

# Candidate for Parliament protests war

By DAMASO REYES  
Special to the AmNews

LONDON — “I was right all the way along. I wish I wasn’t. I wish I was the nutter, as they call me. The lunatic on the pavement, the fool. I wish I was, because if I was all this suffering and all this death wouldn’t be happening. It would be better for me and the world if I was a lunatic, but the trouble with me is that I’m too bloody sane.”

Brian Haw has spent the last four years sleeping, shouting and protesting in front of British Parliament and he looks and sounds like it. One man, standing against the evils of war, he has stood day and night in rain and snow in Parliament Square, across from Westminster and Big Ben, with a statue of Winston Churchill glowing in the background. Haw has led what many might call a futile campaign to show the world what has been happening in Iraq for the last fifteen years.

Now he is running for a seat, representing London and Westminster, in the very Parliament he has been facing for four years.

With the Labour government predicted by most opinion polls to be returned to power, Haw is unlikely to receive more than a few hundred votes, and even his friends predict a defeat.

“My government, New Labour, they call themselves, blowing up people’s houses, murdering people in their hospitals, destroying schools – this is Labour?” he asked indignantly between pulls of his hand rolled cigarette, the only vice he says he allows himself.

Wearing a weathered white cap festooned with buttons and pins exhorting passersby to “Stop Bush” and “Keep My Muslim Brothers Safe,” Haw seems to veer between exultation and bitter frustration. He can be seen hugging total strangers who stop by to look at his block-long display of anti-war posters and placards or alternately berating friends and the occasional journalist who force him to talk too much and strain his permanently hoarse voice. He has been saying the same thing for four years and he would rather not have to repeat himself.

“There are certain things about Brian that can be very off-putting,” said Chris Coverdale, a friend and supporter as well as an independent candidate campaigning in Wimbledon. “He’s deeply committed to eradicating the killing. ... He’s very brave to do it, is all I can say. God almighty, at times it must be hell out there.”

For what may be perceived as his short temper and his often unkempt appearance, Haw

attracts many more people than he repels, and his tremendous sacrifices engender a great amount of respect and admiration.

But not everyone is so enamored of his tilting at windmills and Haw has had to go to court several times to maintain his place outside Westminster. During the last session of Parliament, a bill was introduced whose stated purpose was to disrupt organized crime. But many see the legislation, which would prevent any unauthorized demonstration within one kilometer of Parliament, as an attempt to remove Haw and the signs which many inside the building find embarrassing.

But Haw is steadfast in his commitment to remain on the street until the war is over. That does not mean that the past four years has been easy on the man, but Haw has a sense of empathy for the plight

of those who are suffering at the hands of the American and British governments that can only be described as passion bordering on obsession.

“Everybody’s looking for a leader, aren’t they? Looking for Moses to lead them into the Promised Land. I’m not Moses, but sometimes I feel like him,” Haw said turning his head toward Westminster and pausing to take a drag from his cigarette. “He didn’t go into the Promised Land, did he? Seems to me that I’m not going to either. Seems to me that I’m going to be dead. But what I’ve got to do is, while I still have a breath in my body, I have to stand up and speak up for what’s right.”



(Damaso Reyes photo)

## Riots rip Togo after disputed election victory

May 2, 2005 (GIN) - Paratroopers have been clearing the streets of barricades and left-over debris as an uneasy calm is returning to Togo following a disputed election victory.

Angry youths took to the streets last Tuesday within minutes of the announcement of the electoral victory of Faure Gnassingbe, candidate for the ruling Rally for the Togolese People (RPT) and son of the country’s ruler for 38 years, Gnassingbe Eyadema.

According to the National Election Commission, Mr. Gnassingbe received 60 percent of the vote, and opposition candidate Emanuel Akitani Bob finished second with 38 percent.

The government said on its website that 22 people had died in the violence that erupted on Tuesday immediately after the son of the late long-serving ruler of Togo was declared winner of weekend presidential elections, tainted by allegations

of fraud.

After an emergency cabinet meeting on Wednesday night, the government announced it was reinforcing law enforcement and security.

And from Thursday morning on, bulldozers and later residents were busy at work across the seaside capital sweeping away burnt tires, glass and bricks left scattered by the riots.

The international community has issued a series of pleas for a political solution to end the violence but there was no immediate response from the opposition.

The April 24 election was called after the February 5 death in office of Eyadema, Africa’s longest serving ruler.

Last week the leaders of the main parties agreed that whoever won the elections would forge ahead with a government of national unity, however, the opposition appears to be considering charges of fraud.

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### PRESSURE BUILDS FOR CANCELLATION OF AFRICAN DEBT

May 2, 2005 (GIN) - African activists on the continent and in the U.S. are renewing their call for a cancellation of Africa’s onerous debt bill owed to European and U.S. banks.

In Nigeria, the federal government has since 1999 committed at least \$1.5 billion annually to debt servicing, an amount experts say would have gone far in the government’s fight against poverty and provision of basic infrastructure and social amenities.

The huge amount for debt payment fueled a recent resolution by the Nigerian House of Representatives, asking President Olusegun Obasanjo to cancel the foreign debts.

Even though Africa has only 5 percent of the developing world’s income, it carries about two thirds of the debt – over \$300 billion. Because of this, the average African country spends three times more of its scarce resources on repaying debt than it does on providing basic services.

“It is unacceptable to spend more on debt servicing to wealthy nations and institutions than on basic social services when millions of people lack access to primary education, preventative health care, adequate food and safe drinking water,” said Imani Countess, Africa coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee’s (AFSC) peace-building unit. “It is not just morally wrong, it is also poor economics.”

South Africa, for example, has \$25 billion in foreign debt that is considered sustainable even when it is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with 20 percent of adults HIV infected. An estimated \$11.7 billion of the total is interest on loans from the apartheid era.

In the U.S., an AFSC letter writing campaign is underway, with letters to be turned over to Treasury Secretary Snow on June 23 as part of National Africa Lobby Day. More information can be obtained on their website: [www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)

### COTE D’IVOIRE RELAXES RULE EXCLUDING OPPOSITION FOR OCTOBER POLL

May 2, 2005 (IRIN) - Acceding to diplomatic pressures, Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo has agreed to allow a main opposition rival to run in October’s elections.

Gbagbo said he would apply Article 48 of the constitution, which allows the president to take extraordinary measures when institutions or territorial integrity are at stake.

The move allows Alassane Dramane Ouattara to be on the ballot in the elections scheduled for October 2005.

Ouattara, a Muslim from the north, was banned from elections in 2000. Opponents claimed he was not “pure Ivorian” with one family member born in Burkina Faso, next door.

The rebel New Forces reacted cautiously to the news.

“It arrives three weeks late, but it is still a good thing,” a rebel leader told Radio France Internationale.

“We didn’t want him to use this clause but the international community asked him to. So now they have to let him use it fully,” said Genevieve Bro Grebe, president of the Female Patriots, who have taken to the streets in support of Gbagbo.

### OLYMPIC MEDAL WINNER GETS HONORARY DEGREE

May 2, 2005 (GIN) - Ethiopia’s double Olympic gold medalist and four time world champion in the 10,000 meters, Haile Gebr Selassie, last week received an honorary degree from the national University of Ireland.

Haile received the honorary degree in recognition of his contribution to social and humanitarian activities.

It is believed to be the first such honorary degree awarded to a sports figure by the university. While in Dublin, Haile joined some of Ireland’s champions of the future at the official opening of a new multimillion-dollar sporting facility at the University College of Dublin.

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## INDEX

# NEW YORK Amsterdam News

Arts & Entertainment Page 19	Editorial/Opinion .....Page 12
Astro/Numerology ....Page 27	Education .....Page 33
Brooklyn.....Page 9	Health Care .....Page 30
Career/Business .....Page 36	Recipes/Reviews .....Page 24
Caribbean .....Page 14	Resorts/Travel .....Page 26
Church.....Page 34	Sports.....Page 44
Classified .....Page 37	Trends.....Page 16