Nobody can now be in any doubt: this is not a war to ‘liberate Kuwait’. All the UN resolutions were a fig-leaf. The US and its allies are bent on the destruction of Iraq.

Not just the elimination of Saddam, but the obliteration of Iraq's military, economic and political strength. However many thousands of civilians and soldiers are killed.

The armies and air strikes in the Gulf — still being daily reinforced — are being prepared for a huge land battle which overrides the invasion and conquest of Iraq. Why? Because Bush and Major see the Ba'athist Iraqi government as a threat to their domination of the region. And because an Iraqi government which dominates the Gulf would wield huge financial power internationally.

No socialist would defend the dictatorial Iraqi regime. But the Ba'athist government, in however distorted a way, is an Arab nationalist force. Arab nationalism since World War 2 has meant continual conflict the aims of imperialism. It threatens to unleash a wave of revolt among the people of the Middle East.

Defeating Iraq is a huge military task. Thousands, tens of thousands, will die in the coming weeks unless this war is stopped. The ‘new world order’ which we West wants after the Cold War has been exposed. It is a world order kept free for profits and imperial might by relentless violence against the third world. The violence of war; the violence of debt; the violence of poverty and hunger caused by the ruthless exploitation of the multinational corporations.

America's war cannot achieve freedom and democracy for Iraq or Kuwait. What will happen if Iraq is conquered? Military government by the allies — followed by a puppet dictatorship, which will carry out a ruthless political purge.

There is no progressive Western solution to the problems of the Middle East. Only the Arab people themselves can finish off dictatorship.

But a war to the finish is not inevitable, neither is the utter destruction of Iraq. The peace movement black and mobilised millions. In the USA the movement is already bigger than during the Vietnam war. In Britain we must go beyond the peace movement to mobilise inside the labour movement against the pro-war line of Kinnock and Willis. The anti-war movement can win, if we act with determination — and in time.

Building the anti-war campaign

The horror of war is building a huge anti-war movement. That movement will get bigger as the full facts about Iraqi civilian casualties become known and the land war starts.

But the anti-war movement must develop a strategy beyond the demonstrations to maximise its effectiveness.

The movement must be open and democratic. A conference, aimed especially at the labour movement, is needed to pull the movement together.

The relatively small and frequent demonstrations which occurred at the start of the war must be replaced by less frequent and bigger mobilisations. The experience of the US and British anti-Vietnam war movements must be utilised. They built coalitions around particular mobilisations, well prepared and mobilised for. Going into the labour movement is a crucial aspect of this fight (see p3). This issue is a golden opportunity to build college and workplace groups. It is this kind of grass-roots organising which will pay dividends on the mass demonstrations.

In recent days news and information about the arrests, interrogations and deportations of people from the Middle East has disappeared from the media. The anti-war movement cannot afford to let it drop; racism and the attack on civil liberties is being used to stoke up war fever.

Finally, as the US opposition to the war is disproportionately high among women and black people. Women against War in the Gulf is providing a focus for organising among women. The anti-war movement nationally and locally has to make a particular effort to involve black and immigrant organisations.

Rights. There is a right of appeal to the Immigration Appeals tribunal, which won't meet for at least six weeks and whose recommendations are only advisory.

Many of the detainees have lived in Britain for many years, and are Iraqi citizens who left Iraq because of opposition to Saddam. Like many Palestinians they face grave danger if they are deported. Not surprisingly, there have been increasing attacks on people thought to be of Arab origin, and also against mosques. This has been going on since August and has become particularly severe in the past few weeks. And we can expect it is to grow rapidly if there are many British casualties.

It is vital that the anti-war movement takes up these issues and builds a campaign to defend those arrested, interned or threatened with deportation.

by Terry Conway
Why we say 'defend Iraq'

Editorial

Among the tens of thousands who have taken to the streets to oppose this war, many have championed a simple argument: sanctions should have been given more time to work, war is not the answer.

This argument simply disputes the methods used by the United States and its allies, not the objectives. Implicitly it accepts the political framework agreed by the anti-Iraq alliance: a crime has been committed by Iraq, and the ‘international community’ must right this wrong.

However well-intentioned, this way of looking at the crisis plays directly into the hands of Bush and Major. The argument bypasses purely about means, and whether sanctions could have worked. In effect it disengages debate: it ignores the real political context, and what the warring forces want to achieve.

As Oliver MacDonald demonstrates in the article opposite, the US is trying to do much more than ‘isolate’ Kuwait. It is trying to destroy the power of the Ba’athist regime in Iraq which is seen as a threat to its position in both the Middle East and globally. The battle to ensure the Emir in Kuwait is a useful justification of this aim.

Tyranny

But, surely, the Iraqi regime is a tyranny? If the occupation of Kuwait is allowed to continue, the people of that country will be under Saddam’s yoke? What answer do socialists have to that?

In fact, the ‘people of Kuwait’ lived under an effective dictatorship anyway. The big majority of the population were immigrant workers from other Arab countries and Asia. Most have now left. The Emir of Kuwait ran a highly dictatorial regime—maybe not as bloody as Iraq, but nonetheless a dictatorship.

The Arab countries in the pro-Western alliance—Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt—are none of them democratically governed by US and British standards. The Assad regime in Syria is every bit as ruthless and bloody as Iraq.

Secondly, capitalism is the main form of capitalist dictatorship against another. The return of the Emir to rule Kuwait would only bolster the power of the other reactionary sheikdoms in the Gulf. It would return Kuwait to being a small enclave for pumping oil to the imperialist powers; enclave of a super-rich minority who lord it over the immigrants who do all the work.

Defeat

Socialist Outlook did not support the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; but in the present situation there is nothing to be gained from the point of view of the Arab masses by calling for Iraq to return Kuwait to the Emir and his US backers. The Arab masses can only gain from the defeat of the US-led alliance.

This provocation argument falls into the legalist trap of seeing the UN as an international court which can ‘solve’ such ‘international problems’. In reality the only solution which the ‘international community’ can produce is one which reinforces the power of imperialism in the region. And the very existence of regimes like the Ba’ath dictatorships in Iraq and Syria is a product of imperialist domination.

Socialists must argue that there is no solution to the existence of bloody and brutal governments in the Middle East which can be imposed from outside. The only force which can overawe Saddam and his ilk is, without imposing another reactionary dictatorship, are the Arab masses themselves. It is the arrogance of imperialism which sees Britain and the US ‘solving’ the problems of the Arab people.

Defending Iraq

Many people in the peace movement don’t like slogans being raised to defence of Iraq. How can we defend the butcher Saddam, even against the US war machine?, they ask. But defending Iraq is not defending Saddam. In this war, international imperialism is trying to crush the people of a dependent, oppressed nation. The people of Iraq have the right to fight against the destruction of their nation, against imperialism and its support.

We defend Iraq, despite Saddam, not because we support his regime. The best conditions for fighting Arab reaction in the Middle East have been created not by the victory of the US, but by the victory of Iraq. An American victory will be a blow to the Palestinians, to the Kurds, all the people of the Middle East.

Peace movement leaders who say the problem is ‘war’, or the arms trade, or the use of force to solve international disputes, don’t get to the root of the problem. Militarism and war are endemic to imperialist world domination. You cannot defeat one without the defeating the other.

The onslaught against Iraq is the first time since 1945 that the United States has attempted to destroy the political, economic and military strength of major regional powers.

It is not a decision taken rashly. Despite the split in the Congress and in the political elite in general, the US government had six months to think through its war aims. The attempt to defeat the Iraqi Ba’athist regime is an act of very precise political calculation.

This calculation has two rationales: a regional and a global one.

It goes without saying that the decision to attack Iraq does not stem from the invasion of Kuwait; that is the opportunity, not the real cause.

By Oliver MacDonald

The ‘chill’ warned Iraq and promised him full backing. The Islamic government in Tehran was seen as the immediate threat to the stability and imperialist control of the region. But the post-Iran-Iraq war situation the US had growing reason to be hostile to the Ba’athist regime.

This is nothing to do with the repressive character of the Iraqi dictatorship. The US has been very happy the support repressive, torturing regimes all over the world; indeed it seems to be a positive advantage in getting US support.

It is about the political meaning of possible Iraqi Gulf dominance. This involves two major factors: first the world economic results of Iraqi hegemony and second the political dynamic of the Iraqi regime in the region.

The ‘economic effect’ of oil prices. Controlling vast oil reserves means building up huge oil revenues. It means making the country holding this capital a major player in the international economy and therefore in international politics. How oil prices are set is a crucial question for the United States—it is a major factor in world politics.

Would Saddam-control led oil capital be denominated in dollars? would it become ‘petro-dollars’ in the American banks? Or perhaps Saddam would denominate it in German marks or Japanese yen, striking a major blow at the US economy?

Would this vast reserve of capital be used to under-cut American banks? or lend money to regimes hostile to the US? These are giant questions for the US economy and therefore its political power. Of course, in this matter the Saudis and Kuwaitis are utterly dependent on the Americans and the City of London.

Here we come to the crux of the matter. Why is the Ba’athist regime not trustworthy, potentially hostile, dangerous from an American point of view? On this a lot of Left-wing discussion about the Saddam regime is beside the point. Yes, Saddam’s regime is utterly repressive and hostile to any form of democracy. But it is more than that. The Ba’athist leadership, reflecting its origins, talks about ‘Arab socialism’ and an ‘Arab renaisssance’. It repeats all the main themes of 1950s and 1960s Arab nationalism.

Build-up

It has not just talked about building up a military force capable of confronting Israel and the West; it has actually done it. It has a leadership which is not just a bunch of dilettante windbags but hard, ruthless, practical people of action. Of course no one really believes that Saddam is interested in creating Arab socialism. But his demagogy, and the building of a strong regional power which uses these themes as a weapon of political mobilisation, has a potential for massive destabilisation.
went to war
of imperialism's rule in the region.

You can see this today in the gigantic demonstrations of support for Iraq in the Arab world. For Israel, and the United States a new surge of Arab nationalism backed by a regional power is dynamite for their domination of the Middle East. They cannot tolerate it.

Nasser
The comparison between Saddam and Egypt's Nasser is an irresistible one: Nasser became the real leader of the Arab world in the 1950's at the height of Arab nationalism. True, we are living in a very different period to the 1950's. True, Saddam's regime is more repressive than Nasser's, although Nasser too put communists in prison camps and had them tortured.

It is also true that Nasser embodied a more radical form of Arab nationalism than Saddam. In the current Arab environment Saddam has been playing Islamic gestures that are not used by Nasser. But like Nasser, Saddam is able to channel the hopes and aspirations of the multi-million Arab masses, unleashing forces which imperialism is gravely threatened by. And from a Marxist point of view these hopes and aspirations, and this mobilisation, is infinitely more progressive than the plans of imperialism.

Now we come to the global aspect of the war. The US is a declining economic power, compared with its main rivals Japan and, especially Germany. But it is still far away from the strongest single political power, and that power is based above all on military predominance.

Here the United States, with its British satellite, has seized a golden opportunity to assert its military and political hegemony, to build an international alliance led by the US, to propel the US once again to the kind of global leadership which would have enormous economic spin-offs.

But it is an extremely risky operation which will probably fail in the short-term and will certainly fail in the long-term.

There is no doubt that the crisis of the USSR and the virtual collapse of the Soviet Union as a superpower, has enabled the US to wage this war. Even five years ago, an attack against the United States has seized a golden opportunity to propel itself once again to the kind of global leadership which would have enormous economic spin-offs.

The United States, has seized the golden opportunity to propel itself once again to the kind of global leadership which would have enormous economic spin-offs.

The leadership of the labour movement has presented a sorry spectacle with war. The role of Kinnock is too well known to need much comment. With a few honourable exceptions the unions have followed suit.

The TUC statement on the war, supporting 'our boys' did not even regret Iraq's civilian casualties. An anti-war motion was not even put to the TUC General Council.

Only MSF has clearly backed the anti-war movement, while SUGAT and the FBU have called for a ceasefire. The other unions which have pronounced on the issue have implicitly backed the TUC line.

With its generally 'progressive' line on international affairs, the Labour Party recognised the war as a 'fact' and contented itself with condemning Saddam and uttering platitudes about the United Nations.

At the top of the movement by no means predominant at the base of the movement, 800 jornalists attended a meeting to set up an anti-war campaign on 28 January. The war is hugely unpopular among health workers, who can see the hypocrisy of money becoming instantly available to re-open wards for Gulf victims; and among teachers working with children faced with the trauma of war.

The vast majority of Labour's MPs have come out against the war. Throughout the country Labour constituencies have been supporting the anti-war movement. There have been now four Labour front bench resignations over the war. If this war is as long and terrible as seems likely, Kinnock will pay a huge price for backing the Tony line.

The response to the initiative by John Digger and Paul Foot to set up Journalists Against War shows the potential for driving this issue into the labour movement. In particular, rarely has there been an issue on which work-place groups could be so easily set up. Every trade unionist and Labour Party member must be raising this issue in the coming days.

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A new pamphlet by Socialist Outlook

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Gorbachev's Baltic 'quid pro quo'

Soviet support for the US-led attack on Iraq has been literally paid for. The Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia have given the Soviet Union $4 billion in loans. It has also been paid for by the obvious 'understanding' that the West will not protest too much against the military crackdown in the Baltic republics which is deliberately timed to coincide with an assault on Iraq.

Just like the invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 when Suez and Vietnam respectively provided the cover, western aggression in the third world has again given the Soviet Union's rulers a golden opportunity for repression in their own sphere of influence.

The build-up towards the use of military force against the national-democratic movements has been apparent for months. It can have taken nobody by surprise. By early January it was simply a question of when and how, and not whether, the troops would go.

For several months Gorbachev had been making an increasingly desperate defence of the unitary state against nationalist forces of his number one priority: and building an alliance within the ruling circles based on this.

The more reformed-minded elements were pushed to the side as he turned decisively towards the military establishment, the KGB and the Communist party - the forces within the ruling bureaucracy committed to defending the union at all costs.

The change of leadership in the interior ministry (with the liberal Yavlinsky taking a minister and replaced with conservative Boris Pugo), the placing of the official mass media back in conservative hands and the enormous extension of Gorbachev's presidential powers completed the preparations.

While it is no doubt the case that the local party bosses, particularly in Latvia, have acted somewhat autonomously in using the opportunity of the crackdown to mount a bid for power against the elected governments of the republics the initial decision to use force was made in Moscow - by the general command and by the president - and followed logically from the preparations of the preceding months.

The opening of hostilities against Iraq provided a welcome opportunity: while Gorbachev's attention was diverted, the crackdown could proceed.

It is very unlikely that the return to the old Stalinist methods in the Baltic will lead to a reversal of the foreign policy orientation developed under Gorbachev. There have been some criticisms of the Soviet Union's stance on the Gulf from figures within the military establishment - but there are no signs of a change of line.

The appointment of liberal career diplomat Alexander Besmertnykh as foreign minister in place of Eduard Shevardnadze (who resigned at Christmas in protest against the offensive of dictatorship) has reassured the US about the continuity of foreign policy, not least in relation to the war with Iraq.

Gorbachev is desperate to demonstrate the reliability of the USSR as an ally of imperialism (at the right price, of course). And the military establishment will be expected to toe the line on foreign policy in exchange for its new-found central role domestically.

The political turn to the right by the Soviet leadership holds out no hope either for the Arab people or the western anti-war movements.

The peoples of the Soviet Union have come out onto the streets in their hundreds of thousands in recent days to call a halt to Stalinist barbarism. Our best effort in the struggle to stop war in the Gulf are not the conservatives in the Soviet establishment but the mass movements for democracy, in the oppressed republics and in the USSR as a whole.

Just as the Soviet Union defends the whole-hearted solidarity of the anti-war movement in the west.

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Women fight back to stop Gulf war

The first organisation in Britain to organise a demonstration against the war threat was Women for Socialism.

They recognised the important gender division in opposition to war - all the opinion polls have shown a higher proportion of women opposed to war than men. Women against War in the Gulf came out of the realisation of the importance of this gender decision over the war.

In any war it is the men who go off to fight and women who are left to pick up the pieces. In wartime the burdens of working class women increase dramatically. This may be more true today in the US, where millions have been affected by the call-up.

But still there are tens of thousands of women whose male relatives are in the Gulf. WAWG is in the process of linking up with support groups like the Gulf Mum's Support Group.

Bridges

Building bridges with these women is absolutely vital to broadening the anti-war movement and reaching into many working class communities.

This aspect of WAWG's work could become much more important if the call up papers which hae been printed are sent out. It will be young working class men who are the first to go.

WAWG has been active in fighting the deportations and internments of people from the Middle East. It is also mobilising support for the Women's Peace Vigil outside the Foreign Office. The permanent vigil, involving some veterans of the Greenham movement, is an excellent focus for organising women against the war.

Women's Day

WAWG is asking for this year's International Women's Day (9 March) to be made a day of 'Peace and international sisterhood'. Activities are being planned in many areas - contact WAWG for details.

Daily support is needed for the permanent women's peace vigil outside the Foreign Office.

The is an emergency national meeting of women opposed to the war. Sunday 3 February 11am-2pm Wesley House, 4 Wild Cl., London WC2.

WAWG can be contacted: c/o 63 Upper Tolington Park, London N4 4DD Tel: 071 272-7469. by Sam Inman