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<http://www.vermontguardian.com/commentary/June17Letters.shtml>

## Story of Iraq unions largely untold

Congratulations Vermont Guardian for publishing Matthew Harwood's article, "Labor unions under assault in Iraq." (April 29) Until now, the existence of Iraq's unions, unemployed movements, student and women's organizations remained largely unknown to the American public. This reflects the studied ignorance of policymakers in Washington who now say they invaded Iraq to build "democracy."

The experiences and the problems of Iraqis have not been on the U.S. media's radar screen. However, Vermont labor organizations and allies in the peace and justice movement are proud to co-host the first delegation of Iraqi labor leaders to visit the United States, and one of the few groups of any sort not brought here by the U.S. government. The six leaders are visiting Montpelier and Burlington June 18-19, and 20 other U.S. cities. They will meet with union, religious, and political leaders, antiwar and social justice activists, working families, and the media.

They'll discuss their fight to form unions, ongoing efforts to thwart U.S. government/corporate plans to privatize Iraqi businesses and jobs. Their secular, progressive voices have not been heard in this country, but could play an essential role in creating a democratic Iraq that serves the needs of its people. That role has not been encouraged.

In February 2003, one month before the invasion of Iraq, the United States drew up "sweeping plans to remake Iraq's economy based on free-market principles" including the "mass privatization of Iraqi industry" including its oil sector (Wall Street Journal, May 1, 2003). The potential profits for U.S. and British oil companies are immense: between \$600 billion and \$9 trillion over the next 50 years. Iraqi labor is united in opposing privatization. They call for an end to the U.S. occupation and for a democratic political process to ensure that Iraq has a government that represents the needs and aspirations of workers.

As Vermont trade unionists we are familiar with the policies and practices of the ideologues in Washington. Though we opposed Saddam Hussein's regime long before it ceased to be an ally of cynical Washington politicians, we had no confidence in the ability of a U.S. invasion to engineer a democratic, self-governing Iraq. After discussion with members, we decided to oppose the war, launching Vermont Labor Against the War as an affiliate of the nationwide U.S. Labor Against the War. Today USLAW is a coalition of 112 labor organizations representing more than four million union members.

The cost to date: some 1,660 American soldiers dead, 10 times that badly wounded; more than 100,000 Iraqi citizens dead, uncounted wounded, with a massive recent upsurge of violence and a \$205 billion price tag that spirals ever-upwards, mortgaging our children's future. The human costs for Vermonters are high: 11 soldiers killed; 53 soldiers wounded. One in six returning soldiers may suffer from a post-traumatic stress disorder. Vermont taxpayers' share for the Iraq War so far is \$336 million.

Our military personnel, many of whom come from union families, have shown great courage, faced extraordinary danger and made huge sacrifices. Many now want to come home, and bringing them home is the best way to protect and support them. Their love for our country is being manipulated in the service of the cynical Bush administration that hides the real reasons for occupying Iraq.

*Dan Brush, president, Vermont State Labor Council AFL-CIO*

*Traven Leyshon, president, Washington-Orange-Lamoille Labor Council*

*Dawn Stanger, co-chairwoman, Vermont Workers Center*