

# Andy Thibault

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## Cool Justice

### Iraqi Makes Friends In Hartford

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Iraq has real people. I met one. He is Adnan Rashed, a very serious guy. He stood gripping a podium at a union hall in Hartford last month, looking down a lot, as he talked about the destruction of his country and the ongoing slaughter of his people.

Rashed warmed up quite a bit after a couple hours as workers asked him what they could do to help. He smiled broadly and looked up to the receptive crowd of about 100 workers at the New England Health Care Employees Union District 1199 headquarters.

"The way to move forward for self-determination, not just in Iraq, but around the world, is for us to have solidarity between people around the world - especially the working people around the world including Iraqi union members and American union members," Rashed said. "This an excellent first step to deepen ties and build international solidarity for self-determination."

The Saddam Hussein regime murdered and imprisoned many union members while banning others from organizing in state-owned enterprises. While organizing now for better wages and benefits, unions in Iraq are also working to end the U.S. occupation.

"Iraqi people are happy Saddam Hussein is gone, but they think the Americans are there for other reasons, obviously, and that the occupation is the source of the problem and not the solution," said Rashed, an officer with Iraq's union of mechanics, printing and metal workers. "The occupation is now the source of the violence."

"Companies like Halliburton and Bechtel and others who have profited from this and plans to privatize oil and public health services and everything else - these are the goals, part of why this has happened. The Iraqi people know these things. The American occupation army is not there to bring them democracy. It's there for other reasons."

An estimated 100,000 Iraqi civilians and more than 1,500 U.S. troops have died since the war began. The American and Iraqi union workers seem united in their goal to divert war spending to reconstruction, health, human services and education.

Iraqis will not be free or safe, Rashed asserted, until the Americans leave.

"Whenever there is a problem or they get shot at they have those big machine guns on top of their vehicles and they start shooting around them at anything that is around them," Rashed said. "And they end up killing a lot of innocent civilians that way. People are organizing in small groups in communities issuing declarations that they are against the occupation. They are having

demonstrations and speaking out, writing. This is what you might expect from people who are opposed to the occupation but don't want to go out and carry guns."

David Lucier, a long-time health care worker and an executive board member of District 1199, said Rashed's remarks affirmed his opposition to the war.

"The point he made that resonated with we was, the Iraqi people disagree about many things," Lucier said, "but, the one thing they do agree about is that the occupation is wrong and the Americans should get out and let the Iraqi people rebuild their country. We hear every day that we're rebuilding Iraq, yet he said, 'We're rebuilding nothing. The money is not going for rebuilding.' Money is passing hands and it's just not happening.

"We're led to believe every day the coalition forces are out there handing candy bars to children and building soccer fields and schools," Lucier said. "Basically, we're killing the civilians indiscriminately. I didn't want to believe that was going on, but this man is an eyewitness to that. The American press wants us to believe we're doing great things over there. It's the civilians who are catching hell, just as they have in every war since World War I. It was refreshing to hear the real thing from the horse's mouth."

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