

How you can protest

When Bush and Blair begin their illegal and immoral attack on a country that offers us no threat, we all have a choice. We can wring our hands and say there is nothing we can do in the face of such powerful piracy – or we can reclaim the democracy that has been so corrupted by an elected dictatorship (in Bush’s case, unelected).

There is only one responsible way to achieve the second goal. The polite term is civil disobedience. The street term is rebellion.

In 1946, Justice Robert Jackson, the chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials of the Nazi leadership, said that the “very essence” of international justice “is that individuals have international duties which transcend national obligations of obedience imposed by the state”.

The British government is about to commit a great criminal act. That is not rhetoric – it is true. Every tenet of international law makes that clear, not least the United Nations Charter itself. Indeed, the judges at Nuremberg were quite clear about what they considered the gravest of all war crimes: that of an unprovoked invasion of a sovereign territory.

In the face of this impending crime, the “international duty which transcend national obligations of obedience” now belongs to you, the millions of people who have understood the nature of the crime. Now, you have both the right and the duty to act.

Rebellion against a government committing a crime in your name is now of vital importance. Silence and inaction will only embolden Blair, this man who has taken this country to war unnecessarily five times in his six years in office. Remember his remark that North Korea, a nuclear power, is “next”.

On the day of the attack on Iraq, leave what you are doing if you can. Leave your home, work, college, school. Join a demonstration. If you are unsure where to go, contact the Stop the War Coalition on 07951 235915. Their website is www.stopwar.org.uk

Or get in touch with Globalise Resistance, which is organising mass walkouts and street blockades in the cities. Phone them on 020 7053 2071. Their website is

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www.resist.org.uk. Amnesty International is another source: 020 7814 6200. Their website is www.amnesty.org.uk

There will be non-violent protests by Reclaim the Bases, which is organising gate blockades and peace vigils at military bases. Contact 07887 585721. Their website is www.reclaimthebases.org.uk

Be encouraged that the revolt is already under way. In January, Scottish train drivers refused to move munitions. In Italy, people have been blocking dozens of trains carrying American military personnel and weapons, and dockers have refused to load arms shipments. US military bases have been blockaded in Germany, and thousands at Shannon in Ireland have made it difficult for the US military to refuel its planes on their way to Iraq.

Propaganda is a weapon almost as lethal as any bomb. For months, “weapons of mass destruction” has been a phoney news issue. As former chief UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter has said constantly, Iraq is “90-95 per cent” disarmed. The current head of the weapons inspection team, Hans Blix, has all but called Blair and Bush knaves and liars. When asked what secret arsenals there were in Iraq, one of his inspectors said: “Zilch”.

And yet we have been forced to participate in this charade: to debate and analyse its specious agenda. BBC current affairs programmes, on radio and television, have consistently promoted the government’s warmongering as legitimate by channelling and echoing its ever-changing deceptions.

A memorandum leaked last week, written by Richard Sambrook, a senior BBC executive, warns programme makers against broadcasting too much dissent and “attracting some of the more extreme anti-war views (even though) there is no question there is a majority public view which is against unilateral US action.”

That he regards principled objection to the killing of innocent people as “extreme” while saying nothing about the murderous willingness of Blair and his apologists reflects the distortion of intellect and morality that pervades so much of BBC current affairs.

When a maverick BBC documentary dared to investigate Israel’s weapons of mass destruction and the use of gas by the Israelis, thus showing the hypocrisy of Bush and Blair, it was dropped from a prime slot on BBC2 at the last moment and put out at 11.20 pm – when most people were asleep.

In the United States, where a recent survey found that 75 per cent of current affairs interviews were with either current or former government or military officials, censorship is more entrenched. However, when the attack begins, watch

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how politicians and former military brass and assorted “experts” fill the small screen in this country.

Propaganda may well have made the difference between war and peace, and life and death for untold numbers of Iraqi men, woman and children. Had the great broadcasting institutions and the great newspapers, on both sides of the Atlantic, not channelled and echoed the lies and the false agendas, but relentlessly exposed them, the Bush gang, I believe, would not have been able to go ahead with this outrage. Neither would Blair.

For this reason, journalists and broadcasters now have a special duty to rebel. Wherever they are, they should follow their conscience, not the demands of a propaganda machine, however subtle and seductive, and materially rewarding.

They might compare their comfortable lives with those of journalists in dangerous countries, like Turkey, an American satellite, which, like Britain, has a population overwhelmingly hostile to an attack on its neighbour, Iraq.

Many Turkish journalists have done their job fearlessly and exposed the mendacious nature of what George Orwell called “official truth”. Some have gone to prison and others have been murdered by the state; but their courageous actions have provided millions of their compatriots with the truth.

Unlike in Britain, for example, a great many Turks are aware of the deaths and suffering of Iraqis caused by the American and British led embargo.

Winston Churchill, when he was colonial secretary, said: “I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes.” Nothing has changed. That was 80 years ago. He was referring to Kurds and Iraqis.

When the Bush/Blair attack begins, the insidious equivalent of Churchill’s poison gas will be used by the Americans and almost certainly by the British.

This is depleted uranium, a sinister component of tank shells and airborne missiles. In truth, it is a form of nuclear warfare, and all the evidence suggests that its use in the Gulf War in 1991 has caused an epidemic of cancer in southern Iraq: what the doctors there call “the Hiroshima effect”, especially among children.

America and Britain have denied Iraq equipment with which to clean up its contaminated battlefields, and towns and villages, which are about to be poisoned all over again, just as they have denied cancer treatment equipment and drugs, just as this week they caused the United Nations to dismantle an efficient Iraqi food distribution system.

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As the dissident reporter Robert Fisk asked recently: Who will have the courage to describe the effects of depleted uranium, a true weapon of mass destruction, a crime against humanity, as part of the “liberation” that will be the headlined propaganda?

By refusing to echo state lies, and by recognising and rebelling against censorship by omission, no British journalist risks jail, or worse, as in Turkey.

Instead, they begin to restore honour to their craft and, along with millions of their readers, listeners and viewers, the very best of people, reclaim democracy from its powerful thieves. **JP**