

Thinking of February 15th

A Collection of articles written by South Tynesiders marking the first anniversary of the massive demonstrations on February 15th, 2003 in London and throughout the world to oppose the attack on Iraq, which have become one of the most significant events in the continuing struggle against the warmongers.



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**South Tyneside
Stop The War Coalition**



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Preface

The South Tyneside Stop The War Coalition was founded by a group of concerned South Tynesiders a month before the U.S. led invasion of Iraq in March, 2003. Founding members immediately took part in the 2 million strong demonstration in London on February 15th. In this issue, which is devoted to *Thinking of February 15th*, it is not just about the demonstration itself but the whole movement of people that has grown up around it, both before and after, here in South Tyneside, and elsewhere throughout the country and world wide.

As the mass demonstrations on February 15th 2003 illustrate vividly it is more than just a movement for peace and against war. It has become part of a powerful movement of people in Britain and worldwide against those small circles at the head of powerful states such as the US and Britain that are committing crimes against the peace and humanity in order to pursue naked interests for world domination of resources, markets and spheres of influence.

This movement of the people if it is linked with a positive vision of how to build a better world without war, and based on defending the sovereignty of countries threatened by the big powers, will become unstoppable, whilst the war mongers will find it increasingly harder to operate politically and militarily. Their ideas will continue to be exposed by a thinking people and the collective consciousness of those

involved in such a movement. Bush and Blair and other warmongers will increasingly be pursued for war crimes.

Whilst we are not a political party we strive to promote a new politics where people in all sections of society, of all political, ideological, religious and other beliefs are included in political decision making. This politics is along the high road of civilisation where conflicts and problems are resolved in the interests of the peoples. All want to live and work in a peaceful world without the present wars, mass poverty, disease and destruction of life and the environment. Anti-war activists along with others want to plant this new way forward and are already, for example, standing their own candidates for election.

Thinking of February 15th, 2003 is about setting such an agenda. It is about including people in thinking and writing about what this movement, that they are a part of, means to them. It is about involving people in what should be its aims and how those aims can be brought about.

Get involved it is your future!

Another World Is Possible! We will create it!

February 15, 2004

February 15th, 2003

By Alan Newham

The anti war demonstration held in London on Feb 15th 2003 was the largest political gathering in British history. If that was not enough there were demonstrations in more than sixty countries around the world. As someone who has attended many demonstrations and rallies over the years with my union banner, Feb15th renewed my faith in the power of ordinary people to make their voices heard and to influence the powerful, especially in a age when it is considered 'old hat ' to do such a thing. Feb. 15th did not stop the war but it did remind people that they are potentially infinitely more powerful than those governments who have learned nothing and continue to act like barbarians.

Alan Newham.

February 15th 2003

A Personal View

By Alan Trotter

This was our day, this was the day when 'ordinary folk' made their voice heard, this was the day to show your colours and to stand up and be counted, and we counted in millions across the globe, this was the day the whole world took to the streets to show their opposition about the threat to invade Iraq. This was the day when we united and became one to say NOT IN OUR NAME.

In London two million people marched in unity, many of these people were protesting for the first time in their lives, they felt so strongly about the situation in Iraq that they were compelled to get out of their beds early on a cold February day to travel to London and join the march. All across the UK there were people protesting and letting the government know of their feelings.

On this historic march all of humanity was represented, people of all faiths, all ages and all nationalities, there were grey haired grannies marching arm in arm with pink haired punks, complete families marching, people drawn together with a common bond, and that bond was the fervent desire to stop the UK and USA invading Iraq and the consequent deaths of innocent people.

I marched for hours with my friends and comrades and when we arrived at Hyde park it was dark and the last speakers had just finished, behind me were thousands of people, such was the magnitude of this demonstration. When we arrived back at the coach I felt as if I had run the London marathon - very tired and footsore but we knew that we

had taken part in a historic event. To tell the truth I felt proud to be part of this gathering of wonderful people who were compassionate and actually cared that fellow human beings were going to invade and kill other fellow human beings.

We felt that with two million people on the streets of London that the Government must take notice of what the 'ordinary folks' think and for a while I thought they did, but the Government cannot afford to ignore the will of the people who want to live in a world without war and all the slaughter, pain and heartache that goes with it. The Peace movement is growing.

Here we are one year on, the suffering in the aftermath, the deaths of so many people and the horrific injuries to innocent children, the human rights violations, the lies from politicians trying to morally justify their actions, and the cost of this war so far is in excess of \$101 billion. When will they ever learn.....when will they ever learn ?

Alan Trotter

A Ramble Through Crowded Memories of 15th February 2003 and Other Matters

By Phil Talbot

Crowds tend to gather at times of disorder - including the run-ups to war. Sometimes those pre-war crowd-gatherings are part of a militaristic mobilisation process. Sometimes they are expressions of public opposition to impending war. Occasionally - as happened before the Falklands War, for example - crowd-gatherings diverge into pro-war and anti-war groupings, with the divergence forming part of the national debate on whether or not to go to war.

It is a striking fact that early last year, prior to the US-UK led attack on Iraq, there were no large pro-war gatherings in Britain - and no large cheering send offs for the troops. The national mood was overwhelmingly anti-war. All the big public gatherings converged in opposition to the war - including the biggest ever political gathering in British history, when two million people marched in London on 15th February 2003.

To bring so many people together peacefully at one time was a huge achievement by the Stop The War movement - and worthy of celebrating a year on. When Britain went to war a month later, it was reluctantly, on the decisions of a few people at the centre of power, and with most people opposing the decision to go to war.

By an insidious and rather sinister process, the broad mass of the British public had been effectively cowed into passively accepting - rather than actually supporting - that war. The Bush-Blair so-called

'war on terror' has in fact created a disturbing kind of state-terror structure of its own - under of guise of 'protecting freedom'.

This state-terror apparatus mixes cynical propaganda [false 'WMD' claims, crude scapegoating of foreign powers, etc] with scare stories of 'terrorist alerts' [which rarely materialize into anything substantial], as well as frightening non-verbal physical symbolism ['security screens' around public buildings, armed police and tanks at airports, etc].

In the name of 'security' the 'war on terror' has created a general state of paranoia and insecurity, which is out of proportion to the real threat posed by non-state terrorist groups such as al Qaeda. In the lead up to the Iraq war last year, such devices fostered a climate of fear - most of it unwarranted - and put the country on a war footing - even though there was no real large-scale direct and immediate threat to Britain's national security.

One of the most important - and under-considered - strengths of the Stop The War movement is the bold way it has rejected the scare propaganda of the 'war on terror' - according to which any large gathering of people [even peace protesters] is supposedly a target for 'terrorists'.

While government leaders have hidden behind 'smokescreens' of dubious 'intelligence', and in physical 'bunkers' of one sort or another, and behind 'security cordons' of varying forms, the anti-war movement has been much more honest, open and bold - visibly out and about at large gatherings in public places, and striving to separate the facts from the propaganda in conspicuous ways.

It is a fact that the biggest of those anti-war public gatherings was in London on 15th February 2003.

'Britain found its voice yesterday and led the world in the march towards peace.'

This description of the 15th February event does not comes from a radical publication. It comes from the front page of the following day's Mail on Sunday. That a traditionally right of centre mainstream news-

paper described the march in such terms tells a very significant story. The evidence was plain for all to witness. No one could deny it or distort it much. The march was of such a scale that it did represent the 'voice' of Britain at that time - and that 'voice' was demanding peace, not war.

Of course that is not the full story. It was a peace march but only a minority on it were outright pacifists. Many people were marching against a specific impending war - of which they did not approve, for various reasons. It is probably also true to say that many other people on the march were not strongly committed to any particular cause, but were marching in search of some sort of better direction.

Without a doubt 15th February 2003 was a remarkable day for democracy - both positively and negatively. It was truly the biggest ever political march in British history, and it spoke for the nation, but yet it seemed to have no effect on the policy of the elected government of the day.

It is an historical fact that the biggest ever political gathering in Britain failed to stop British involvement in the war it opposed. 'People power', so splendidly displayed at the 15th February Stop The War gathering, did not seem very powerful after all. This has discouraged many who marched optimistically that day, and has seemed to confirm many people's sense of powerlessness and disillusionment with politics. It is now common to hear words on the lines of: '... what is the point of protesting? ... look at that anti-war march ... it made no difference ... the government did not listen ...'

The British prime minister Tony Blair was certainly not listening to the 'voice' of his own people on 15th February 2003.

He was separated from the reality of what was happening ... and delivering one of his pious sermons to few hundred New Labour supporters in Glasgow. He was even claiming to be making a 'moral case for war'. Meanwhile, back in the real world, events were happening pretty much as described by the Mail on Sunday:

'Amid unprecedented scenes, a human sea of protestors converged on London to oppose an invasion of Iraq - while equally passionate

and peaceful demonstrations were held in some 600 cities around the globe.

'Organizers of the London rally claimed their counting, backed by aerial photos, showed the support of more than 2 million marches. Others said one and a half million. Scotland Yard put the number on the official route to Hyde Park at 750,000, but conceded the overall figure could be significantly higher because many made their own way to the park.

'Whatever the actual number, the protest was by far the biggest in British history - dwarfing the 400,000 on last year's countryside march - and a staggering display of people power.'

In other words, while the detailed facts might be uncertain, the broad truths were undeniable.

Meanwhile, up in Glasgow, Tony Blair was distorting reality with characteristic kinds of word-twisting. This is what he actually said:

'The moral case against war has a moral answer: it is the moral case for removing Saddam. It is not the reason we act. That must be according to the UN mandate on weapons of mass destruction. But it is the reason, frankly, why if we do have to act we should do so with a clear conscience.'

This was a deliberately unclear and issue obscuring statement by Blair. With hindsight it can be understood more clearly.

As we now know, he did not have that United Nations mandate, and he did not have real evidence of 'weapons of mass destruction', but he was determined to back the American President George Bush in the attack on Iraq to get rid of Saddam Hussein.

It is important for the anti-war movement to repeat as often as possible that by any standard convention of international law it was illegal for the American-British led forces to invade Iraq without a UN mandate and to topple Saddam by force - however obnoxious he might have been. This act broke standard conventions of international law that exist to protect the integrity of nation states. It set a very danger-

ous precedent. In future other powers are likely to attempt to justify invasions of other nations and topplings of foreign governments of which they do not approve by back-reference to the U.S.-U.K.-led attack on Iraq in 2003.

And Blair must have known that what he and Bush were planning to do was illegal - which was why he put out the smokescreen over 'weapons of mass destruction', and which is why, with that smokescreen now blown away, he attempts to justify the war in terms of the removal of the tyrant Saddam.

Saddam was a tyrant, yes, but it was illegal for the USA and UK governments to topple him as they did. You do not fight tyranny effectively by debasing the rule of law and acting like violent tyrants yourself.

In the wider world that weekend, as the millions protested in Britain and elsewhere, a big shift had in fact taken place in international relations. In the week before the march there was a showdown at the UN in which Britain gave unconditional support to an U.S. government policy, in opposition to, amongst others, Russia, China, Germany, France, much of the rest of the EU, and most of the Islamic world.

This policy was to invade Iraq regardless of international opinion, seize the oil fields, topple Saddam violently, and effectively privatise the country. These acts were to be the first steps towards remaking the Middle East according to American corporate capitalist models.

It was a heavy-handed power-play. Talk of 'liberation' was propaganda. From the anti-war British perspective, our government had sold out the interests of Britain and the wider world to a dangerous clique at the centre of the American government. This clique was a blend of corrupt oil men, right-wing Christian 'prosperity gossellers' - some with disturbing 'end times visions' focussing on violent events in the Middle East - as well as extreme Zionists, and right-wing power-junkies.

And you did not have to be very far to the left of politics to be disturbed by this plan. As the mostly orthodox liberal analyst Anthony

Sampson [author of such standard 'solid centre' texts as *The Anatomy of Britain*] put it in an essay that weekend, what was happening was 'the most fundamental realignment since the 1940s, with far-reaching implications'. It was happening 'without any serious debate, against the advice of senior diplomats and military advisors, at a time when parliament is in recess'.

He concluded: 'Britain is doing no service to itself or to Israel by supporting a hawkish American foreign policy in the Middle East. However speedy and successful the first victory over Saddam, the aftermath will be perilous and bitter. The British people may well look back on the Iraq war of 2003 with the same puzzled questions that they asked after Suez. HOW COULD THEY HAVE BEEN SO MISLED, BY SUCH A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE, TO MOVE BOTH AGAINST BOTH THEIR INSTINCTS AND THEIR INTERESTS?' [Observer, 16.02.03]

Meanwhile back on the march, two million or so British people were doing their best not to be misled, and to lead themselves and others in better directions.

The Mail on Sunday reporters Ian Gallagher and Jo Knowsley continued to tell it more or less as it was:

'It was the diversity of those at the rally which amazed observers. Organisers celebrated "the mass mobilization of the middle classes" and the huge number of women.

'There were many anxious but determined Middle England protest virgins marching alongside really hardened veterans.

'But there were all united in pursuit of a common goal - peace.

'Reflecting the nature of the day, Scotland Yard reported only three arrests for minor offences 'remarkable given the amount of people, said a senior officer.'

The diversity was indeed amazing.

As the Mail on Sunday suggested, it was the day when the 'middle

classes' were mobilised, but they are no homogenous body, they are a very varied bunch. The broad coalition marching against war that day spread all the way from moderate 'One Nation' Tories to the more revolutionary parts of the Left. Almost all religious groupings were represented. There were also thousands of people attending as individual citizens with no particular group allegiances. It was a kind of festival of diversity and tolerance. And more marginal people were not excluded.

At about 11.30am, near the Houses of Parliament, and half-an-hour before the main march was due to start, a group of several hundred 'Class War' anarchists gathered around a large drum band, and set off in their bloody-minded off-beat way ahead of the main march.

Outside Parliament, they formed into a sort of phalanx ... and had a brief stand-off with police, including a dozen or so mounted officers. The confrontation was very ritualized, with both sides keeping to the 'rules of the game' - some intimidation but no real violence ... and then the anarchists backed off ... and marched elsewhere ...

In its own off-beat way that confrontation spoke with the 'voice' of the day. Police and anarchists said to each other, in effect: 'We might not agree with you and what you stand for, but we accept your right to be doing what you are doing here today.' The ritual restrained the potential violence. In the broadest sense, it was within the 'rule of law' [although the anarchists themselves might object to that phrase!]

The point hardly needs to be stressed that it was a better example of how to behave in a New Millennium than what Bush and Blair and their supporting cliques were about to do in Iraq - that was out of order ... and outside the rule of law.

Later, about 10 minutes before midday, the main march began on the Embankment, on the north side of the river Thames. It was an indication of the size and intensity of the march that the pressure of the crowds building up behind the starting point forced an early start.

The march soon built up in an extraordinary manner on the north of the Thames. Over on the South Bank, near the Millennium Eye, and close to the Spanish Civil War International Brigade Monument, there

were overflows from the march. The crowds were smaller but still significant, and contained many diverse elements. A group of a hundred or so 'Pagans for Peace' formed a large circle on a patch of grass beneath the Eye and performed one of their own rituals.

It was the sort of thing the uninitiated might expect to see in dark woods at midnight. But there it was to be seen in central London just after midday. Christians, Muslims, and people of other religious faiths and none watched it with interest.

Some observers seeing this pagan rite might have not have approved of what they were witnessing, but they tolerated it happening in their proximity nevertheless. It was accepted as part of the 'voice' of the day - and that sort of general tolerance of things that were not necessarily approved of was a key part of the day's message of peace ... and a pointer to ways of making a better world without war.

The British national consciousness in all its diverse and often contradictory forms - including much normally mostly hidden 'under-stuff' of the sort represented by the pagans and anarchists - was out in the open and expressing itself in London that day.

And it was troubled ... but hoping to find better alternative ways ...

While the anarchists and the pagans might have represented some of the more 'marginal' elements of the march, what swelled its ranks to huge numbers was the influx of people from the mainstream middle-ground. Many of them had no precise political commitment - and no great desire to be converted to particular political outlooks. What they had was a strong sense of being troubled by the course of world events, and a belief that they were being lied to - that the government was misleading the country ... and leading it astray ...

You cannot deny the reality of what huge numbers of people have experienced for themselves.

And so, like the Mail on Sunday report quoted, most mainstream reports of the event told it pretty much as it was. It is significant that several mainstream newspapers, most strikingly the Mirror, gave direct support to the march - even providing it with placards. This was

not an entirely altruistic gesture of course - since it was a form of advertizing for the paper - but such direct involvement of the mainstream media significantly affected the character of the event. Circulation pressures must have come into play to some extent for other papers - and so, for example, even the Daily Mail, sensing the mood of the time, printed a handy map in advance for would-be marchers - who must have included many of its regular readers.

The small print of the Mail on Sunday report told a very telling story that has not been much remarked upon since. In a comparative list of 'biggest demos in British history' it noted that 15th February was much bigger than an event the previous June [2002] when 'more than one million people packed The Mall to take part in a huge public demonstration of support and admiration for the Queen on her Golden Jubilee'.

That is a startling fact that is worth restating: about twice as many people turned out in February 2003 to oppose the Bush-Blair war plan than turned out on June 2002 to cheer the Queen's on her Golden Jubilee Day. [This is not to say 15th February was a strongly republican march, because it was not - and there must have been many pro-monarchists on the march too.]

We had the numbers and a very broad base of support.

We spoke for the nation that day, far more than the isolated PM speaking up in Glasgow.

We were making the more truly 'moral case', which was against the Bush-Blair war plans.

We spoke a message of peace, and had hopes of creating a different kind of politics for the new century.

We had a great day.

But the war went ahead anyway.

How did Blair and his small group of followers get away with ignoring the true 'voice' of the British people and misleading the nation into

war?

The broad outlines of what happened the following month are now well understood by most people. Blair went to war against public opinion, using the cynical calculation that the middle-ground elements of the anti-war movement would rally behind the British forces once war began.

Right-wing commentators have been as enraged by this cynicism as have left-wing. For example, Cornelli Barnett: '... emasculating the anti-war movement by going to war was just once of a series of cynical moves that marks the confrontation with Saddam Hussein as the biggest collective exercise in con-trickery of modern times ...' [Daily Mail, 29/05/03]

Evidence is growing that this 'con-trickery' was very calculated. Blair was not listening to the 'voice' of 15th February - but he was not entirely oblivious to British public opinion before going to war. As ever, he was carefully monitoring the private Labour Party 'Middle England' focus groups, which were telling him what he could get away with, and how people could be scared into not opposing - even if not actually supporting - the 'war on terror' and the attack on Iraq.

One of the tricks Blair used was to create the impression that he knew some terrible 'secret intelligence', which he could not reveal for 'security reasons'. He did not have such 'secret intelligence' of course - and according to what he says now he did not even properly understand the 'intelligence' he thought he had - but the trick created doubts in the minds of many who otherwise opposed the war plan.

And then once the war started, and British troops were in action, fewer people were willing to protest against it openly. It is an indicator of continued unease in the wider public that those of us who did continue to oppose the war openly when British troops were in action did not face much public hostility - indeed many people said they were thankful that some were continuing to stand out against a war that few had ever wanted. And our work continues ... because the war is not over, and the disastrous consequences of the Bush-Blair scheme are becoming ever more apparent as time goes on.

The events of 2003 should not be regarded as a defeat for the anti-war movement but as part of our development process. Within South Tyneside Stop The War Coalition we believe that establishing an accurate history of our own - which cannot be distorted by spin doctors, or destroyed by war-mongering propagandists - is an important part of that development.

15th February 2003 was the biggest public event in anti-war history and a key historical reference point. We had our great day, the promise of which seems to be lost for the time-being. What we are left with is memories, photographs, newspaper clippings and other memory aids of that day.

Such is the stuff of history. It is important we hold on to it - because Bush and Blair and allies are relying on short-attention spans to erase the truth, and they want to rewrite history in ways favourable to themselves.

One of the problems in remembering 15th February 2003 is actually that it was so big and so complex. The two million people present in London - and the many more who were involved indirectly - had limited perspectives and can only remember a few snatches.

The real memory of such a large public event is collective. We put it together between us, and maintain its history between us - in all the many individual memories and in all the multitude of small memory aids.

Big events always start on a small scale ... and later resolve down to a small scale ...

In the days and weeks leading up to the massive London march, relatively small groups of people gathered in community centres, church buildings, private homes, and many other venues - including such virtual realms as internet chat rooms - to put together plans for the large scale public event between them.

In a real sense, I joined the Saturday 15th February London event eight days earlier, on Friday 7th February, when I was one of about 40 people at the founding meeting of South Tyneside Stop The War Coa-

lition, at Ocean Road Community Centre, South Shields. I had gone along undecided, and only that night decided to take part in the following week's march. Many others at similar small meetings around the country must have been making similar decisions at that time. It was the convergence of millions of such small-scale choices that made the London event so big.

A turn out of 40 or so was actually quite large for a political meeting on a cold Friday night in February in a borough that, for a variety of reasons, has become politically stagnant. The mix of people attending was strikingly diverse - and included people, including myself, who would not regard themselves, then or now, as 'political activists'.

The opinions expressed that night were varied, but the mood of those present united around a general sense of unease at the course of world events and a general desire to find better alternative ways for the new century. There was a then ill-defined sense that something different was happening - suggesting the possibility of a new kind of revitalized politics emerging in future.

Since that night, a broad-based anti-war group has gradually developed in South Tyneside, where no such group previously existed - which is quite an achievement.

Eight days after STSTWC was formed, at about tea-time, in London's Hyde Park, I was finding unimpressive most of the platform speeches that I was hearing. Most of the words spoken from the raised platform to the vast expanse of Hyde Park, London, seemed to me far less uplifting than the discussion I had heard the previous week, when local people, sitting on plastic chairs in a small space in a community centre, had spoken their minds in often very articulate and moving ways.

Some of the platform speakers at the London rally seemed to be just plugging personal causes rather than embracing the wider inclusive aspects of the day; some of the political rhetoric was tired and heard too often before; few speakers that I heard in Hyde Park seemed hugely inspired by the day.

This did not seem such a bad thing to me. 15th February 2003 was a

day of a truly democratic event - made by huge numbers of very diverse kinds of individual people, who could make up their own minds, and who did not have to be told what to think by platform speakers.

It was a march in which people led themselves - not a march behind leaders. It is notable that the Stop the War movement, as it has emerged, has no real charismatic leaders. That is probably not a bad thing. One of the beliefs underlying the anti-war movement is that professional politicians, however well intentioned they might start out, are turned by the present systematic political processes into power-playing truth distorters - moving towards various kinds of self-serving behaviour patterns, including outright personal dishonesty and corruption.

Our principle opponents, Bush and Blair, seem to be two increasingly vacant looking machine politicians, who have fabricated - mostly on t.v. screens - a 'just cause' war against the tyrant Saddam and the terrorist bin Laden, whom few really admire or support, and so who were easy to scapegoat.

There are huge amounts of reality avoidance in that scapegoating process - and the methods Bush, Blair and others have used to oust the tyrant Saddam and pursue the terrorist bin Laden, have made them look like tyrants and terrorists themselves.

The few who play that increasingly empty looking game of professional politics ignored the many who marched on 15th February 2003 - and the few seemed to get away with a contemptuous dismissal of popular opinion.

While professional politicians exist in an ever more unreal and trivial seeming - but highly financed - media circus of publicity stunts, photo opportunities, sound-bites and spin-doctoring, the Stop The War movement has been notably down to earth and 'realistic' in its approach.

We have done our best with limited resources. We have produced low-cost publications to counter the glossy government propaganda in 'authentic' ways. We have gotten cold and footsore in while marching on real streets. We have mixed with real people with diverse

views - not carefully selected audiences - and debated freely with those who oppose our position.

Those many who marched on 15th February 2003 expressed the view - each in some unique personal way - that politics should not just be a spectator sport played out by a few main players in the virtual nowhere of the modern mass media. This is what happens when the majority of people get it right and the few in position of power in governments get it wrong: the governments devote themselves to constructing ever more elaborate webs of self-justifying propaganda to evade responsibility and the truth.

When professional politicians distort historical processes and seem to get away with it, people naturally become cynical and disillusioned.

But we should not let them mislead us that way.

We should make our own history - not have it imposed on us.

As even the Mail on Sunday reporters recognized, the 15th February 2003 London event was not only a protest march against illegal war plans, it was also the day that the British people joined the world in motion in a more hopeful direction.

On that day, millions of people took the first steps of what could be a positive 'march towards peace' ... and a truly better kind of future world ...

Phil Talbot

Thinking of February 15th – A Defining Moment for the Future of anti-War Government

By Roger Nettleship

When people took to the streets of London on February 15th, 2002, to oppose the attack on Iraq and to demand freedom for the Palestinian people few guessed at the qualitative change that was taking place among the people of Britain and throughout the world over the “war on terror”.

Two million people demonstrated against the warmongering of Bush and Blair and their imminent attack on Iraq. Demonstrations of similar mass proportions were simultaneously taking place across the world. Even after the war started hundreds of thousands demonstrated against the bombings and death and destruction in Iraq and its eventual armed occupation by the “coalition of the willing”. Hundreds of thousands protested against the visit of Bush to Britain during the week last year.

February 15th with what happened before and its aftermath is one of the greatest manifestations of the people against war. With the world faced with the overwhelming military power of the US and Britain in pursuit of their unjust wars and interventions, with their aim to control the Middle East and other areas of the world, February 15th was as if the whole world were speaking – a defining moment – for the future of anti-war government!

February 15th – all humanity is on the streets, drawn together not just

against war but against the anachronism of warmongering states of US and Britain and those that govern them.

Millions of people are asking questions. How is it in the modern age, in the birth of the new millennium, outright gangsters and warmongers using sophistry and spouting “ethical” phrases that cover over lies and more lies are allowed to rise to the head of powerful states?

How is it that in the modern age conflicts are not being resolved peacefully, that the right to human life is not sacrosanct and the sovereignty of nations not respected and protected?

How is it that in the name of opposing terrorism and weapons of mass destruction state terrorism is the only response and weapons of mass destruction proliferate whilst the battles to defeat poverty, disease and destruction of the environment is never taken up and is becoming so acute that it is threatening the future of humankind?

February 15th showed this greater realisation that peoples and oppressed countries cannot rely on the big powers to settle conflicts, end war, provide real disinterested aid to end poverty and protect the environment.

February 15th represents today the growing consciousness and realisation that people are the makers of history and must take matters into their own hands and keep the initiative in their own hands.

What has happened following February 15th has all confirmed how right people were to take a stand that this was not in their name. It is confirming with every passing day that there is no future for the world, for humanity, in following the path of these imperialist powers that continue their occupation of the Balkans, Middle East, Asia and Africa and prepare for more wars of occupation.

Thinking of February 15th is thinking of the future. Not in terms of some unrealisable dream but a practical task that the peoples of the world are taking up regardless of different political and ideological views, different religions, social status and so on to build a new world where conflicts and war are a thing of the past, where the peoples in their millions more and more actively take part in deciding the future

for their societies and countries and resolve all of the most serious problems that face them.

Thinking of February 15th is ending the situation where warmongering governments are imposed and creating anti-war governments. It is even raising the issue of ending the control of the monopolies over the economy and politics, and providing renewal of the political process so that the people become the decision-makers.

This anniversary of February 15th must continue to act as a defining moment for a future direction that the people are increasingly taking and raising with increasing and considerable justification and optimism – a future of anti-war government. Another World is Possible! The People Will Create It!

Roger Nettleship

February 15th - Impressions

By Doreen & Bryan Henderson

The February 15th rally was a welcome release of pent up anger towards the way the country was being duped into going to war. We were being fed a diet of lies and spurious intelligence reports and I wondered how anyone could believe it. The rally lifted my spirits and gave me new hope. The number of people, especially young people, was a real tonic. Our opinions were ignored - a point that should be remembered at the next election when we will have the opportunity to put them out of office.

Bryan Henderson

My first impression of the great march was one of jubilation as I first saw the massive turnout. 'So many kindred spirits,' I thought, 'This is a peaceful uprising.' I had a feeling of a possible successful result. Who could ignore such a massive show of solidarity against the invasion of Iraq? Who? Tony Blair and his New Labour MPs, that's who. And then I realised again that without the support of MPs and trade unions this was going to be another sickening defeat, just like the miners' strike. However, that does not detract from the fact that over 2 million people protested.

But without the support of MPs all our protests were doomed. Our next protest has to be at the ballot box. If your MP did not or does not listen to his or her constituents, then vote that MP out at the next

election. Why support an MP on the premise that just because he or she has 'Labour' in his title and stands as a 'New Labour candidate, then that MP must be a 'socialist'? It does not work that way. In fact the MP might have not have any socialist values. The invasion of Iraq was a blantant contravention of what most of the United Nations said in mandates that they wanted. Do not forget the lies we were fed. Do not forgot how the attack was linked to the USA's need for oil. Do not forget the suffering caused by sanctions imposed on the Iraq people. Do not forget Tony Blair's obsession with the USA.

But the main question to ask yourself is: what sort of twisted policy could have led the stongest nation in the world to bomb and bomb again the people of Iraq with cluster bombs, and with the backing of Tony Blair, our PM, and all in the name of 'freedom'? This war has opened up a can of worms. There are now more terrorists of untold numbers and determinations. It will last for years.

Doreen Henderson

CAMPBELL'S SOUP

By John Timmouth

(To be sung to the tune of "The Campbells Are Coming")

Lines were written on the occasion of the impending visit of Alistair Campbell to South Shields Customs House on January 30th, 2004

Here's a little pre-emptive preamble
To the visit of Alistair Campbell
Who is coming to South Shields Customs House
Once Tony Blair's premier media louse
Roll up, if you please,
To see Mister Sleaze
They're sure all to be there
To see the good Alistair
From New Labour, the ones who're just self-serving roadies
From Old Labour, the ones who're Just time-serving toadies

But, to all lovers of truth, we say
"Shun this spin doctor, and stay away
Tear up any tickets to Campbell's *spinfest*
Boycott the meeting as a moral protest"
He was puppet and monkey (can't put it kinder)
To Blair as puppet-master and organ-grinder
Now, thanks to Lord Hutton
They're both dead as mutton
Politically, that is, stone dead as can be
They'll fade into history - we say R. I.P.

But we don't really care now about Alistair
Because he's gone anyway - what matters is Blair
Not just for Blair's culture of deceit and spin
Which is reason enough to give him the bin
Not even for Blair's lies over Kelly's naming
Though these lies also are degrading and shaming
But, for the big lie, on the reasons for war
Where he tricked the entire nation, and now for
This one great unforgivable lie we must send
Blair - moral cripple - to his political end

For those interested, the rhyme's title is a parody on the title of a verse by one of the Newcastle group of poets, in vogue in the 1970's - "Lines Written On The Demolition Of The Salvation Army Hostel, Dog's Bank, Newcastle." It's interesting not only for its colourful title, but for the body of the verse, which consisted, as far as we can recall, of only two short lines - making the verse body shorter than its title.

Dog's Bank is within the completely rejuvenated area around Newcastle quayside, near the new Millennium Bridge. On a sunlit morning, you can also, from further along Newcastle quayside, in the shadow of the old Tyne bridge, walk halfway up Dean Street towards Grey's Monument, and climb Dog's Leap Stairs, to an area to the rear of St. Nicholas' Cathedral. Beautiful names, beautiful places.

John Tinmouth

Another World Is Possible!

By Alan Newham

The latest European Social Forum [ESF] held in Paris in November 2003 was, like the last one held in Florence in 2002 a success and is part of a developing world-wide social movement aimed at challenging the priorities of governments and multi national corporations which are proposing that there is 'no alternative' to neo-liberalism and globalisation.

An estimated 50,000 people from many European and non-European countries attended over 50 plenary sessions, 250 seminars and as many workshops. Discussions were wide ranging and included for example; the war in Iraq, opposition to war and militarism, the effects of globalisation and neo-liberalism on the environment, confronting racism, the European constitution containing a threat of deregulation of our public services via the General Agreement on Trade in Services [GATS] with which companies can use the World Trade Organisation to open up any public service for privatisation anywhere in the world. There was also an Assembly for Women attended by around 3000 people, where speakers talked of their experiences of discrimination in work and their broader societies.

It was very disappointing that the event did not get the press and media coverage it deserved in the UK. Here were many thousands of ordinary people from all over Europe coming together to debate and challenge sometimes the very basis on which our societies are founded yet hardly a mention was given to it, although the mainstream French press and media gave the event very good coverage. Nevertheless it

was heartening to see and hear people from all over Europe raising the same concerns that many people in our own country have: such as Erhart Crome from Germany who said that protests against the war in Iraq are not in vain and has made politicians more careful. Gilbert Achcar said the anti war movement is a worldwide movement and the ESF is an excellent forum to move forward with and called for a progressive pacifist Europe attractive to the people of the U.S.A. Rosa Canadell from Spain claimed that war was the direct fruit of capitalism and that we had to think deeply about how we develop the alternative world we want. Local action was also necessary meaning that we must move from demonstrations to structures. Panos Garganos from Greece claimed that we would not get peace from our governments – only a peoples movement can stop imperialist wars.

Mention should be given to the two fathers who referred to their sons. The father of an Israeli soldier who had refused to take part in the occupation of Palestinian territory and asked for support, and the father of an American serviceman who called for the return home of the US forces and claimed that Bush and Rumsfeld loved American soldiers like farmers love chickens.

It was clear that the main agenda items had not altered since the last ESF in Florence. Discussion and argument still revolved around fundamental questions of creating a world free from war poverty and oppression, and so meetings questioned the role our current mainstream political parties. So although there were many disparate groups and individuals debating these fundamental questions, there was a broad agreement that such events as the ESF and the energy of the massive worldwide demonstrations against the Iraq war signalled a desire in ordinary people to question and challenge how those in power – be it governments or multi national corporations – have allowed our world to continue in a state of continuous conflict, war and poverty.

Although speakers were unanimous in their condemnation of the war in Iraq it would be wrong to portray the ESF as having all the answers to the worlds problems or for all those taking part to be in total agreement with each other, let alone emerge with a firm and coherent plan to create an alternative world. What is exciting is that ordinary people are coming together to engage with the world at a time when a small

amount of very powerful people thought they could do whatever they wanted with our world. Therefore the ESF is a very significant and important annual event [the next one will be held in London later in 2004] which, together with the World Social Forum on which the ESF is modelled, will continue to bring together ideas and help co-ordinate and shape this movement giving voice to the millions of ordinary people around the world who demonstrated on February 15th 2003 their desire for a just and peaceful world.

Alan Newham

**28
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Stop the War Coalition 3rd Annual Conference

Saturday 28th February, 10am

Camden Centre, Euston Road WC1 (opposite Kings Cross station), London.

Information on registration and delegations

Affiliate for 2004

Stop the War Coalition



**NO MORE
LIES
MR BLAIR**

NATIONAL DEMO
20 MARCH
ASSEMBLE 12 NOON
CENTRAL LONDON

phone 020 7053 2153/4/5/6 **web** www.stopwar.org.uk

**Contact South Tyneside Stop the War Coalition
for details, E-mail: s.t.stop.war.coal@btopenworld.com**

Silence is Shame!

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