

PEACE & PROGRESS  
a party for human rights

“A WORLD WITHOUT FEAR OR POVERTY”

Ladies, gentlemen and friends

It is good to be here. I am pleased to have been invited to speak briefly. Just as I found the words of Chris Cooper this afternoon, I found the paper on “Fear and Poverty” a chilling overview of the corrupted state of peace and justice, the neglect, no ... it is more the dismissal of human rights as ... too constraining, too inconvenient ... that we find today. And we find it both at the domestic level and the international. Evermore conspicuously since 9/11, international law has been swept away by the black hole that is the convenient so-called “war on terror”. A fiction that has brought to reality the mad dreams of those Washington policy wonks who drafted the Project for the New American Century in 2000, and who can now realize their ambitions and appallingly ours ... it seems ... here in Europe, for opportunistic aggression.

We cannot allow the concept “a world without fear and poverty” to be a naïve hope. Change is possible. In fact, it is essential ... if we want it to improve the lives of billions ... the majority. I refer to those who have no voice, and yet see over 30,000 children die everyday for lack of minimal nutrition and rudimentary health care ... the silent majority who lack the basic human rights of adequate food, education, employment, housing and opportunities. The entrapment of poverty is indeed one of the root causes of today’s global chaos.

And fear is certainly one outcome and perhaps one possible solution. I refer to the fear and anger of those who despair of the right to life, to have even basic needs met. The beginning of a solution may lie in their increasing unwillingness to tolerate exclusion any longer. Better than the White House and No 10 ... they instinctively understand their fundamental economic and social human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration. And again instinctively, they understand their rights as in Article 51 of the UN Charter - that is the right of self-defence. We may not often acknowledge it, but they have the right of resistance to cultural intrusion, bible thumping, military invasion and occupation, economic exploitation ... crusades of any kind. They are rightly demanding their sovereign and human rights. And we have the obligation to assist in making those rights happen.

However, men like Bush and Blair, and their friends, prefer to call this resistance ... “terrorism”. And indeed, it is often unacceptably violent and indiscriminate. But are we really surprised that it mirrors ... almost exactly ... the lawless brutality of US and UK state aggression on civilians, or dare I say it... the “state terrorism”, to which it is responding? Is it not strange how we accept the long distance and impersonal killing of cluster bombing, bunker busters, or the slow death of depleted uranium, yet righteously reject the equally ghastly, but up-close and personal killing of a suicide bomber? It is not rational. Ask those butchered by modern and often experimental weapons in Afghanistan, or in Iraq ... talk to those who survived Fallujah, or “Shock and Awe”.

The fear and new sense of vulnerability we find in the “West” is very different. Propaganda has de-linked it from our military aggression, our intrusion, our exploitation without regard to injustice, or the human rights of others. We are willing to be facilitated by a righteous leadership that has created opportunities for spreading “freedom and democracy” as we plunder, privatize and control. We have found a justification for our strategic and energy-related military adventures and atrocities. We have created a circle of aggression.

As the gap between rich and poor widens, both domestically and between North and South, we witness the expenditures of vast wealth not on people, but on

weapons and warfare, and the diversion of billions of sterling, dollars, Euro from meeting human needs. We increasingly function like a corporation, that is, quarterly. We no longer think long term. And as Eisenhower warned in 1958, the military industrial complex ... let's include the media and energy sector ... is in control. The economies of many "civilised" countries, including the five permanent members of the UN Security Council thrive on weapons production. As you know, some 85% of all weapons sold are produced by those five guardians of international peace and security!

Now I realize that the human rights violations ongoing in US occupied Guantanamo Bay is the focus today. We have heard the frightening inside story and personal experience of Moazzam Begg. Guantanamo is indeed one of the lowest points of the human rights crisis. As reported in the NY Times on 5 June, Baltasar Garzon, Spain's most prominent investigative magistrate has said, "a model like Guantanamo Bay is an insult to countries that respect laws". I have little to add, but to tell you that in March 2002, I was taken there by Cuban authorities ... to view the construction of cages by American heroes. Even then, one had a sense of the demise of America's much vaunted democratic, religious and family "values". Recently, a NY Times editorial of 7 June has deplored the removal of Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions from the US Military Field Manual ... the Article that prohibits the use of torture, and outrages on human dignity such as deliberate humiliation and degradation. Even more recently, suicides have occurred, presumably from the hopelessness of interminable confinement without charges, without protection of law.

Where is the United Nations in all this? The sad fact is that UN neglect of "Git'mo" Bay is no worse than the total disregard for human rights shown by the UN Security Council in respect of the people of Iraq during 12 years of comprehensive sanctions. Similarly today, when we have the people of Darfur helplessly caught in a genocidal trap, the Council fails to bring an end to the killing and destruction of lives, culture and homeland. Meanwhile, the already illegally occupied Palestinians are being collectively punished by the international community for exercising their democratic right to elect Hamas. And there are many other human rights violations within member states ... neglected.

Much of the same international community dangerously supports Washington paranoia and ignorance of modern history in threatening Iran, eager to pursue its right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Having forgotten the UK/US overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953, which led to the overthrow of the Shah, and the Revolution he fears, Bush employs the diplomacy of violence, supported by military threats, including leaks about nuclear bombing. There is no justification for this pre-emptive aggression.

Millions of us marched in February 2003, here in London, in Dublin, in New York and elsewhere to stop the invasion of Iraq. I remember speaking in this room the Friday night before that extraordinary real people-protest here in London. And ultimately we were all frustrated by the arrogance of elected leadership and our powerlessness. But yet, we cannot let go of our commitment to making a difference, just as we cannot turn our backs on our democratic obligations. Given the catastrophe of Iraq, maybe our collective feet-on-the-ground influence has grown. Maybe Blair and Bush may listen better the next time around.

The mess we face today indicates that we need to revitalize the concept of participatory democracy. Those of us enjoying the privileges of being citizens of a democratic state need to be reminded of our obligations. Despite taking to the streets, we all became responsible when the US and UK determined to invade and occupy Iraq ... although lacking any UN approval under Article 42 of Chapter 7 of the Charter. Because we failed on Iraq, we cannot fail on Iran. We all know another failed military action that targets innocent civilians is not the answer, nor would it be acceptable.

Since 9/11, my own Government has been collaborating with Washington allowing US warplanes en route to Iraq carrying armed troops to land and refuel at Shannon. Likewise, allowing the fuelling of CIA flights involved in "extraordinary renditions". Sadly, I

am a collaborator in the illegal pre-emptive invasion and ongoing occupation of the sovereign state of Iraq. I believe that in a democracy at war, or in collaboration, there are no non-combatants. We cannot hide behind the conscripted, or even the volunteers who kill, maim, torture and commit atrocities in our name. Our elected officials encourage them, arm them and exploit misplaced patriotism. We are responsible for hegemony, intrusion and corruption of cultures and values.

We can never give up our efforts to make a difference.

Righteously our elected representatives have arranged for James Taylor to be brought to trial, and Milosovic before him. We support the domestic prosecution of Saddam Hussein. We impose a tribunal on Cambodia. But when it comes to our own ... we seem to be a lot slower. Some have declared immunity and others defy the ICC. Here we are in 2006, and it seems we accept that "might is right"! It is astonishing. The winner still takes all. International law is malleable when god is on our side! We buy the misinformation. We allow armed aggression, when it is ours, in violation of international law.

One could question who really are the terrorists? Meanwhile the prime perpetrators ... our democratically elected leaders ... are walking free, to threaten again. Bush is not yet impeached. Blair lives around the corner. Almost makes one yearn for the good old days when jolly good chaps knew enough to do the right thing and resign. Or via people power, leave town like ... Marcus, Suharto, Welenska.

What to do with our non-violence? As citizens, we need to demand that investment is made in people, not in warfare. We need to make our economies not dependent on the arms trade, but on satisfying human well being, basic human rights. Our religious leaders have got to stand up and be counted. There can be no just war. And I am not demanding pacifism, but suggesting tolerance and rights, and recognition that the world's resources are finite; that we need to move forward with justice if there is to be any equality and peace; that we need to revitalise international law, respect it and abide by it; and that we need to have our democratic leadership implement human rights domestically and overseas. It is in our own best interests and in the interests of all nations, more importantly all people. We need our elected leaders to understand that.

I have just come from Malaysia where a meeting committed to making anything to do with war a criminal offence took place. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration inter alia calls for making criminal speaking on behalf of, or financing, or legislating warfare. It suggests that all politicians, political parties, religious leaders, you and me, must stop glorifying war. Our schools and universities must do the same. Corporations must no longer manufacture and sell weapons.

If Prime Minister Blair was sincere in legislating to prevent the glorification of "terrorism" ... presumably he included "state terrorism" and resistance thereto ... surely we can demand legislation to end not just the glorification of war, but the usage of war as a device for change ... in violation of international law ... the pre-emptive, the illegal invasion, and murderous occupation.

If we cannot understand that human rights belong to all, if we cannot understand the need to invest in people as opposed to arms, and cannot understand the counter-productivity of war, we are doomed. It may already be five minutes to midnight. However, it is never too late for us individually and collectively to reach beyond the angst that prevails and initiate resolution and redress. We need to make tangible our opposition ... to take to the streets again and again ... to ensure that the understanding, gaining stature even in Washington, that addressing root causes around the globe may contribute to the human security of us all.

We may feel threatened by the “terrorism” of others, and be blind to our own terrorist methods, or that others are simply responding in kind to the aggression we pursue. We may be prepared to collectively “punish” as though that was legitimate. It is not. Perhaps we need to think of the Iranian poet Omar Khayyam who said “if you punish the evil I have done - pray tell, what is the difference between you and me”.

Thank you.

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