

Down With Imperialist State Terrorism!

US: Hands Off Iraq!

23 February—We have just learned that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has announced an agreement with Saddam Hussein. Based on preliminary reports, it seems that the Iraqi government has acceded to the demands of the U.S. in exchange for some slight relaxation of the sanctions. The initial response of the American government has been to declare that its military deployment will remain in place.

22 February—The International Bolshevik Tendency condemns the imperialist plans to commit mass murder in Iraq. In recent weeks the world has been subjected to a massive disinformation campaign aimed at demonizing Saddam Hussein as a “madman,” “monster,” “evil dictator” and “psychopath.” But it was the U.S., its allies and vassals, acting under the flag of the United Nations, which murdered more than 100,000 Iraqis in 1991.

The vicious UN-imposed sanctions have reduced life expectancy for Iraqi women by twelve years, and for men by twenty. They have directly resulted in the death of well over a million Iraqis, two-thirds of them children. On top of this, in 1993, and again in 1996, the U.S. carried out cowardly and unprovoked air strikes against Iraq. In the face of an impending massive terror attack spearheaded by American and British imperialism, it is necessary for decent people everywhere to rally to the defense of Iraq.

The pretext for the current threats is Saddam’s reluctance to allow American and British intelligence agents permanent, unlimited access to any and all Iraqi installations. No country in the world, including the U.S., Britain and Israel (which, unlike Iraq, actually possess substantial quantities of “weapons of mass destruction”) would willingly tolerate such infringements of its sovereignty.

During the 1980s Iraq was armed and supported by Britain, Germany and the U.S. as a bulwark against Iran’s Islamic Revolution. Today Saddam’s former patrons pretend to be shocked at the idea that Iraq may still possess some of the weaponry which they originally provided. In fact, UN inspectors have acknowledged that Iraq’s nuclear and chemical weapons programs appear to have been eliminated and furthermore admit that they do not know of any biological weapons. The hysteria about “weapons of mass destruction” also ignores the fact that almost all Iraq’s long-range missiles, which are necessary to deliver such weapons, have already been decommissioned.

The campaign against Iraq is fundamentally an assertion of America’s “vital interest” in controlling the oilfields of the Middle East by negating Baghdad’s capacity to exert pressure on the Saudis, Kuwaitis and other U.S. clients in the region. Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator and the enemy of the Iraqi masses, but his only real “crime” in the eyes of the U.S. ruling class and its allies is being a little too independent in pursuing his own agenda.

The continuing pressure on Saddam is seen by the U.S. as a means of gaining leverage over Iraq’s nationalized oil industry which sits atop more than ten percent of the world’s total proven oil reserves. The chief political value of the open-ended U.S./British “weapons inspections” (besides humiliating Saddam) has been to provide a pretext for

the indefinite continuation of UN sanctions, particularly the restriction on oil sales. Much of the revenue from the oil that Iraq has been permitted to sell has not been spent on food or medicine, because the U.S./UN has earmarked it for war “reparations” and debt payments to international creditors.

So far Canada, Australia, Holland and New Zealand have agreed to token participation in the U.S./British attack, and Germany has been pressured into offering its “full political support.” But unlike in 1991, Saudi Arabia and most of the other U.S. dependents in the region (who have been told that they will have to help pay for the American-led expedition) have formally been keeping their distance:

“The Arab world is bristling, as angry as any time in recent memory, and opposition to an American attack is nearly universal. Bahrain, virtually an American protectorate since the 1991 Persian Gulf War, joined Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates this week in saying it would not allow bombing raids against Iraq from its territory. While the decision will not stop an American military strike, it pointedly demonstrates unease among even Washington’s staunchest Arab allies.”

—Associated Press, 20 February

In recent weeks Turkey has moved 30,000 troops into northern Iraq to continue their drive to exterminate Kurdish guerrillas and also to block any Kurds who try to escape the bombing by fleeing into Turkey. The Turkish military will also move to abort any attempt to establish an independent Kurdish entity in northern Iraq if Saddam’s regime collapses. As in 1991, the Kurdish people, whose territory is divided between five countries which refuse to recognize their right to self-determination, are likely to be among the prime victims of any imperialist assault on Iraq.

Oil, the UN & the ‘New World Order’

At the outset of the current crisis, Bill Richardson, U.S. delegate to the UN, proclaimed: “This is not a fight between the U.S. and Iraq. This is Iraq confronting the United Nations,” (*New York Times*, 3 November 1997). But America’s rulers only respect those UN decisions that coincide with their interests. The U.S., as the world’s only military “superpower,” has made it clear that it is quite prepared to act unilaterally. Last week, when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced plans to travel to Baghdad to mediate the dispute, the White House publicly laid down its bottom line and pointedly reminded the UN’s top official that, “there’s not much point going to Baghdad and floating a proposal that we won’t accept” (*New York Times* 17 February).

While Washington and London have taken the lead in bullying Iraq, the other three permanent members of the Security Council (France, Russia and China) are, each for their own reasons, opposed to a military strike. In part, Annan’s trip to Baghdad must be seen as a reflection of this divergence. Beijing’s Stalinist rulers, who have set themselves the impossible task of presiding over an orderly transition from collectivized property to capitalism, have experienced growing tension with Washington over trade

and spheres of influence in Asia. These frictions have led China to seek a rapprochement with Boris Yeltsin's capitalist-restorationist regime in Russia.

For years the Soviet Union was Iraq's protector and today the Russian military chafes as they are forced to watch the U.S. bully their former client. This presumably accounted for Yeltsin's petulant declaration a few weeks ago that a U.S. attack on Baghdad could lead to "world war." But there is more to Russia's pro-Iraq tilt than loyalty to a former ally—Iraq owes Russia \$7 billion which will not be repaid until Iraqi oil can once again be freely sold on the world market. In addition, Russian companies are reported to have signed \$20 billion in oil development contracts with Iraq which are frozen until sanctions are lifted.

Iraq also owes \$5 billion to France. And two French oil firms (Elf Aquitaine and Total Petroleum) are reported to be in the process of negotiating their own major deals with Iraq. In a 20 November 1997 report by ABCNews, Jorgen Wouters noted:

"While foreign oil deals represent a new frontier for Russian firms, the French are trying to recapture former market share. 'The French would like to reestablish themselves as an oil power in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq,' [John] Lichtblau [chair of the Petroleum Research Industry Foundation] added.

"The French were a major power in the Middle East at one time and feel they were displaced by the United States," said Lichtblau. "There is no question they want to reassert their position."

This rivalry has also led France and Russia to ignore U.S. attempts to block investment in Iran (the other prong of Washington's policy of "dual containment" in the Persian Gulf). Recently an international consortium, involving Russia's Gazprom and France's Total, signed a \$2 billion deal to help develop Iran's natural gas reserves in open defiance of U.S. attempts to isolate "rogue" regimes (i.e., to bend them to American requirements).

Defend Iraq! Down With UN Sanctions & Imperialist Aggression!

Iraq's workers and peasants have suffered terribly during the past seven years. For them, the war of 1991 never really ended, as the economic sanctions imposed by the imperialists have produced death on a scale comparable

with warfare. Malnutrition, bordering on starvation, is commonplace and of course it is the most vulnerable, children and the elderly, who suffer the most. When the Western news media occasionally turns its attention to this grim situation, it inevitably blames it on Saddam Hussein for "defying the United Nations." And so, once again, the UN/U.S. and its allies prepare to rain death on the Iraqi people they cynically pretend to want to "save" from Saddam.

Socialists and class-conscious workers must actively oppose this imperialist terrorism through mass mobilizations, political strikes and every other available means. It is urgently necessary to call for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the cruel, arbitrary and barbaric UN sanctions which have resulted in so many needless deaths and unnecessary suffering.

Unlike pacifists and social democrats who only oppose the embargo on food and medicine, Marxists call for lifting restrictions on *all* goods, including weapons. We bitterly regret that Iraq is forced to face the looming assault as lightly armed as it is. This British/American bombing exercise can not be called a "war," it is an act of massive, murderous terrorism against a virtually defenseless, primarily civilian, population. We can only hope that the imperialist forces end up paying a price (the higher the better) for their gigantic criminal undertaking.

The medium and long-term effects of the anticipated U.S./British assault are unknown and, at this point, unknowable, but they may hold some unpleasant surprises for the arrogant imperialist architects of aerial death and destruction. A new massacre might well touch off a wave of mass popular upheavals in the Arab world large enough to topple many of the corrupt U.S.-backed regimes, threaten the stability of the Zionist fortress and crack the foundations of U.S. imperialism's New World Order.

In the present confrontation Marxists must unconditionally defend Iraq against the murderous assault of the U.S., Britain and their accomplices. But it is necessary to go beyond simple opposition to particular outrages and to challenge the very existence of the inequitable imperialist world order. This requires a struggle to forge Trotskyist parties, rooted in the proletariat of the region, capable of leading the revolutionary overthrow of Saddam, the reactionary Arab sheiks and colonels, and the racist Zionists, and thereby opening the road to the Socialist Federation of the Middle East. ■

International Bolshevik Tendency

Box 385, Cooper Station

New York, NY 10276

email: ibt@babeuf.actrix.gen.nz

<http://www.bolshevik.org>

labor donated