

Report from Jeremy Corbyn MP

May-June 2009

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Iraq Inquiry

The statement by Gordon Brown on having a private enquiry by Privy Councillors into the Iraq War is totally unsatisfactory. As a result of a lot of pressure, the Government is now proposing some form of public involvement, but it's still unclear how open the inquiry will be.

In my view, a serious examination of the political decision along with the legal advice and the evidence provided to Parliament in advance of the debate on 18 March, 2003 are crucial. This war has resulted in the deaths of well over half a million Iraqis, 179 British soldiers, and the expenditure of billions on the war and private security contracts/ors.

Any inquiry has to apportion responsibility for this, and must be conducted in such a way as to enable the public to see and understand exactly what happened, and at every turn. I have strongly supported this view and I recently attended the Stop the War Demonstration in Parliament Square ahead of Gordon Brown's statement (15 June). Related to this subject I was also a guest on the Al Jazeera English Inside Story programme (22 June).

I began my speech in tonight's Iraq Inquiry debate: "I have been present at virtually every debate on Iraq for the past seven years. I never thought that, seven years on we would still be debating the legality of, and responsibility for, the war, and how to conduct a proper investigation into it. The image of Parliament has suffered enormously over the past few weeks—nay, the past few months. If we fudge this issue tonight and decline to hold the kind of open, public, legally based, oath-taking, subpoenaed inquiry that is required, yes, there will be a report—some kind of bowdlerised version of what happened will be produced by a group of Privy Counsellors, and everyone will go away and say, "That's fine"—but the demand for an inquiry will still be there, culpability will still be sought and the responsibility will still rest on those people who took us into the conflict. Fudging the issue tonight will merely delay the debate until another day, and another day after that." (*refer to the attachments at the end of this report for my full contribution*).

Housing

The Housing debate took place in Parliament and my speech is attached (9 June).

Transport

I also spoke in an adjournment debate on the Rail Industry and the recession, as attached (3 June).

Parliament

The issue of MPs' expenses is obviously huge, and it is very damaging to the image of parliament and to politics as a whole. Along with Emily Thornberry, I offered my expenses to the Islington Gazette, and they published a substantial story about this.

The expenses system is being reformed and indeed the first steps have already been made, setting up an outside body dealing with MPs expenses.

In this fevered debate about parliament and politics, Speaker Michael Martin has resigned, and a new Speaker has been elected so there is real possibility of substantial change.

I voted for John Bercow to be the new Speaker as he seemed to me to represent the interests of democracy, rather than those of one who would protect the Executive from legitimate inquiry and discussion. I wrote an article for The Morning Star entitled "The Strange Journey of Mr Speaker" (attached at the end of this report).

London Metropolitan University (LMU)

I secured an adjournment debate on London Metropolitan University and the transcript of the debate is attached (20 May).

I coordinated a meeting with David Sweeny, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Director, and Paul Greaves, HEFCE Head of Assurance. I was pleased that representatives from both the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) and Unison could attend. I was joined by parliamentary colleagues including Frank Dobson and Emily Thornberry, whose constituencies are also affected by the job losses at LMU (22 May).

I was delighted to speak at a rally organised by UCU in support of students and staff and LMU. We marched from Highbury Fields to Archway (23 May).

I had a meeting with a group of staff from LMU regarding the time allowed for voluntary redundancies (15 June). The situation has not got any better despite all the meetings we have had, and the requests that I sent to the governors of the University calling for them to desist from the redundancy programme and to negotiate with HEFCE for more adequate funding for support.

I am due to meet the new Vice Chancellor, Alfred Morris, at the beginning of July, and I will impress on him my concerns about job losses and student places. I continue to work closely with both unions (UCU and Unison) on the matter.

Cleaners

Too many people in London take the work of cleaners for granted - in offices, shops, stations, buses and colleges and schools. Most cleaners are badly paid. A considerable number of them are grossly exploited undocumented workers who are liable to be reported to the Home Office if they object to the practices of their employers. Two disputes have arisen in the past few weeks concerning cleaners at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and contractors engaged by Tube Lines on the Underground. In the case of SOAS, the treatment of them was appalling and I visited the occupation, and spoke at a big demonstration called by students and unions. I also tabled the following EDM (1685), which acquired 21 signatures rather quickly.

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN 16.06.2009

Corbyn, Jeremy

That this House supports the campaign, led by mainly migrant cleaners and supported by the University and College Union, Unison and the National Union of Students branches, fighting for the improved pay and conditions of School of Oriental and African Studies workers and against the victimisation of the Unison branch chair, Jose Bermudez Stalin, who was sacked earlier this year; notes with concern that after winning union recognition for cleaners working for the cleaning company ISS and on the same day as a protest calling for the reinstatement of Jose Bermudez Stalin on 12 June 2009, nine cleaners, one of whom is reported to be over six months pregnant, were taken away during a sudden immigration raid at the university; is extremely alarmed at reports that five of the nine individuals have already been deported and seeks urgent clarification of the wellbeing of all of the nine cleaners; condemns the practice of using immigration status as a means of attacking workers fighting for their rights and breaking union organisation; and reaffirms the principle of the right of all workers to a living wage and to be active within a free and independent trade union.

I also supported the demonstration outside the City Hall ahead of Mayor's Question Time, called by the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers Union (RMT) for the Tube Line cleaners (17 June).

The situation with the RMT cleaners who work on London Underground continues and I met with their representatives in Parliament to discuss their campaign (18 May).

Immigration

Calling for an end to the destitution of refused **asylum seekers**, I spoke alongside a number of others (Jean Roger Kaseki, Amnesty's Kate Allen, Unite Against Fascism's Weyman Bennett and more) at a rally / march organised by Amnesty

International together with the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Hackney Refugee & Migrant Support Group, London Detainee Support Group and others (20 June).

As part of the '**Still Human Still Here**' campaign run by Amnesty International, I was invited to speak at their rally in Trafalgar Square on the issue of asylum seekers (20 June).

Islington Refugee Forum invited me to address their meeting as part of Refugee Week. I spoke about the huge contribution (18 June).

I visited **Light Project International** who moved into new premises on Caledonian Road (6 June). They are clearly settling in nicely to their new location. The work that Micheline Ngongo and her team do with the African and Caribbean communities in Islington, as well as their work with refugees and asylum seekers, is inspiring.

The **National Campaign Against Deportations** held their Annual General Meeting (AGM) at which I was invited to speak (6 June).

I spoke at the second reading of the **Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill** and raised the issues facing the **Chagos Islanders** (refer Attachments, 2 June).

Looking back on the past 4 weeks, in brief:

On the last day of **The Workers Educational Forum** course I spoke to participants about the recession and the Labour Movement (23 June).

George Durack attended the House of Commons yesterday having been put forward as a "local hero" for a special event to honour senior citizens who have done good work in the community. George met the criteria in every way and I was pleased to see his life long activities acknowledged at this event (23 June).

The Every Disabled Child Matters campaign held a reception in Parliament which I attended. Many local residents have written to me on this topic and many suggested I attend the event, which was most informative (22 June).

Daniel Hulls did a wonderful job organising the **Wray Crescent Festival** which was attended by approximately 2,000 people, if not more (20 June). IAMS pupils played an invaluable role in it, as did Ashley Grey with a cream tea stall, and Dave Norman with his Five Aside football competition

I spoke in the session on International Affairs at the **Morning Star Conference** (20 June).

Liberation held a very successful fundraising dinner for Tamils, at the Blueberry restaurant in Harrow (20 June). Several MPs attended and spoke, among them John McDonnell, Gareth Thomas, Stephen Pound, myself, and a local Councillor, Julian Bell. It was an excellent evening at which we had a good discussion about the situation in Sri Lanka, and the abuse of human rights by the government there. It was agreed that a human rights and solidarity organisation would be established.

St John's Ambulance have been running first aid sessions with local schools and invited me along to a session with Year 6 pupils from **Montem Primary School** (19 June).

I met with Savos Panos from the **Pilion Trust** about homelessness in Islington and the problems of the shortage of move-on accommodation (18 June).

An **Islington Parents Forum** (held at the Coram Foundation), new to the area, invited me to meet with them and talk about their work (18 June).

Newington Green Action Group held their AGM and I attended and commended them on the excellent refurbishment on Newington Green and the dispersion of S106 money (17 June).

Susi Bascon from **Peace Brigades International** brought a hard working Mexican Lawyer, Vidulfo Rosales, to meet with myself and some other members (16 June).

Michael Wise is the new Borough Commander for the **Metropolitan Police** and I met with him and Emily Thornberry to discuss the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, problems of knife crime and the public perception of crime (16 June).

Year 11 pupils from **Islington Arts and Media School** were doing a project on knife crime and I was interviewed by some of the pupils as part of their project (15 June).

I hosted my annual **Garden Party** in the Ecology Centre in Islington. Thanks to Maggie Dunn and Tom Ogg for all their hard work in organising the event, and to the many people who attended, on such a glorious summer afternoon (14 June).

Unlock Democracy invited me to take part in their seminar on A Bill of Rights, as part of the annual Compass Conference. I was happy to share a platform with Helena Kennedy QC and others (13 June).

The **Highbury Pensioners** have a new lounge which they celebrated and I joined them in this (13 June).

Meena Varma, Director of the **Dalit Solidarity Network** met with me to discuss the campaign (12 June).

I supported residents at an Appeal Hearing regarding the 130 **Junction Road development** where the properties have been poorly maintained over the years, and the application is for a more intrusive development compared with the existing Victorian Shops (11 June). Junction Road is an effective local shopping facility and I strongly support the campaign.

I chaired a presentation by the **Isledon Village Project**, a tenant-led organisation which is fund raising for the development of a community centre on land provided by the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture. It is hoped that the eight housing associations that own properties on the estate will contribute to the cost (11 June).

Highbury East and Highbury West branches of the Labour Party invited me to their joint meeting which had a great turnout, thanks to the hard work put in by Jenny Sands. I spoke about local issues and parliamentary things and answered questions from local Labour Party members (10 June).

I met with Austin Harney from the PCS Union regarding the **Archway Tower**, and the danger of transferring jobs with the Public Guardians Office to Birmingham, where face-to-face contact will be replaced with a call centre (9 June).

I visited **Somali Human Hope** which is a small project in Islington working with Somali families and young people to help with their education and youth activities (9 June).

Margaret McMillan Nursery on Hornsey Rise invited me to attend their Open Day. The nursery is a valuable asset in our community (9 June).

I spoke at the **Cuba Solidarity** AGM about Ken Gill (6 June).

I've done quite a few media **interviews on a variety of topics**: I took part in a programme for Al Jazeera Arabic on the topic of legalising families in the UK as part of the Strangers into Citizens Campaign (5 June); I was interviewed by Blackstock Media on the subject of race and class issues in the 1970s in the UK (23 June); I was also interviewed by Mark Thomas (10 June) about democracy and what is wrong with parliament as part of his Radio 4 program entitled 'Manifesto' (Thursdays @ 6.30'ish I believe); ARD TV spoke to me about Gordon Brown / government troubles as did El Alam, BBC 24, Al Jazeera English and NHK Japan TV (8 June).

As part of the **Unison Conference in Brighton** I spoke at the fringe meeting organised by Stop The War and Palestine Solidarity Campaign (18 June).

The Annual Parliamentary Bike Ride took place commencing at Speaker's Corner (10 June).

I attended the **Unison Greater London Regional Council Meeting** where we talked about London issues, particularly housing and health spending (4 June).

I met with Year 6 pupils from **St Jude and St Paul's Primary School** as part of their visit to Parliament (2 June).

I delivered a petition to 10 Downing street regarding Western Sahara, with Stephan Simanowitz and others (12 June). Most of you will be aware that the **Western Sahara** was occupied by Morocco in 1975 and since then over 130,000 Saharwi refugees have been living in refugee camps in Algeria. I am Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Western Sahara Group (APPG Western Sahara) and as such I was invited to talk at a conference on Western Sahara at the Autonomous University of Madrid, focussing on political and legal action toward securing justice for the Saharwi (29 May).

A Guinness Book of Records attempt was held at the Mile End Stadium and I participated in a rally race to raise money for charities working with children in **Gaza** (21 May). Also on the subject of Palestine, **Islington Friends of Yibna** held their AGM alongside a public meeting and I was happy to be able to attend and say a few words about the good work they are doing (3 June).

I was invited by Islington Trades Council to speak at their public meeting '**Defending Jobs and Public Services**' which took place at Islington Central Library (21 May).

I attended the **book launch** of **Grace Livingstone's** 'America's Backyard'- the book is a good read and I would recommend it (18 May).

SADLY:

Jack Jones has passed away and we should all take a moment to acknowledge all that he did in his life, from his participation in the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War, to his great leadership of the Transport and General Workers Union in the 1970s. Even in his retirement he campaigned endlessly for justice for pensioners. Jack eschewed all of the trappings of power, refused to go to the House of Lords and remained committed to the cause of Labour. Thanks Jack for all that you did and all that you taught us.

Ken Gill's funeral took place (5 June) at Golders Green and I attended. Ken was a former General Secretary of the technical section of the Engineering Union which became Amicus. He was very active on international solidarity issues as well as opposing anti union legislation in 70s and 80s. I knew him very well through his union work and his great sense of solidarity with international trade union actions.

Olive Brown has also passed away recently and I wrote the following piece for the Gazette about Olive: "I met Olive when I was an aspiring Labour MP in 1983. Her Liverpoolian humour, her directness, love of community and enjoyment of a good argument were precious characteristics of her amazing personality. Olive had that wonderful combination of human warmth, music hall, and a healthy disrespect for status and place. Over the years I got to know her very well as she seemed to be in every Day Centre, every community project, every festival, and indeed at every Islington event and beyond! She was a wonderful friend, a marvellous woman and one of the great characters of our community. I was in the Whittington Hospital two weeks ago and as I was leaving I met her son, who had been visiting her. We immediately took the lift up to the 5th floor – she briefly awakened and in her lovely characteristic way pointed her finger at me and said: *Jeremy*, before nodding back to sleep."

Note: she always pronounced Jeremy as in *Jeremy*. I will attend her funeral in due course!

END

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