

Down with UN Starvation Embargo! **Hands Off Iraq!**



PETER DEJONG-AP

Funeral procession for young Iraqi victims of UN blockade

Reprinted below is the IBT's 19 December 1998 statement on the imperialist bombing of Iraq.

At 12:49 am Thursday morning Baghdad air raid sirens sounded, and minutes later the city was subjected to the first wave of a punitive imperialist terror-bombing operation dubbed "Desert Fox" by the U.S. Pentagon. Clinton's "Desert Fox," like George Bush's 1991 "Desert Storm," is all about maintaining U.S. hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East. Britain's social-democratic prime minister, Tony Blair, volunteered British bombers for the murderous campaign. Blair has also vigorously defended Clinton against suggestions that the timing of the assault had anything to do with postponing a scheduled vote on impeachment by the U.S. House of Representatives.

The pretext for the current attack is Iraq's supposed failure to fully comply with UN arms inspectors. 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 feign horror at the thought that Iraq may still possess some of the weaponry which they originally provided. Yet UN inspectors have conceded that Iraq's nuclear and chemical weapons programs have been dismantled, and they also admit that no evidence of biological weaponry has been found. The hys-

teria in the imperialist media about the supposed dangers posed by Saddam's "weapons of mass destruction" also routinely ignores the fact that the medium-range missiles Iraq possessed (which are necessary to deliver such weapons) have been decommissioned.

Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator and the enemy of the Iraqi masses, but his only "crime" in the eyes of imperialism is that he is not pliable enough. Having failed to topple Hussein in the aftermath of Desert Storm, for the past eight years the U.S. has subjected Iraq to a vicious embargo that is directly responsible for the deaths of well over a million Iraqis—two-thirds of them children. The ongoing campaign against Iraq is, at bottom, an assertion of America's "vital interest" in controlling the oilfields of the Middle East by negating Baghdad's capacity to lean on the Saudis, Kuwaitis and other U.S. clients in the region. The continuing pressure on Saddam has also allowed the U.S. considerable leverage over Iraq's oil industry which holds more than ten percent of the world's total proven oil reserves. For years the open-ended "weapons inspections" have provided a pretext for the indefinite continuation of UN sanctions, and the restriction of Iraqi oil sales.

American/British insistence on the importance of heeding UN resolutions has always been very selective.



DIRCK HALSTEAD-TIME

February 1998: Clinton's war cabinet booed by students at televised Ohio State University meeting

The Israelis, the main U.S. ally in the Middle East, have for years simply ignored UN decisions they don't like. Unlike Iraq, the U.S., Britain and Israel possess both substantial quantities of "weapons of mass destruction" and the means to deliver them, but none of them would tolerate the infringements of sovereignty to which Iraq has been subjected. The inspectors (who the Iraqis rightly regard as little more than spies for the imperialists) supposedly report to the UN, yet "Desert Fox" began before the UN Security Council even had a chance to discuss the report which supposedly occasioned it.

In his televised speech from the White House announcing the attack, President Bill Clinton bragged that U.S. policy toward Iraq was one of "intense diplomatic pressure backed by overwhelming force." A considerable amount of diplomatic pressure has also been used on America's allies in Europe and its Middle East clients. Germany's social-democratic chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, eagerly endorsed the U.S. assault, as did Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, but France has shown a marked lack of enthusiasm and Russia recalled its ambassador from Washington to signal its displeasure.

One reason the U.S. did not wait for the Security Council before launching its offensive may be because three of the five permanent members of the council have interests that, to one extent or another, conflict with those of the British/American axis. The Chinese Stalinists, who are attempting the impossible task of presiding over an orderly transition from collectivized property to capitalism, have recently had increasing frictions with Washington over trade issues, spheres of influence in Asia, and China's handling of various pro-American dissidents. The leaders of Russia's bank-

rupt capitalist-restorationist regime find it galling to have to watch the U.S. humiliate a traditional ally. Moreover Iraq owes Russia \$7 billion which cannot be repaid while Iraqi oil is embargoed. France is also owed some \$5 billion by the Iraqis. In addition to these debts, both French and Russian oil companies have reportedly been negotiating lucrative oil development deals with Iraq which cannot go forward until the UN sanctions are lifted.

The international working class has a side in this struggle—and it is with Iraq, and its government, against the British and U.S. pirates and their allies. This in no way implies any political support to Saddam Hussein, the "butcher of Baghdad," whose brutal dictatorship has been maintained through murder of every potential opponent, the crushing of the left and workers' movement and savage repression of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly the Kurds. We look forward to the revolutionary overthrow of Saddam, the reactionary Arab sheiks and colonels, and the racist Zionists, and the opening of the road to the Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

The U.S.'s preferred option is to organize some kind of palace coup to replace Hussein with a more subservient dictator. In explaining the rationale for this latest campaign of imperialist aggression, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright announced that: "we have come to the determination that the Iraqi people would benefit if they had a government that really represented them" (*New York Times*, 18 December [1998]). This encapsulates the cynicism and arrogance of the imperialists—so eager are they to "save" the Iraqi people from Saddam that they are willing to rain death on tens of thousands to do so.

Defend Iraq! Down with Imperialist Gunboat Diplomacy!

In the imperialist countries it is imperative that socialists and class-conscious workers resist the outrages perpetrated by "our" leaders through mass mobilizations, political strikes and any other available means. It is also important to oppose the semi-official media campaign aimed at whipping up anti-Iraq sentiment which, particularly in the U.S., could potentially escalate into racist hysteria directed against all Arabic and Islamic peoples.

This British/American bombing exercise cannot be called a "war;" it is an act of massive state terrorism against a virtually defenseless, primarily civilian, population. We bitterly regret that Iraq is forced to face this assault as lightly armed as it is, and that the imperialist forces seem likely to escape without suffering any serious military reverses in their gigantic criminal undertaking.

In the present confrontation Marxists stand with millions of people around the world who are angered by the murderous campaign against Iraq by the U.S., Britain and their accomplices. But the job of Marxists is to channel that anger, to win workers and young militants to understand that it is necessary to go beyond mere opposition to particular outrages and begin serious and sustained revolutionary work to end the irrational and blood-drenched imperialist order and replace it with a system in which human need comes before pursuit of private profit. This requires a struggle to forge Trotskyist parties, rooted in the proletariat, in every region of the world. It is to that struggle that we of the International Bolshevik Tendency are committed. ■