

CLASS STRUGGLE

The principal contradiction in the present crisis in the Gulf is between the Arab masses on the one hand, and imperialism headed by the United States on the other.

The Iraqi attack on Kuwait should be condemned. The majority of third world countries have frontiers which were manipulated by colonialism, and it only plays into the hands of imperialism if they try to resolve issues by force.

In the Middle East, imperialism prefers to intervene by proxy where possible. It relies first and foremost on Israel, and secondly on the conservative Arab regimes. However, these are not sufficient to contain the mass struggles, and an important service is also played by the 'nationalist' regimes like Iraq.

IRAQ'S REGIONAL ROLE

The Iraqi leadership has consistently suppressed the democratic aspirations of its people, wiped out the strongest communist movement in the Middle East, massacred the Kurdish people and assassinated many Palestinian leaders. These actions have been of priceless value to imperialism. With its one-sided economic development, Iraq was a profitable outlet for surplus industrial capacity, surplus foodstuffs and especially military hardware from the industrialised world. However, the problem about such regimes, from imperialism's point of view, is that they can sometimes get too big for their boots and get carried away by their militaristic regional ambitions.

Up to the end of the 1970's, the key to US implantation in the Gulf area was Iran. The revolutionary struggle of the Iranian masses changed all this, and made a direct appeal to the oppressed masses of the Middle East who were disgusted at their governments' capitulation to imperialism and betrayal of the Palestinian cause. This posed a grave threat to imperialism. In these circumstances, Iraq attacked Iran in 1975. Although not entirely happy about Saddam Hussein's

regional ambitions, imperialism, with France playing the major role, stepped in with massive military aid to prevent his defeat. Even Iraq's large-scale use of poison gas and massacre of civilians met with only token condemnation because it suited imperialism at that time.

Encouraged by the way the international community turned

increasingly being orientated in a southerly direction, i.e. towards the Middle East.

SUPERPOWER STRUGGLE

For most of the post-war period, US activity in the area was conducted under the signboard of opposing the Soviet Union. In fact, this served as a smokescreen to hide US ambitions, and the main contradiction was always between imperialism and the



a blind eye to these atrocities, Saddam Hussein conceived wider regional ambitions, based on the huge military machine he now possessed.

The USA had long prepared for a military invasion of the Gulf area. Detailed planning goes back at least to President Carter's scheme for a rapid deployment force in the late 1970's. During the 1980's, NATO strategy was

masses, with the Palestinian struggle as the central manifestation of this contradiction. However, there was also a genuine, though secondary, struggle between the two superpowers. Soviet infiltration of the revolutionary movements, support for authoritarian regimes and undermining of the line of self-reliance did great damage to the cause and objectively aided imperialism. At the same time, its own

strategic ambitions in the area provided a certain constraint on what the USA could do, if direct military confrontation were to be avoided.

Thus an indispensable external factor for the present US intervention has been the new climate of relations with the Soviet Union. Trying to curry favour with the West in order to win acceptance into the embrace of international capitalism under favourable terms, Gorbachev's main bargaining counter is to offer to throw the Soviet Union's considerable international clout behind US policy. Bush has gratefully accepted this.

Although the above is an essential condition it does not explain the main politics of the US intervention. In fact, this has to be understood in terms of the central contradiction between imperialism and the masses.

1. In the specific conditions of the Middle East, the Palestinian issue has always been the main focal point of this contradiction. It is the touchstone of anti-imperialism, and at different historical junctures has served to point the accusing finger at the capitulationist and anti-popular regimes. Most recently, the Intifada of the Palestinian people has marked a new stage. It exposes the hypocrisy of so-called nationalist political movements and the misleading philosophies once propagated by the Soviet Union. Thus the situation throughout the area is far from stable from the point of view of imperialism.

2. A secondary reason is the need to administer a slap on the wrist to dependent regimes like that of Iraq. It is fine if they stick to massacring their own minorities and the revolutionaries. But they need to be taught a lesson if they dare to challenge imperialism's definition of the regional status quo.

3. A third important reason is that Saddam Hussein faced at home a potentially destabilising mass movement. In choosing to confront the West in the interests of his own regional ambitions, he has been forced to conjure with a number of genuine

revolutionary ideas which strike a chord with the oppressed masses. The most important of these is the Palestinian issue. Another important one is the challenge to the conservative Arab regimes, particularly over the petroleum issue. Kuwait symbolises quite well the way in which the fruits of the oil price rise, which was won as a result of the bitter struggles of the masses in the Arab world and other parts of the third world in the 1970's, have simply been used mainly to stimulate economic expansion in the already industrialised countries.

4. A fourth element, which also in a way sums up the others, is a theme often alluded to in the bourgeois press. This is the fact that the cold war is ended and a new order of international relations needs to be built. From the point of view of imperialism, this should be one where regional conflicts are kept within bounds where they don't threaten the stability of the exploitative system itself. Joint military interventions by the powers will serve this end, using the USA mainly as a kind of collective gendarme. Within the Security Council of the United Nations, none of the big powers now questions this vision of the world, which is the reason why imperialist policy can so easily be depicted as the voice of the international community in this instance.

Our position is one of consistent support for anti-imperialism, democracy, human rights and the basic interests of the masses. If the USA

(whether in its own name or under the banner of the United Nations) attacks Iraq, the main aspect of this will be a conflict between imperialism and the oppressed masses. We will support whatever forces, including Iraq, are fighting the USA. It is perfectly consistent with this to support at the same time, all other struggles of the oppressed masses in the region, including the democratic struggle of the Iraqi people, the national struggle of the Kurds and the independence movement in Kuwait, against the Iraqi regime. ■

POLITICAL PAPER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE

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I read with interest October's editorial on the Gulf. There was much I agreed with, but not the assertion that the principal contradiction was "between the Arab masses on the one hand and imperialism by the United States on the other".

In the absence of armed hostility, I think the situation in the Gulf has not yet developed whereby the main issue is opposition to imperialist intervention. That remains, to my thinking, secondary to the defence of Kuwaiti sovereignty.

For me, the nature of the main contradiction will change in the event of the war preparations being used to resolve the dispute by force:

Uphold the right to

Self-determination

there can be no 'international policeman' be it self-appointed or UN sanctioned.

Without condoning the hypocrisy and barbarism of the intervention in the region, the initial reaction of the RCL has not fallen into the error of other left groups of calling for imperialist forces out of the Gulf without addressing the issue of Kuwait's self-determination. This was, I believe, a more correct position than that taken in the October editorial which acknowledges (but undervalues) the arrogant militarism and aggression of Iraq, as secondary to the intentions of the Western imperialists now encamped in the region.

In correctly arguing that imperialism has long sought to suppress the Arab anti-imperialist movement, not least through the aggression of the expansionist Zionist state, the editorial does not point to important changes in the balance of power within imperialism.

US imperialism needs to orchestrate a show of support through a multi-national presence because of its own weakness. The US cannot do it alone. To safeguard the fragile alliance of forces that have been constructed in the Gulf, Washington has taken the unprecedented action of criticising its Israeli client at the UN. This may not be terribly significant in terms of the Palestinian national liberation struggle. But it exacerbates inter-imperialist tensions. The US cannot force military action without consulting those it has long regarded as "junior partners", specifically Britain and France.

While oil is the sole reason for the Western response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait, is this the sole factor communists should consider in assessing the issue? Saddam Hussein is not moved by Pan-Arab aspirations to re-unite the Arab nation under Iraqi leadership.

WHOSE CLASS INTERESTS?

The Ba'athist national bourgeoisie of Iraq wants accommodation in the "new world order". Saddam wants for Iraq the role of regional power in the manner that South Africa operates in Southern Africa.

Iraq, far from jeopardising the reactionary alliance, wants to enhance its own role within that imperialist-imposed settlement. The Western powers want compliant

clients, like the feudal monarchy of Saudi Arabia. On no account should defenders of the restoration of Kuwait's independence give a gloss to imperialist intentions. The Western powers are there for their own reasons, not in defence of the rights of a "small, helpless nation".

The actions of Iraq cannot be condoned. But the danger of making the issue of self-determination for Kuwait a side issue is part of the 'shadow text' of the argument that moves the focus to the presence of the American, British and French troops to the primary position.

The argument that while Iraq's actions provided the pretext, it is the presence of Western troops (by Saudi invitation) that should be the main focus, loses sight of the fact that the necessary principle of self-determination is the primary concern, that Iraq's intervention and annexation of Kuwait ought to be opposed in defence of that right.

Iraq's leadership may adopt the nationalist mantle against Western troops, without mentioning the free Kuwait troops, Saudi Arabian, Gulf Co-operation Council, Syrian, Egyptian, Moroccan, Pakistani and Bangladeshi contingents. But their invasion of Kuwait and past actions display naked regional ambitions at the expense of their fellow Arabs.

Iraq's anti-imperialist credentials are threadbare: chemical warfare on the Kurdish people; the slaughter of Iraqi communists; intervention in the internal



affairs of the Palestinians, and, as Noriega was supported so long as he toed the line, so was Iraq in the fight against Iran.

There have been a number of red herrings used in excusing Iraq's actions. The two most obvious concern firstly the historical origins of Kuwait (granted independence in 1961). This is not a factor in whether one defends the right of sovereignty. The vast majority of the world's nation-states have been arbitrarily drawn. Iraq's own boundaries emerged after the defeat of Ottoman Turkey at European convenience.

Secondly, Kuwait under the ruling al-Sabah family was a reactionary entity. Which state is not? Is it now a matter of to what degree, where on the spectrum of reaction a state lies, that dictates whether it is "deserving" of support when subject to aggression.

Communist support for the right to self-determination is not determined by internal constitutional arrangements. Whilst imperialism may cynically use the language of self-determination, communists should not waver in their support for national liberation. Formal independence is the beginning point for the defeat of imposed neo-colonial exploitation. We should also continue to defend the integrity of Third World nations, even when it is a neighbouring Third World state that is the aggressor.