

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

February 2 1991
Gulf War Special

15p

- * Why the US went to war
- * Why we say 'Defend Iraq'
- * Gorby's Quid Pro Quo



Women around the world are mobilising against the Gulf war - see back page

BRITAIN, USA OUT OF THE GULF!

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 armadas in the Gulf - still being daily reinforced - are being prepared for a huge land battle which involves 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 internationally has 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.

Fight arrests and deportations

While press and TV have concentrated on war action in Gulf, a full-scale witch-hunt against people from the Middle East has been going on in Britain.

23 Iraqis were expelled in September, and another 67 issued with notices of intention to deport on 3 January. Since Jan 15, hundreds of people from the Middle East have been rounded up by the police, with no notice, under a clause in the Immigration Act which deals with the question of 'national security'. Those detained or expelled include opponents of Saddam Hussein.

Most of the detainees have been held in Pentonville, in appalling conditions, but are soon to be transferred to Full Sutton, a security prison in rural Yorkshire. A prison camp is being prepared on Salisbury Plain for 'prisoners of war'.

Detainees have very few

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 dissidents 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 though 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 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

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 p.3). 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, interments 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.

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 argues 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 becomes purely about means, and whether sanctions could have worked. In effect it de-politicises the 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 'liberate' 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 restore 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 so bloody as Iraq, but nonetheless a dictatorship.

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

Socialists cannot support one 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.

The pro-sanctions 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 provide 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 the outside. The only force which can overthrow Saddam and his like, 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 in 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 an imperialist-imposed solution. We defend Iraq *despite* Saddam, not because we support his regime.

The best conditions for fighting Arab reaction in the Middle East will be 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 and the third world.

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.



Why the USA w

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 power.

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 mainly from the invasion of Kuwait; that is the opportunity, not the real cause.

While Kuwait does embody some US oil interests they are not vital ones. If the US had been prepared to accept Iraq being the dominant power in the Gulf, then such matters as territorial disputes with Kuwait could have been dealt with.

And if Kuwait had been annexed by the pro-American Saudis there would not have been a Gulf war. The truth is that the Ba'athist regime in Iraq and what it stands for had become utterly unacceptable to US policy aims in the Middle East.

Shah

After the 1978 fall of the Shah of Iran, dominance of the oil-rich Gulf was up for grabs. Saddam's invasion of Iran in 1980 was an attempt to win rapid Iraqi dominance. He hoped for a quick defeat of the new Khomeini regime which would make him overlord of the Gulf.

The US urged Saddam

By Oliver MacDonald

into war against Iran and promised him their full backing. The Islamic government in Teheran was seen as the immediate threat to the stability and imperialist control of the region. But in the post Iran-Iraq war situation the US had growing reason to be hostile to the

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.

Ba'athist regime.

This is nothing to do with the repressive character of the Iraqi dictatorship. The US has been very happy to 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' is

not just about oil prices. True, if Saddam controlled the oil of Iraq and Kuwait, and was able to control the other Gulf oil sheikdoms, he could exercise a lot of control over oil prices. But other oil states have in the past pushed up oil prices without causing a US attack.

For example, the Arab states led by the Saudis used a dramatic oil price increase as a political weapon during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. But the US never dreamt of war on this issue. Besides, oil prices depend a lot of the price of alternatives, and the West is much less dependent on oil than in 1973.

No; it is much more to do with the control of vast amounts of *oil capital* than

striking a major blow at the US economy?

Would this vast reserve of capital be used to undercut 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 subordinate to 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 renaissance'. 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 demagoguery, and the building of a strong regional power which uses these themes as a weapon of political mobilisation, has a potential for massive destabilisation

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 capital is used is a crucial question for the United States – it is a major factor in world politics.

Would Saddam-controlled oil capital be denominated in dollars – would it become 'petrodollars' in American banks? Or perhaps Saddam would denominate it in German marks or Japanese yen,

©1990 The Miami Herald



vent 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 1950s at the height of Arab nationalism. True, we are living in a very different period to the 1950s. 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 tunes not used by Nasser.

But like Nasser, Saddam is able to channel the hopes and aspirations of the multi-millioned 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 and away

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 super-power, has enabled the US to wage this war. Even five years ago, an attack against

East are dominated by Germany? These are grave risks to the United States.

The fact that the US war aims involve its global struggle for hegemony against a German-dominated Europe and Japan is clearly shown by the reaction to the conflict by people like Ted Heath and Dennis Healey. They are among the most sophisticated pro-European politicians in Britain. They understood from day one what this conflict was about.

Only if there are explosive hostilities between the Arab and Islamic peoples and the countries to their north will Anglo-American militarism have a chance of preserving its hegemony in Europe, maintaining NATO by swivelling its gun turrets south.

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.

a country like Iraq, in many ways allied to the Soviet Union would have been unthinkable, impossible.

But to a certain extent the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe has made the triangular economic competition between the US, Germany and Japan even more risky from a US point of view. What happens, for example, if Germany opts for a closer alliance - not a formal one of course - with the USSR? What happens if the economic openings in the

This is the barbaric objective behind this war.

The stakes in this war are enormous. Britain and the US are fighting in the Gulf not just to defeat a resurgent and dangerous Ba'athism, but to preserve a dying world order. This dying world order was based on the supremacy of the dollar, American globalism, and the strong linking of Western Europe with US interests through a web of institutions like NATO. Now the decline of US economic power, and the rise of Ger-

many and Japan together with the collapse in the East have put all that in the melting pot.

This war is one with huge risks for American imperialism. Confronting a regional power like Iraq would have been a dangerous operation even when it was at the height of its post-war power. Politically the US risks defeat.

It can be defeated by failing to decisively win the military battle, with all the consequences to US military and political credibility. The consequences of the huge wave of anti-American sentiment, especially in the Arab world, are incalculable.

World order

Most of all the US cannot prevent this new world order from being born. What socialists have to understand is that the shape of the new world order is not absolutely determined in advance. It is also a question of struggle.

In this titanic struggle now going on, which pits not just the Iraqi military, but the hopes, the demands, the aspirations of the Arab people against the US and its Israeli satrap, there is no equivalence, no two camps of equal evil. Despite Saddam, the values of human solidarity and progress will be best served by the defeat of the United States and its allies.

This article is a shortened version of a speech made by Oliver MacDonald at the 24 January joint Socialist Outlook-Palestine Solidarity Campaign meeting on the Gulf.

Fighting for labour movement action against war

The leadership of the labour movement has presented a sorry spectacle faced with war.

The role of Kinnock is too well known to need much comment here. With a few honourable exceptions the unions have followed suit.

The January 23 TUC statement on the war, supporting 'our boys' did not even regret Iraqi civilian casualties. An

Kinnock: even ready to back an invasion of Iraq!



anti-war motion was not even put at the TUC General Council.

Only MSF has clearly backed the anti-war movement, while SOGAT and the FBU have called for a cease-

fire. The other unions which have pronounced on the issue have implicitly backed the TUC line.

Even NALGO, with its generally 'progressive' line on international questions, recognised the war as a

Anti-war: Benn

'fact' and contented itself with condemning Saddam and uttering platitudes about the United Nations.

Cowardice at the top of the movement by no means predominant at the base of the movement. 800 jour-

nalists 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.

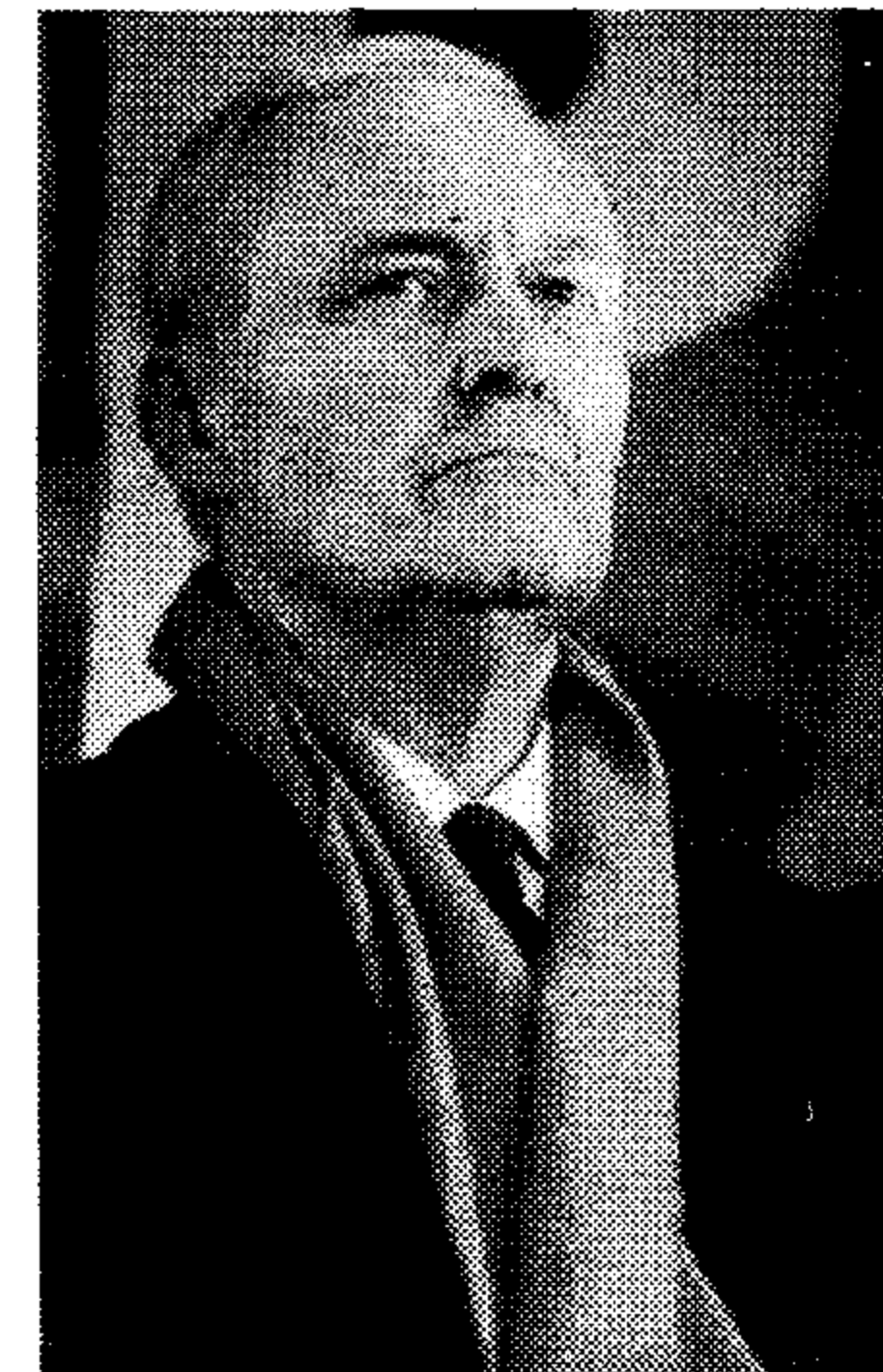
The vast majority of Labour's MEPs have come out against the war. Throughout the country Labour constituencies have been sup-

porting the anti-war movement. There have now been four Labour front bench resignations over the war. If this war is as long and ter-

rrible as seems likely, Kinnock will pay a huge price for backing the Tory line.

The response to the initiative by John Pilger and Paul Foot to set up Journalists against the 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.

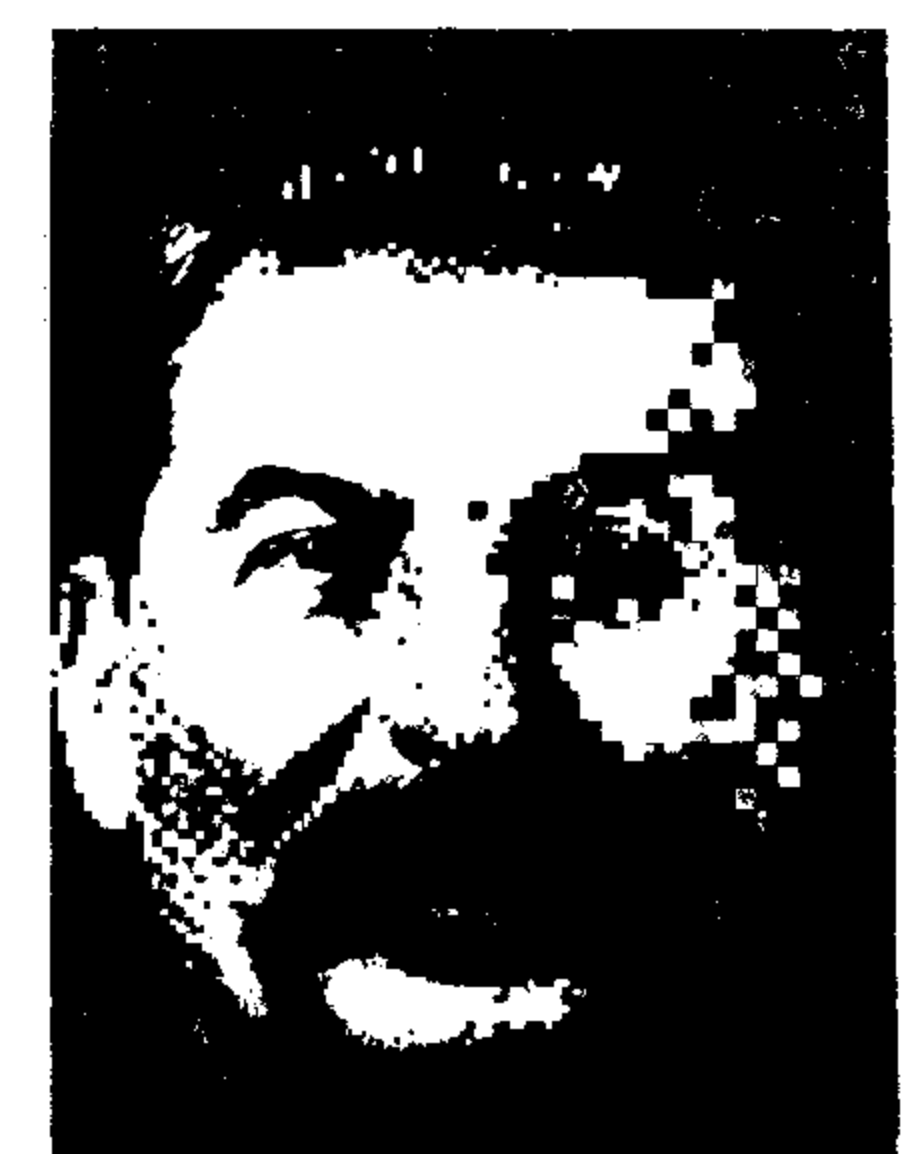


Anti-war: Benn

Socialism After Stalinism

A new pamphlet by Socialist Outlook

"...Stalinism is the greatest tragedy of socialism in the 20th century. It consumed the lives and energies of countless thousands who were its victims or its champions. Its collapse combines both tragedy and farce..."



Available for only £1 from: Socialist Outlook PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU or your nearest Socialist Outlook seller.

PHOTO: John Harris

PHOTO: John Harris

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

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 was deliberately timed to coincide with the 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 in.

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

The more reform-minded elements were pushed to the side as he turned decisively towards

**By David
Shepherd**

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 Vadim Bakatin sacked as 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 the world'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 Bessmertnykh 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 allies in the struggle to stop war in the Gulf are not the conservatives in the Soviet estab-

lishment but the mass movements for democracy, in the oppressed republics and in the USSR as a whole. Their fight deserves the whole-hearted solidarity of the anti-war movement in the west.



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 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 have 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 depor-

tations and internments of people from the Middle East. It has also been mobilising support for the Womens 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 Womens 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.

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

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

by Sam Inman

Subscribe to SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Socialist Outlook is currently produced as a monthly magazine presenting revolutionary socialist views and ideas. We are in the process of changing our format to a fortnightly paper. Any subscriptions will be transferred to the new paper when it comes out.

1 years subscription for £10 inland, £15 Europe, £20 outside Europe (surface), £25 outside Europe (airmail) Multi reader institutions £20 inland, £35 overseas.

Name

Address

Subscription to start from Number

I enclose £.....

Please return to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU