

CAMPAIGN GROUP NEWS



We are repeatedly told there is overwhelming public support for the war in Afghanistan. After the first weeks of bombing, opinion polls suggested only 16% of people opposed it. But what does this mean?

After an uninterrupted barrage of pro-war publicity, I was astonished that 16% - almost 10 million people - were still willing to openly oppose it. As the scale of the Afghan humanitarian tragedy unfolds, and the uncertainties of ground troops involvement increases, the scale of public opposition will increase. This is not a war like any other. As the wisest counsels persistently remind us, it is not really a war at all. The USA cannot attack Afghanistan 'in self defence' because the USA was never attacked by Afghanistan. The events of September 11th were horrendous criminal acts, but they were acts of terrorism, not of war. If this terrorism was driven by ideology or fanaticism then we are going to have to address the causes of this terrorism, rather

than bomb our way in pursuit of its various manifestations.

The cracks and contradictions in the pro-war case open up by the day. America asserts the ideological right to bomb innocent civilians in almost the same terms that bin Laden claims it. The USA demands the right to try anyone for crimes committed on its own land, but blocks an international criminal court that might try American soldiers for crimes committed in other's lands. Britain stands by the belief that peace in Ireland can only be found through negotiation, diplomacy and a rejection of violence, but rejects this in Afghanistan. We mourn the death of 8,000 innocent people at the hands of fanatics, yet we are also willing to see up to 2 million equally innocent people freeze or starve to death because 'our cause is just'. These are the jagged edges of contradiction that the War Party is beginning to impale itself upon.

At the first national anti-war rally in Trafalgar Square, up to 50,000 people turned out to oppose the war. But where were the Labour banners in all this? With a degree of unexpected assistance from the Whip's Office, Labour MP's, trade union leaders, NEC members and party activists have begun to put this right, forming a 'Labour Against the War' group. Its aim is to mobilise the party in the country, rather than repair the bruised confidences of MP's in Parliament. In the next national rally on 18th November we need to see a sea of Labour banners there, affirming Labour support for the anti-war campaign and re-affirming our belief that Labour is a party that is pro-peace and pro-poor. As the momentum picks up, first MP's and then parliament itself will begin to edge itself towards an anti-war majority. There are several levels we need to be working on now

- getting constituency parties to affiliate to 'Labour Against The War' (PO BOX 2378, London E5 9QU; tel. 020 8985 6597; e-mail latw@gn.apc.org)
- forming local 'Labour Against The War' groups to work with the broader 'Stop the War' campaigns
- Organise to be part of the November 18th demonstrations in London, along with all the Labour Party banners we can muster Encourage MP's to join the group and/or to sign EDM 240, calling

for an end to the bombing and a focus on getting food and aid into Afghanistan.

- Opening up wider discussions on a justice-based agenda that can address conflict resolution and conflict reduction issues
- None of this should justify or accept the appalling acts of terrorism on September 11th. What we have to do is break free from the spirals of violence it has unleashed.

Alan Simpson MP
Chair of Labour Against The War

alansimpsonmp  .co.uk  Labour