

REPORT from

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The Prime Minister made a statement in parliament on 21 February in which he outlined a reduction in British troop presence in **IRAQ**, and then unfortunately went on to defend the existing policies in the region, including the uncritical support for Israel in continuing hostilities towards Iraq.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not backed by any legal entitlement and has since then cost the lives of nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ million Iraqis, not to mention those who have suffered as a result of bombardment, and / or the use of depleted uranium and cluster bombs (the latter having also caused the deaths of many children since).

This war has done enormous damage to Britain's reputation around the world, as well as to the Prime Minister's reputation. I raised this concern with the Prime Minister during exchanges on his statement today.

THIS SATURDAY the STW (Stop the War) Coalition and CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) are holding a joint march and rally to oppose the development of a new Trident replacement.

You will see from my diary selection that I have been concerned about the introduction of charging for **English Language Courses** in this country. This policy is completely at variance with the government's desire that all immigrants learn to speak English. It is both mean and short-sighted, and I have joined with MPs from all parties in demanding that such plans be dropped.

Dr Nandi was a very popular and respected local physician whose surgery was at Medicine House on the Seven Sisters Rd. He tragically and suddenly died from a heart attack and the response of the Primary Care Trust (PCT) has, to say the least, been extraordinary. They initially couriered a letter to his widow on the day after his death, asking her to sign for the practice to be run temporarily for one month by them, as a prelude to its closure. Not surprisingly, Mrs Nandi was in no position to deal with this, despite which they chose to close the practice six days later, sending letters to most of the patients asking them to find other GPs.

We met with the PCT on 15/02 to discuss their method and their plans, and the patients turned up in very large numbers forming something of a demonstration.

Together with Mrs Nandi's solicitor, we demanded that the PCT reconsider their stance, apologise, and prepare for the re-opening of the practice.

The proposal by **Islington Council to sell off large numbers of small businesses in the borough** is predictably short-sighted. Islington Council fail to realise their duty of responsibility to the businesses, which are normally very small operations providing a very good local service. The experience elsewhere has been that once the local authority sells the freehold, "big business" moves in, increases the charges to the tenants, and we then develop a depressing uniformity of High Street brand names, rather than the excellent diversity that Islington still has. In their rush to sell property, Islington Council fails to appreciate the huge housing needs in the borough that could be met by the property that Islington already owns.

I have made a submission to the consultation process on Archway because I am concerned that a large single developer wants to develop the area in a way that is not sympathetic at all to the needs of the local community, or the viability of Junction Rd as a shopping centre. Better Archway Forum also made excellent submissions on this and I am working with them to try to ensure that the principles of the **Sustainable Communities bill** (shifting planning powers towards localities and away from the pressure of big business) becomes law.

When **Arsenal** developed their new stadium there was also an

understanding that they would replace the Arsenal sports centre. Unfortunately, Arsenal then deleted this plan from the new Stadium complex and there is now no Arsenal sports centre, but they do use local parks and schools as part of their program. I have had meetings with Network Rail to identify a possible site adjacent to Drayton Park station, Arsenal, to try to persuade them of the value of an Arsenal branded sports centre for thousands of Islington devotees. Islington Council must ensure that the planning brief for Qld Road and the Drayton Park site includes a sports centre within it.

Slavery

As mentioned in my diary, there is to be a parliamentary exhibition to commemorate the ending of the slave trade 200 years ago and in this year we must recognise that those who suffered from the slave trade and died in the ships and the plantations were the real heroes of the abolitionist movement. In England Thomas Clarkson from Wisbeach in Cambridgeshire was the beacon for the whole anti slavery movement, and whilst Wilberforce's contribution in parliament was crucial, he could not have achieved anything without the sacrifice and bravery of those who led the uprisings in West Africa and the Caribbean. During the year we must recognise that in many different forms, the tragedy of slavery still continues in many around the world.

David Fowler tragically died during this month and I attended his funeral expressing my condolences to his widow Marion. David was a former carpenter with Islington Council, a stalwart of the local

community around Mitford Road, active in the Neighborhood Watch and together with Marion, fought successfully for the preservation of the war memorial at the entrance to the Royal Northern Hospital.

Margot Schreberny, the doyenne of Finsbury Park, tragically died after a long and painful battle with illness. I attended a memorial function at her daughter Annabelle's home to pay thanks for Margot having been such an inspiration in insuring that government money went into Finsbury Park area and that the three local boroughs took the problems of all concerned seriously. She was a superb community activist who also insured that Isledon village happened as a social housing scheme and that the Gillespie Festival continued and became the huge success that it is.

My Advice Surgeries continue to be held once a week if not two, and below I include some **snippets from my diary**:

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22 January I attended a meeting of the **Anti Slavery Exhibition Advisory Board** This Committee is charged with commemorating the abolition of the slavery trade in 1807, and this will be held in Westminster Hall in May of this year. I represent one of the two MPs on it for the House of Commons, very interesting and enterprising activity.

23/01: I was a guest speaker at the **Islington Chinese Centre's Annual General Meeting**. This organisation has now been going

for over 20 years and has done an incredible job in looking after the interests of the Chinese community, particular the older women who do not speak any English and rely very much on the association of other older women for their support. I also attended their **New Year celebrations** on 17th February in Giesbach Rd which was supported by many Councillors, the Mayor, and a large number of local people who enjoyed the food, the dancing, music and general celebration of the year of the pig.

23/01: I was a guest speaker at the **Greater London Pensioners Association** lobby of parliament to talk about the Pensioners White Paper, linking state pension with earnings. I expressed caution at over-involvement with private section pension schemes.

23/01: I chaired a meeting organised by **Iraq Occupation Focus** which went though in some detail, the reality of the occupation of Iraq from a legal and moral point of view. The event was well attended by MPs and included contributions by Glen Rangwalla and Greg Muttitt, who have both done excellent work on Iraq, the latter by exposing the truth about the Iraqi oil industry.

24/01: There was a **debate on Iraq** and the Middle East and my speech is attached at the end of this report.

25/01: The House debated the **Fraud Trials by Jury Bill**. Which I voted against because I do not believe it was right to remove the opportunity of a jury trial from people.

26/01: It was an enormous pleasure to take part in the welcome event organised by **Icap** for Mary McAleese the President of Ireland, who visited Icap's new building in Moray Rd, later attending a reception at St Mellitus Church. Finsbury Park ward Councillors, Phil Kelly and Mick O' Sullivan attended, as did many people from the local Irish community.

30/01: I was invited to chair the press launch for **Enough**, a united campaign calling for Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, which was extremely well attended by the media and other organisations. Later that day I chaired an enormous rally for Enough at Friends meeting house at Euston Rd.

30/01: Dr Ian Gibson, MP for Norwich organised a **meeting on Arms Conversion** to expose the myths about the alleged benefits to the British economy over the construction of nuclear missiles.

31/01: I met a delegation of members of parliament from **South Korea** to discuss the issues facing South Korea, in particular the Six Party talks on North Korea and its possible development of nuclear weapons.

I later visited Foyles Gallery to see a **photo exhibition of Palestinian students** entitled students under occupation.

01/02: I was a guest speaker on a very well attended Unison Regional Council at the Teacher's Union officers, where I gave a parliamentary report on London

matters concerning transport, housing and health.

I visited and read a poem at **Sandblast**, the Western Sahara exhibition at the Host Gallery off Old St.

Together with Emily Thornberry I spoke at the Yibneh Twinning meeting at Islington Town Hall. This is a refugee camp in Rafah (**Palestine**) in the Gaza strip.

02/02: I visited the **Latin American Elderly** project to support their grant funding applications, and talk to them about issues facing their community.

I visited the **Africa project** on Elthorne Rd to meet the excellent director Rebecca Brown and the English as a second language students who are worried by the Learning and Skills Council who wish to charge people who wish to learn English, this will discriminate against the most needy people.

03/02: I was a guest on Al Jazeera lunch time news which resulted in a 30 minute interview on policies in relation to the Middle East.

I co chaired a conference organised by Liberation for a visiting group of **Sudanese** regarding the horrific situation in Darfur, in addition to the problems of people in Khartoum and the northern part of Sudan.

05/02: I went to the High Court to support the ongoing Foreign Secretary's appeal against the right of the **Chagos Islanders** to return to their islands. They won their right to return to their homes in

2000 and in 2004 the government invoked an Order in Council to Block this, and the Chagos Islanders went back to court this week and the court case is now completed and we are awaiting the results.

I was invited to present the Staff Achievement Awards at the **Whittington Hospital** in the new wing of the hospital. This was a lovely occasion and I was able to thank, on behalf of the local community, the staff for all that they do.

In support of Emily Thornberry's arctic expedition I attended a reception to raise money for the Children's Society.

06/02: I Chaired a **Palestine** public meeting for Ms Jamila Asleh in parliament. Jamila Asleh saw with her own eyes Israeli police shooting her son at a peaceful demonstration in 2003. She came to speak about her grief and to rally support to ensure that those who carried out this atrocity are brought to justice.

07/02: I was a guest speaker at a public meeting to call for a **ban on the use of depleted uranium** (DU). The meeting was held in parliament with speakers from the anti DU campaign and the World Health Organisation

09/02: I visited Islington **Link Up** on Seven Sisters Rd to support their work in trying to ensure that the young black people in the area have better job and educational opportunities. This organisation needs much more support from Islington Council.

I attended the opening of **La Danza** studio on Holloway Rd which is a new project to provide space for dance and art exhibition in a former shoe factory in Holloway Rd.

10/02: I went to Glasgow to speak at the **Scotland STW** conference at the university. Approximately 500 people attended from all parts of the country.

12/02: I was a guest speaker at **Islington Citizen's Advice Bureau** when I outlined the problems of benefits claimants, and in my view a very short sighted plan of the Department of Work Pensions to threaten to remove benefits from single parents when their youngest child reaches the age of 11. I have subsequently taken this issue up with the Department and this was reported in the local media.

17/02: I was a speaker at the Opening Session of **Unite Against Fascism** conference at the TUC Congress Centre, in which I warned of the dangers of the BNP gaining seats on the London Assembly in the event of a low turnout at the election.

I later spoke at a conference on Trident NUCLEAR WEAPONS at the same venue.

20/02: I was invited by **Ken Livingstone** to witness the agreement that has been made for Transport for London and the Venezuelan Oil company to provide cheap fuel for London's buses which will result in half fares for people on income support and in return, TfL (Transport for London) will advise the Karakas area on certain policy areas.

I later chaired the **Islington STW** campaign meeting at the Red Rose Club to encourage greater support for the demonstration on 24 February.

I met a group of human rights defenders from **Indonesia** in my role as vice chair of the Parliamentary Human Rights group and I promised once again to take up the issue of British arms and crowd control equipment being sold to Indonesia.

I was invited to give the annual **Ron Huzzard Memorial lecture** in Orpington in which I outlined a vision for peace in the world, strongly opposing the current Iraq war and replacement of the Trident Nuclear program.