

News from Baghdad, 10 April 2004

By Jane McKay-Wright

(Note from the editor: In the last issue (Volume 100 #2), Jane McKay-Wright's article was cut off. I regret this error, and continue that report here.)

The situation with Al Sadr is only one element of the violence, however. Disaffected Iraqis in cities such as Fallujia and Ramadi have been squaring off against U.S. troops for weeks. Someone attacks a U.S. convoy, then U.S. forces retaliate, then the locals retaliate, and on it goes. Unfortunately, U.S. forces appear to have risen to the bait, and raised the level of violence each time. They deploy hundreds of troops, tanks, military vehicles, helicopters, etc. and continue to scoop up whole neighbourhoods in hopes of finding one "bad guy." People working with the Americans have also been targeted and these are the news stories you see on television. The number of Iraqis who have been killed by U.S. gunfire in the past weeks is in the hundreds, however.

Sometimes what U.S. soldiers do is totally inexplicable. The ten-year old son of our friend, Hameed, a successful businessman in Fallujia, was sitting with other boys under a tree near his home outside the city at the same time as a U.S. convoy of Humvees was patrolling. For reasons no-one can understand, one of the soldiers took aim as he was sitting there and shot him through the arm.

Most of the Iraqis we know are fed up with the U.S. occupation but, despite this, are not advocating armed resistance. We think they are representative of the majority of Iraqis. In fact, the people we know are moderates who seem to want the U.S. troops to leave gradually, not all at once. They do want the U.S./Coalition forces to change their behaviour, however. They want U.S. forces to help them rebuild the civil infrastructure that has been destroyed, and to give them a chance at jobs. They also want the U.S. forces to stop jailing people for no reason, to stop shooting apart



houses and cars, to take responsibility for compensating the damage, and to start consulting Iraqis who live here, not just the expatriates on the "governing council." Iraqis tell U.S. they want security (safety) but the U.S. occupation has brought the opposite.

The three Canadian Christian Peacemaker Team members in Baghdad (Greg Rollins, Stewart Vriesinga, and I) had an interesting meeting yesterday with Canadian Brigadier-General Walter Natynczyk. He is on exchange with the U.S. army, works directly under the head of the U.S./Coalition forces, and is responsible for military planning and strategy. He said that they intended to cease offensive action, and to work for reconciliation and amnesty in the current situation. It seems like a good idea. Even a taxi driver I had today said this was the only way to go. The latest news, however, is that Fallujia has been surrounded by U.S. troops; people have been told to get out of the city; they are streaming out in cars and on foot; and military checkpoints are not necessarily letting them through. Sounds like a violent offensive is in the works. Our translator reported that the U.S. truce lasted for 90 minutes. Several NGOs have been working to get food and aid to the people of Fallujia. ☞

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