve as unwitting "useful idiots" to our new "enemies" and at worst traitorous amoral members of the "Fifth Column".

A tad harsh, one might think, but this is essentially a widely prevalent view amongst new converts to the Neo-right.

Why am I telling you all this? It's certainly not because I espouse this rather unkind assessment. However, I do believe people who consider themselves "Left-leaning" could learn from it.

For a start, there is no doubting SOME of the people who join marshes, sign petitions, and gather outside press conferences in the name of the left/socialism/activism DO conform to this loathsome image. But so what? How is this anybody's fault but their own?

But the wrong approach would be to flatly deny any such person exists, because this would only confirm the widely-peddled stereotype of an introverted, self-deluded, conspiracy-obsessed left that some in the right wing media have tried to foist on us.

The left HAS to change, not by selling out or abandoning its basic

principles but by having the moral courage that genuine, rigorous self-criticism demands. Nothing is sadder than seeing some figures on the left, vibrant and lucid for years, turn into vituperative whiny loudmouths whose rhetorical performances have now seemingly being set on autopilot.

I believe the left still has a huge role to play as a world-shaping force for good, but I also believe that this will only be if it can muster the intellectual will to perform a thorough self-examination of its beliefs, principles and strategic positions.

I think we should never oppose (or, indeed, support) a war, a government, or an individual, simply as a result of some Pavlovian reflex based on perceived alliances and mutual benefit. Unfortunately, I have witnessed too many cases of people who call themselves leftists (or even, more intriguingly, activists of the left) taking a stand on certain political or moral issues purely based on very flimsy and simple-minded prejudices against a country, a government, a doctrine, a religion or even, ludicrously, a profession. (Lawyers, since you ask).

This cannot be the way forward and any movement that internalises an intellectualised form of bigotry as its Modus-Vivendi is not worth following or keeping alive.

I believe a strong, impassioned and rigorous riposte to the attacks on the Left is overdue, and I think it's every activist's mission to make it his or her duty to take part in this ongoing discussion. Yes it could be dry and humourless, but somebody's gotta do it. And if not us, who then?

Please send in your articles, photos and cartoons for submission to ceasefiremag@yahoo.co.uk.

IN FOCUS: THE ARMS' TRADE

A corporate parasite

Andre Gibson

When the government forced the Serious Fraud Office to abandon its investigation into allegations that BAE Systems had bribed their way into the £43 Billion Al Yamamah arms deal with Saudi Arabia, many people were left feeling very bitter. Luckily BAE has recently been doing shady deals with much poorer countries, which do not have the political clout to make SFO disappear. What follows is how BAE and the government ripped off Tanzania, the second poorest country in the world.

In 2001 Tanzania spent £28 Million on a joint military and civilian air traffic control system using a 'soft' loan from Barclays Bank. The deal seemed unnecessary and expensive to some, particularly as Tanzania has a tiny air force. The World Bank, with the assistance of International Civil Aviation Organisation, investigated the project. Their preliminary report in October 2001 confirmed fears that not only was the technology dated but that an equivalent system could have been purchased for a tenth of the price. These fears had been held by Clare Short and Gordon Brown, with the former suspending British aid to Tanzania pending the conclusions of the World Bank's final report on the matter. Nevertheless in December 2001, only a month after Tanzania was deemed so poor that it qualified for World Bank debt relief, Tony Blair and Patricia Hewitt overruled their Cabinet colleagues to grant BAE an export license. In Spring 2002 the system was delivered to Tanzania, at the opportunity cost of health care for around 2 million people.

Barclays gave the loan below commercial rates of interest, which helped them secure a banking licence to open branches in Tanzania. BAE pushed for the deal for the usual reasons. But why did the Tanzanian government accept such unfair

terms? Are they as stupid as their country is poor? Perhaps not.

Last month the two Tanzanian businessmen who brokered the deal, Sailesh Vithlani and Tanil Somaiya, admitted to British police that they had secretly been paid £6.13 Million by BAE. Although the SFO are still investigating the matter, it is believed that this money, approximately 30% of the price of the system, was to be used as a slush fund to bribe appropriate politicians. When asked by members of the press Mr. Somaiya said that BAE had made two parallel arrangements with the middlemen. The first was a conventional agency agreement in which a 1% commission was paid to Merlin International Ltd, of which Mr. Vithlani is the majority shareholder. The second was an agreement in which BAE's secretly owned offshore company Red Diamond deposited the £6.13 Million in Switzerland. Both men deny that any of this money has been disbursed to public officials in Tanzania. It is worth noting that Sailesh Vithlani has close links with many government officials and acted as an agent when the then Tanzanian President, Benjamin Mkapa, spent £20.5 Million of taxpayer's money on a top-of-the-range Gulfstream official jet.

Opposition parties in Tanzania have recently protested to demand action from their government on the issue, particularly calling for the arrest of the aforementioned middlemen. The current President of Tanzania, Jakaya Kikwete, has stated during an address to the nation that he is closely following the investigations into whether or not the system was overpriced and whether any politicians received kickbacks. Mr. Kikwete stated that he will ask for a refund of any excess payment if it is found the system was grossly overpriced and will lodge a formal

complaint against Britain. Mr. Kikwete's campaign against corruption, which includes a bill to be tabled this month which would give anti-corruption agencies much more power, has been welcomed by the UK Department for International Development. The DFID recently increased our annual aid to Tanzania from £110 Million to £120 Million and prefers that the money is spent on schools and hospitals rather than paying off debts to Barclays.

To conclude, how far the SFO investigation into this deal gets is a political decision and it will be a test of whether the government is fully in bed with the arms industry, or whether it has occasional flings with morality. Tanzania has made excellent progress in recent years, with the number of children in primary schools doubling since 2000 and a stable rate of growth compared to many African nations. However if we allow BAE to siphon money from their national budget, of which 40% comes from aid, then we will be making a mockery of our commitment to reducing poverty and showing that the arms industry is entirely above the law. The SFO are also investigating BAE deals with South Africa, Romania, Qatar and the Czech Republic.

Please send in your articles, photos and cartoons for submission to ceasefiremag@yahoo.co.uk.

IN FOCUS: THE ARMS' TRADE

Control Arms?

Sam Walton

Amnesty International, IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms) and Oxfam have been petitioning for an international treaty "asking governments to toughen up controls on the arms trade" because "(the) lack of controls on the arms trade is fuelling conflict, poverty and human rights abuses worldwide". It is undoubtedly a good thing that massive NGOs like Amnesty and Oxfam are recognising that the arms trade is "out of control", but is the Control Arms treaty the way to tackle the problem?

One of the main problems that many people have with the Control Arms treaty is that by aiming to control the arms trade

it is legitimising it, saying it can exist but only in a regulated form. Can selling arms to people ever be justified? And if not, by attempting to limit the arms trade we will be acknowledging its right to exist.

However, many say we have to be realistic. The arms trade is so embedded in our system of government, and has such deep links with the military, and influence globally that eliminating it is not something that is realistically ever going to be achieved, therefore limits and controls are the only way of lessening the damage the arms trade does, consequently this is what we should be aiming for. There is great concern that controls on the arms trade simply do not work. Currently it is

illegal for British companies to sell arms to countries involved in conflict or countries with a poor human rights record. A bit like telling cigarette companies to stop selling cigarettes to smokers. Needless to say this is almost totally ignored.

The reason why measures to control and limit arms trading do not work are the same reasons why some argue getting rid of the arms trade is not a realistic target and why the current regulations are ineffective. The massive influence that the arms trade has cross party at all levels of government, lobbyists, MP's, peers, ministers even it's own ministry (DESO). Is there any reason why will a new treaty be any more effective?

Another problem many see is that whilst the Control Arms treaty seeks to control the distribution of arms, it does not tackle the way the arms trade works, particularly the fact that it is astonishingly, mind-bogglingly, and totally corrupt. This is because the designers of the treaty did not want to dilute the essence of the treaty by widening its remit. The corruption in the arms trade means that many (probably about a third) of arms deals do take place not because of a perception of a need for arms, but because of the massive incentives in the form of bribes, favours and "commission payments"-(more bribes) available. Surely if controlling the arms trade is the way forward, we should endeavour to control all

unsavoury aspects of the trade which result in the horrors that it plays such a major part in creating.

Many feel that whilst Control Arms undoubtedly has good intentions, its weaknesses may well render as ineffective as the current regulations. And whilst it is good that awareness has been raised of the evils of the arms trade, Control Arms may be the next Make Poverty History; an excuse allowing the Arms trade and friends to look like they're doing something, while business continues as normal.

An alternative approach is that of Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT), which is a member of IANSA and so indirectly supports the Control Arms campaign, but focuses it's efforts on eliminating the links between government and the MoD and the arms trade, the reasons why the arms trade is such a powerful body and so hard to destroy/control. Currently it's main campaigns focus on stopping the traffic of personnel between the government and the MoD and the arms trade, and shutting DESO (a government department whose purpose is solely to aid the sale of arms).

Feel free to email me at ppyzsmw@nottingham.ac.uk
Useful Web Links:
<http://www.controlarms.org>
<http://www.caat.org.uk>

Fair's Fair?

By Richard Hinds

Taking things which hitherto have been viewed as ethically dubious and producing more salutary alternatives is in vogue nowadays, especially within large sections of the activist community. Hence ethical consumerism, ethical careers, ethical investment, fair trade and all the rest. In recent years, the popularity of these has blossomed. In 2005, 40% of UK households bought fair trade products, which can be purchased in more than 55,000 supermarkets across Europe. Fair trade brands now account for 20% of the roast and ground coffee market, while 2005 saw the sale of more than a billion litres of fair trade wine. (All facts from *New Internationalist* 395, p. 19) This all sounds good and in its own way it is a positive step, but I want to challenge is the idea that ethical living or the promotion thereof constitutes a strategy for social change.

I am not questioning the motives of those who purchase fair trade or pursue ethical careers, both are things I have done and intend to continue doing. In a sense, the unmediated nature of such actions is compelling. You don't have to wait for anybody else. You just get on and do it yourself. My argument is that we should be wary of overstating the importance we attach to individual ethical choices. Bedecking ourselves in ethically produced, sweat-free t-shirts made of organic cotton while sipping fair-trade tea from recycled cardboard cups may well leave us with a warm feeling inside, but what has it done to actually improve the world? Sure, one or two people may have been paid slightly more than they otherwise would have been, but global capitalism continues undaunted.

It might be retorted that I am arguing against a straw man. That no-one actually holds such a nuance-free position as to think that their choice of tea alone is going to change the world. It would be nice to think that were true, but *New Consumer*, ethical shopping's trade magazine proclaims, without a trace of hyperbole that "creating a world that works for everyone has never been easier. It lies in your simple shopping

decisions and lifestyle habits!" (Quoted in *New Internationalist* 385, p. 3) Even if such views are unusual within activist circles (activists after all are, by definition, involved in activism) we should be wary of implicitly promoting messages which reinforce such disconnected perspectives on social change. It seems to me that one of the key problems with this whole "ethical" business is the fact that it focuses on individual choices rather than collective action, perpetuating the atomising effects of capitalism. Unless you are in an unusual position of influence, your individual choices, about food, clothing or even a career, are likely to have a fairly limited impact. If you want to make the world a better place, you're likely to find rather more success if you combine your efforts with other people. One and a half million atomised individuals moaning about the invasion of Iraq wouldn't have had a fraction of the influence of the same number coming together on February 15. As that example demonstrates, large numbers alone aren't a guarantee of success, the problems we face are huge after all, but there is a long history of movements which have transformed the world. The civil rights movement in the States defeated segregation; the resistance in Vietnam defeated US imperialism; and the suffragettes achieved votes for women.

It might be averred that the anti-apartheid struggle demonstrated the success of ethical consumerism, at least insofar as the boycott of South African goods helped to weaken the regime. It is important to bear in mind, however, that in South Africa the African National Congress (ANC) was well organised and supported by groups around the world. People's choice about whether to buy purple or green grapes took place within the context of a wider, larger struggle.

A further problem it seems to me is that the insertion of the "ethical" prefix presupposes that there are also unethical alternatives and implies that these remain in existence. In fact, I would argue that the entire exercise

is predicated, albeit usually implicitly, on the continuation of the decidedly unethical *status quo*. The basic notion is that while exploitation, environmental destruction and the assorted evils of capitalism carry on as they have always done, we can console ourselves that it isn't our responsibility. We've done our bit by choosing fair trade chocolate over a Mars bar; by deciding to work for a wind turbine company rather than BAE Systems.

Ethical consumerism may not just fail to challenge capitalism, but actually reinforce it. Nestlé, long criticised for policies in the third world, now sells fair trade coffee; L'Oréal purchased the Body Shop in May last year, despite a long-history of animal testing; and fair trade coffee is now available in Starbucks and even some McDonald's outlets (the former sells it in 23 countries, the latter only in New England). (All facts from *New Internationalist* 395, p. 2) Perhaps the most egregious example is BAE Systems decision to begin production of an 'ethical' bullet, which is lead-free. (*New Internationalist* 395, p. 1) BAE note, without any apparent self-awareness, "Lead used in ammunition can harm the environment and pose a risk to people." (BAE Systems Corporate Social Responsibility report) Perhaps naively, I'd always assumed that posing a risk to people was ammunition's *raison d'être*. If you're an Iraqi civilian getting shot with these things, I doubt it hurts any less. The words may have changed, but the song remains the same. Capitalism is not a problem we're going to buy our way out of. Our personal choices have only a limited role to play in the struggle for a new, better world. At best they allow us to minimise our culpability in the current system. They won't defeat that system, nor stop its devastation of the environment. Those are things we're going to have to fight for. That might not be as easy as popping out for a fair trade cappuccino, but maybe it's worth the effort.

PEACE CONFERENCE

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18
PORTLAND BUILDING

11:00 – What's oil got to do with it?

Sue Blount, local Green Party councillor

James Howard, Powerswitch

Tom Unterrainer, No Sweat

1:30 – Workshops

Destitution Group, Being an asylum seeker

No Sweat, Workers' struggles and solidarity

Powerswitch, Peak oil

More TBC

4:00 – SPEAKER

**Craig Murray, former British ambassador to
Uzbekistan**

All day – atrium

**Stalls from local campaigns (including Amnesty,
Defy-ID, Faslane 365, No Sweat, Stop the War)
and vegan catering by Veggies**

NOTTINGHAM STUDENT PEACE MOVEMENT

