

Britain: Recruiting Kids to Kill

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Britain's new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown announced a 'war on poverty' at the United Nations on 31st July, aiming to: '..eradicate the great evils of our time - illiteracy, disease, poverty, environmental degradation and underdevelopment'. This from the man who failed to mention exactly that, which he had been responsible for, in Iraq and Afghanistan's invasions - for which, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had written the cheques for the UK's involvement, in the total decimation of all which can be called normality. Those elephants in the Bush-Brown meeting at Camp David and at Brown's UN., foray, were seemingly un-noticed; the horrors air-brushed out.

Brown of course stayed silent, both in opposition and since becoming Chancellor in 1997, at one of 'the great evils of our time', the silent holocaust which was the thirteen year embargo on Iraq - and there has not been a squeak from him over what one could be forgiven for thinking has become a genocide since the 2003 illegal invasion. What else can describe a possible million dead and four million displaced and one third of the country in absolute poverty? There has not been a glimmer of compassion from a man who suffered the agony of watching a baby of his own lose her fight for life, not a spark of empathy of the searing grief of others, from a man whose small son suffers a serious health condition - for whom he can demand the best treatment, whilst in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, parents watch in helpless heartbreak and trauma, because little or none is available.

The man who wants to '..eradicate the great evils of our time ..' is especially focused on Africa (in a patronizing hark back to the 'penny for a black baby', sort of way) so presumably is against that rife in parts of that continent, one of the world's great shames, child soldiers. Listen out then. His predecessor Tony ('I'm a pretty straight sort of guy') Blair and now Brown preside over the only country in the European Union, where it is legal for the armed forces to recruit under eighteens. Further, recruiters arrive at schools unannounced to the pupils, on recruiting drives at periods such as assembly, where attendance is compulsory and sanctions can be taken against them for leaving in protest, since they can be accused of truancy, 'bunking off'. In the UK children of sixteen can be recruited, an age too young to legally drive a car, drink a pint, or have a credit card. School Students Against the War (ssaw.org.uk) are a vibrant, informed organization, growing across the U.K.. and have launched a campaign in response: 'Troops Out of Our Schools - Troops Out of Iraq'. SSAW's Sam Fairburn says they 'demand students right to attend school without fear of being recruited into a discredited government's killing machine.'

This fear is well founded since, state SSAW : 'Recruiters typically target economically deprived areas', with little hope of meaningful - if any - employment. Moreover, via the school Cadet Forces, children as young (and impressionable) as twelve are subject to the forces recruitment officers sales pitch. In Gordon Brown's native Scotland, the Scottish

Teaching Union has passed a Motion demanding the end of recruitment in schools.

In a shameful, shocking allied development, SSAW have discovered that the Ministry of Defense has employed an agency called 'Kids Connections', to write forty lesson plans for use in UK schools this September, entitled: 'The Defense Dynamics Project'. A plan which is: 'A blatant propaganda exercise justifying the invasions and occupation of Iraq.'

SSAW point out that: 'Included in their 'Fact Sheet' about Iraq is the following: "Over 150 healthcare facilities completed and many more are in progress. 20 hospitals rehabilitated. 750 nurses trained in maternal and child health services. Immunization programmed re-started in 2003." 'The real facts are to be found in the report released this week by the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (made up of 80 international NGO's, 200 Iraqi NGO's and supported by OXFAM) which states: "4 million Iraqis are 'food-insecure' and in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

More than 2 million people are displaced inside Iraq and over 2 million have fled abroad, the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world. Child malnutrition has risen from 19% before the US-led invasion in 2003 to 28% now. OF 180 HOSPITALS COUNTRYWIDE - 90% LACK KEY RESOURCES INCLUDING BASIC MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SUPPLIES.' Media queries addressed to Kids Connections were referred to the Ministry of Defense. THE M.O.D., asked into what part of the curriculum the Defense

Dynamics Project would be slotted (citizenship? colonialism? popular mechanics? target practice?) the response was that it was: ' mapped to support various subjects across the curriculum, including English, maths and science.' SSAW are organizing a picket outside Kids Connections at 2pm August 2nd., and handing in a letter, signed by veteran former M.P., author and broadcaster Tony Benn and Stop the War Convener, Lindsey German, demanding that Kids Connections terminate their links with the Ministry of Defense and that the Defense Dynamics Project not be introduced in to schools. For those who are inclined to picket or express their views in writing, Kids Connections are at : 114-118 Parkway, Camden Town, London, NW1. SSAW also has a petition to end recruiting in schools to be presented to Downing Street in October.To add your name visit their website and click on 'Resources'. The shame of Britain's child soldiers must be ended.

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