

*“From the very start the Western media has grossly misrepresented these uprisings. The uprising in the South, centred on Basra, was portrayed as a Shia Muslim revolt. Whereas the insurrection in the North was reported as an exclusively Kurdish Nationalist uprising which demanded little more than an autonomous Kurdish region within Iraq. The truth is that the uprisings in both the North and South of Iraq were proletarian insurrections.”*

# **Class Struggle During The Gulf War**

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## **Iraq: a century of war and rebellion**

Since the state of Iraq was created early this century, the working class in the area have suffered brutal exploitation and repression at the hands of the rival ruling class groups competing for power. As if dealing with these home grown gangsters wasn't enough, they have also faced the bullets and bombs of the global capitalist powers (especially Britain and America) seeking to control the oil wealth of this part of the world.

Meanwhile opposition political organizations such as the Iraqi Communist Party and the Kurdish Democratic Party have consistently made deals with both Iraqi regimes and the global powers at the expense of those who they claimed to be leading in resistance to the state. Despite all this, the working class has shown itself a force to be reckoned with, toppling governments and sabotaging war efforts. This brief chronology charts some of the key moments in a century of war and rebellion.

**1900** -Iraq doesn't exist. Since the sixteenth century the area that will later become Iraq has formed part of the Turkish-based Ottoman Empire. The Empire's rule is based in the cities; the countryside remains dominated by rural tribal groups, some of them nomadic.

**1912** -Turkish Petroleum Company formed by British, Dutch and German interests acquires concessions to prospect for oil in the Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Mosul (both later part of Iraq).

**1914-18** -Turkey sides with Germany in the First World War. To protect its strategic interests and potential oil fields, Britain occupies Basra in November 1914, eventually capturing Baghdad in 1917. By the end of the war, most of the provinces of Iraq are occupied by British forces although some areas remain "unpacified". Colonial direct rule is established in "British Mesopotamia", with the top levels of the administration in British hands.

**1919** -Throughout 1919 and 1920 there are constant risings in northern Iraq, with British military officers and officials being killed. The different tribes in this area share a common Kurdish language and culture, but at this stage there is little demand for a separate Kurdish nation state. The issue is rather resistance to any external state authority.

The RAF bomb Kurdish areas. Wing-Commander Arthur Harris (later known as "Bomber Harris" for his role in the destruction of Dresden in World War

### **And finally...**

A special mention to whoever provoked the following patriotic letter to the Sun in 1991:

“Your Page One flag will stay in my window until Our Boys come home in glory- even though someone smashed my window” (the Sun had put out a full page Union Jack on its front cover with the caption ‘support our boys and put this flag in your window’).

—

Two) boasts: “The Arab and the Kurd now know what real bombing means in casualties and damage. Within 45 minutes a full-size village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured”.

Colonel Gerald Leachman, a leading British officer declares that the only way to deal with the tribes is “wholesale slaughter”. The RAF Middle Eastern Command request chemical weapons to use “against recalcitrant Arabs as (an) experiment”. Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War comments “I am strongly in favor of using poisonous gas against uncivilized tribes.. It is not necessary only to use the most deadly gases: gases can be used which cause great inconvenience and would spread a lively terror and yet would leave no serious permanent effects of most of those affected”. Others argue that the suggested gas would in fact “kill children and sickly persons” and permanently damage eyesight. At this stage, technical problems prevent the use of gas, but later it is deployed.

**1920** -In the post-war carve up of the spoils of conquest between the victorious imperialist powers, Britain gets Iraq (as well as Palestine), France gets Syria and Lebanon. The borders of the new state of Iraq are set by the great powers, setting the scene for a century of border conflicts (e.g the Iran/Iraq war).

The British authorities impose tight controls, collecting taxes more rigorously than their predecessors and operating forced labor schemes. In June 1920 an armed revolt against British rule (“the Revolution of 1920”) spreads across southern and central Iraq. For three months Britain loses control of large areas of the countryside. British military posts are overrun, and 450 British troops are killed (1500 are injured).

**1921** -By February the rebellion has been crushed, with 9000 rebels killed or wounded by British forces. Whole villages are destroyed by British artillery, and suspected rebels shot without trial. The air power of the RAF plays a major role; what this involves is shown by one report of “an air raid in which men, women and children had been machine gunned as they fled from a village”.

Britain decides to replace direct colonial rule with an Arab administration which it hopes will serve British interests. At the head of the new state structure, Britain creates a monarchy with Faysal as Iraq’s first King. Although senior positions are now filled by Iraqis, ultimate control remains with their British advisers’.

**1924** -Britain’s Labor Government sanctions the use of the RAF against the

Kurds, dropping bombs and gas, including on Sulliemania in December. The effects are described by Lord Thompson as “appalling” with panic stricken tribes people fleeing “into the desert where hundreds more must have perished of thirst”.

**1927** -The British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company (successor to the TPC) opens its first substantial oil well at Baba Gurgur, north of Kirkuk. Tons of oil decimate the local countryside before the well is capped.

**1930** -The Anglo-Iraq Treaty paves the way for independence. However the Treaty provides for Britain to maintain two air bases, and for British influence on Iraq’s foreign policy until 1957. In negotiations the British government contends that Kuwait “is a small expendable state which could be sacrificed without too much concern if the power struggles of the period demanded it”.

Kurdish uprisings, prompted by fears of their place in the new state, are put down with the help of the RAF.

**1931** -General strike against the Municipal Fees Law which imposes draconian new taxes (three times heavier than before) and for unemployment compensation. Thousands of workers and artisans, including 3,000 petroleum workers, take part and there are clashes with the police. The RAF flies over urban centers to intimidate strikers and their supporters.

**1932** -Iraq is admitted to the League of Nations, becoming formally independent - although Britain remains in a powerful influence.

**1933** -The Artisans Association’ (a union) organize a month long boycott of the British-owned Baghdad Electric Light and Power Company. After this, unions and workers’ organizations are banned and forced underground for the next ten years with their leaders imprisoned.

King Faysal dies and is succeeded by his son Ghazi.

**1934** -Iraq Petroleum Company begins commercial export of oil from the Kirkuk fields.

**1935-36** -Sporadic tribal rebellions, mainly in the south of the country. Causes include the government’s attempt to introduce conscription (the focus of a revolt by the minority Yazidi community), the dispossession of peasants as tribally-

25 reservists publicly refused to serve in the war. These included Tim Brassil an ex-army nurse who went into hiding. He said: “as a nurse, I am disgusted that massive funding has become immediately available to fight a war when for years we have seen the National Health Service starved of funding”. Another reservist and Falklands veteran declared: “”There’s no way I’ll fight to fill their petrol tankers”.

Also in the UK Lance Bombadier Vic Williams deserted from his regiment and spent the war on the run, turning up at anti-war rallies to denounce the war for oil.

Terry Jones, an Australian sailor, was put on trial for going absent without leave from HMAS Adelaide- a warship destined for the Gulf. He said that he was not prepared to die “to protect US oil lines”.

As with every other aspect of the war, resistance in the military was censored. The father of a British RAF pilot noted: “They interviewed our lad for the telly out there. He said it was all for a bit of oil and it wasn’t really right. They spoke to his mate after that, and his mate was a bit more proper. He said they were there to do a job of work and would get on with it the best they could. It was his mate they eventually broadcast”.

The families of military personnel also spoke out against the war. Relatives of US servicemen and women set up the anti-war Military Families Support Network. The parent of one Marine wrote “now you have ordered my son to the Middle East. For what? Cheap gas?”. In the UK, the mother of a 19-year old soldier wrote in a letter to a national paper: “My son is very precious to me and I do not want to see him risk his life for oil”.

## Repression

The war was used as an opportunity to step up repression across the world. A bogus ‘anti-terrorist campaign’ saw 62,000 troops and police deployed in Italy. In France, 200,000 troops were deployed and police leave was cancelled.

In the United States Cheryl Lessin, of Cleveland, Ohio, was jailed for a year for setting alight to the US flag.

35 Iraqi servicemen who were students in Britain were held as POWs at Rolleston military prison camp on Salisbury Plain. 53 Arab detainees were put in jail, and a further 167 were deported. These included anti-Saddam Arabs. For instance Abbas Shiblak, a Palestinian who had publicly criticized Saddam as a member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, was held for several weeks before being released after a well-publicized campaign in his support.

In February 91 there were 11 arrests outside Home Office in London at a protest in support against the war and in particular the detention of Arab nationals.

in San Francisco's financial district. Called to protest against the "destruction of the planet and its people by the corporate and financial cartels" it focused on corporate links with the Gulf War. The world headquarters of Chevron Oil were blockaded, and a US and Chevron flag burned. Traffic was blocked in Market Street (San Francisco's main street).

On 21 January anti-war protestors blockaded the entrance to the Frankfurt Stock Exchange and pelted the dealers with eggs and paint bombs. In August a live TV show was disrupted with a banner reading "There's always German money in weapons when there's any slaughter in the world".

A spontaneous demo in San Francisco blocked the golden Gate bridge. Police cars were set on fire and a TV station disrupted. In Chicago roads were blocked for four hours. In London 31 were arrested in a sit-down protest blocking traffic near Parliament. The toll booths on the Severn Bridge were occupied.

AIDS direct action group ACT UP staged a "Day of Desperation" in New York on January 23. Protestors forced the CBS national evening news off the air when they invaded the set shouting "Fight AIDS, not Arabs". 500 activists shut down Grand Central Station for an hour during the evening rush hour, floating a large banner reading "Money for AIDS not war" to the ceiling with helium-filled balloons.

### **Resistance in the military**

The most effective action against war is of course the refusal by soldiers to fight. The Iraqi war effort was destroyed by the mass desertions of soldiers, and it was this that caused the war to come to an end so quickly.

Unfortunately in the Coalition forces there was no mass resistance of this kind, but there was significant opposition to the war. By the end of November over 50 US service people or reservists had declared their refusal to go. In New York, the War Resisters League had received more than 400 phone calls from soldiers, including 12 members of one company of 150 Marine reservists. Paul Dotson, a US Marine Corps reservist stated: "I emphatically refuse to kill for oil in the Persian Gulf".

The US army issued new regulations preventing soldiers from filing for conscientious objector status until they were in Saudi Arabia. Some soldiers tried other ways of avoiding the front: there were reports of 300 cases of self-mutilation among US troops in Germany who didn't want to go to the Gulf.

US Marine Jeff Patterson sat down on the runway in Hawaii and refused to board the plane due to take him to the Gulf saying that he refused to fight for "American profits and cheap oil".

In the UK, 410 compulsory call-out notices were issued to reservists (mostly medical personnel), but only 314 turned up as ordered on 5 January. At least

owned lands are placed in private hands, and the decreasing power of tribal leaders. The revolts are crushed by air force bombing and summary executions.

**1936-37** -General Bakr Sidqi, an admirer of Mussolini installs a military government and launches repression against the left. There are protest strikes throughout the country including at the Iraq Petroleum Company in Kirkuk and at the National Cigarette Factory in Baghdad.

**1939** -King Ghazi is killed in a car crash. Many Iraqis believe that there has been a conspiracy, as the King had become outspokenly anti-British. During an angry demonstration in Mosul, the British Consul is killed.

**1940** -Rashid Ali becomes Prime Minister after a coup, at the expense of pro-British politicians. The new government takes a position of neutrality in the Second World War, refusing to support Britain unless it grants independence to British-controlled Syria and Palestine. Links are established with the German government.

**1941** -British troops land at Basra. The Iraqi government demands that they leave the country. Instead Britain re-invades Iraq and after the thirty days war restores its supporters to power. During the British occupation, martial law is declared. Arab nationalist leaders are hanged or imprisoned, with up to 1000 being interned without trial. Despite this, British forces do not intervene when Rashid supporters stage a pogrom in the Jewish area of Baghdad, killing 150 Jews.

**1943** -Bread strikes prompted by food shortages and prices rises are put down by the police.

**1946** -Strike by oil workers at the British-controlled Iraq Petroleum Company in Kirkuk demanding higher wages and other benefits. Workers clash with police, and ten are killed when police open fire on a mass meeting on 12 July. The following month there is a strike by oil workers in the Iranian port of Abadan and Britain moves more troops to Basra (near to the Iranian border). The Iraqi government suppresses opposition papers criticizing this move, prompting strikes by the printers and railway workers. The cabinet is forced to resign.

**1946-47** -Strikes and demonstrations against the proposed establishment of the Zionist state of Israel at the expense of the dispossessed Palestinians.

**1948** -The Iraqi government negotiates a new treaty with Britain which would

have extended Britain's say in military policy until 1973. British troops would be withdrawn from Iraqi soil, but would have the right to return in event of war. On January 16, the day after the Treaty is agreed at Portsmouth, police shoot dead four students on a demonstration against the treaty. This prompts an uprising that becomes known as al-Wathba (the leap). Militant demonstrations and riots spread across the country, directed not just against the proposed Treaty but against bread shortages and rising prices. Several more people are killed a few days later when police open fire on a mass march of railway workers and slum dwellers. On 27 January 300 to 400 people are killed by the police and military as demonstrators erect barricades of burning cars in the street. The cabinet resigns and the Treaty is repudiated.

In May 3000 workers at IPC's K3 pumping station near Haditha strike for higher wages bringing the station to a halt. After two and a half weeks, the government and IPC cut off supplies of food and water to the strikers, who then decide to march on Baghdad, 250 km away. On what becomes known as the great march' (al-Masira al-Kubra), strikers are fed and sheltered by people in the small towns and villages en route before being arrested at Fallujah, 70 km from Baghdad.

The British military mission is withdrawn from Iraq. Martial law is declared, ostensibly because of the war in Palestine, and demonstrations are banned.

**1949** -Communist Party leaders are publicly hanged in Baghdad, their bodies left hanging for several hours as a warning to opponents of the regime.

**1952** -Port workers strike for increased wages, more housing and better working conditions. Strikers take over the Basra generator, cutting off water and electricity in the city. Strikers are killed when police move in.

In October students go on strike over changes in examination rules. The movement spreads to mass riots in most urban centers, known as al-Intifada (the tremor). In Baghdad a police station and the American Information Office are burned to the ground. A military government takes over, declaring martial law. There is a curfew, mass arrests and the banning of some newspapers. 18 demonstrators are killed in military action.

**1954** -Government decrees permit the Council of Ministers to deport persons convicted of communism, anarchism and working for a foreign government. The police are given new powers to stop meetings.

In Holland, before the war started, protestors were active against the transport of US arms through the country en route to the Gulf. Many groups joined to try and block the movement by trains, lorries and boats, with people getting arrested for sitting in front of trains. Incendiary devices were used to sabotage railways.

In Turkey there were bomb attacks on a NATO office, a US Army building and the American Consulate.

In Italy there were attempts to blockade Malpense airport near Milan to prevent it being used to refuel US B52s. Months after the war officially finished, there were bomb attacks on the homes of two Italian air force pilots proclaimed as national heroes for their part in the slaughter.

Army recruiting offices were picketed. In January 1000 high school pupils demonstrated outside a military recruiting office on Broadway. 19 were arrested. one 11-year old said: "I'm angry. My uncle's probably going to die... Who care's about oil?" In Detroit, riot police broke up a demonstration outside the Military Entrance Processing Station. Leicester Direct Action Movement picketed their local army recruitment office, and the office in Brighton was also blockaded. A combined forces recruiting office in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, was damaged in an arson attack.

There were demonstrations outside several naval bases in the US and outside Westover USAF base, MA. At the send off for the one Greek warship being sent to the Gulf, relatives of Greek citizens in Iraq and Kuwait staged their own demonstration to voice their opposition. In England there was a demo at USAF base at Alconbury. The police limited the number of demonstrators to 60 for "security" reasons. 1500 demonstrated at Fairford in Gloucestershire, from where B-52s made flying bombing raids.

In September 1990 a group called Gulf War Resisters staged a protest at the Farnborough Air Show, the UK's main annual public display of military aircraft and weapons systems. Slogans were painted on a British Aerospace Tornado jet, and two people climbed on top of the jet with a "No War in the Gulf" banner.

### **Stop business as usual**

The BP refinery in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania was picketed, as was the Chevron Oil HQ in San Francisco (28/8/90). No War but Class War picketed the London headquarters of the oil company BP. Their leaflet we declared "We won't die for oil profits- Class War not Oil War", and supported strikers on the North Sea oil rigs as well as opposing war in the oilfields of the middle east.

Financial interests were also targeted. In October 1990, 350 took part in demo

and a fence torn down outside the FBI building. In Los Angeles, blood and oil was poured on the steps of a federal building.

In Germany roads and railway lines were blocked and department stores set on fire. In Berlin petrol bombs were thrown in clashes outside the US diplomatic mission. Education came to a virtual standstill as teachers and pupils joined demos.

In Paris police were stoned, shop windows smashed, rubbish bins set on fire after a demo. In Amsterdam, street fires were started outside the US consulate. There were large protests in Australia, where the government sent two frigates and a supply ship to the Gulf. 30,000 marched in Sydney, including Vietnam veterans. 15,000 marched in Tokyo.

400,000 took part in a march in Algiers, where youths stormed the UN headquarters, ripping down the flag and burning it. There was a massive demonstration in the city of Kassala in Sudan, while in Morocco 300,000 were on the streets of Rabat to oppose the war. As well as sending troops to support the Coalition, the Moroccan government used the army against the working class at home. Troops killed at least 100 people during riots in December following a one-day general strike for higher wages after subsidies on basic foodstuffs were cut on the orders of the IMF.

In some countries just the act of taking to the streets was dangerous. In Turkey, police opened fire on anti-war demonstrators and Birtan Altumbas died under torture after being arrested on a demo at Ankara University. Six people were seriously injured when police open fire on demonstrators in Batman, 65 miles from the Iraqi border. The town is near a US airbase from where bombing raids against Iraq were launched.

Police banned anti-war demonstrations outside embassies in New Delhi, claiming protests could strain India's ties with countries involved in the war. Police shot dead three protestors in Pakistan. On 6 February, 500 police smashed a 50 strong anti-war demonstration in Egypt. Four days later riot police swamped Cairo after rumors of another march.

### **Blockade the bases**

In Germany there were frequent attempts to block military depots and barracks. At the end of November US military transport was held up for four hours by a blockade of Mannheim harbor in southern Germany. In January, 10,000 blocked the entrance to the US Rhine-Main Air Base outside Frankfurt. Hundreds held up an army train in the alpine city of Chambery. Military vehicles were set on fire at the armed forces barracks in Haan, near Hilden.

**1956** -Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal. Britain, Israel and France launch a military attack on Egypt. The government closes all colleges and secondary schools in Baghdad as huge demonstrations, strikes and riots spread. Two rioters are sentenced to death following clashes with the police in the southern town of al-Havy. Martial law is imposed.

**1958** -Popular unrest throughout the country, including in Diwaniyah where in June 43 police and an unknown number of demonstrators are killed in a three hour battle.

A month later the "14 July Revolution" brings to an end the old regime. A coup led by members of the Free Officers seizes power, denounces imperialism and proclaims a republic. The royal family are shot. Crowds take to the streets and a number of US businessmen and Jordanian ministers staying at the Baghdad Hotel are killed. People take food from the shops without paying, thinking that money is now obsolete. To prevent the revolution spreading out of their control, the new government imposes a curfew. After a brief power struggle within the new regime, Abd al-Karim Quasim becomes prime minister (as well as commander in chief of the armed forces) and continues to rule with the support of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and other leftists.

Although Islamic influence remains strong, there are public expressions of anti-clericalism including the public burning of the Koran.

Without waiting for Quasim to deliver on his promises of land reform, peasants in the south take matters into their own hands. In al-Kut and al-'Amarah they loot landlords' property, burn down their houses, and destroy accounts and land registers.

Fearing the spread of rebellion throughout the Middle East, the United States sends 14,000 marines to Lebanon. Plans for a joint US/British invasion of Iraq come to nothing because "nobody could be found in Iraq to collaborate with".

**1959** -Baathists and nationalists form underground anti-communist hit squads, assassinating not just ICP members but other radical workers. By 1961 up to 300 people have been murdered in this way in Baghdad and around 400 in Mosul.

In Mosul, Arab nationalist officers stage an unsuccessful coup against the government, prompted largely by anti-communism. Popular resistance goes beyond suppressing the coup: the rich are attacked and their houses looted.

There are similar scenes in Kirkuk where 90 generals, capitalists are landlords are killed in violent clashes ( excesses' later denounced by the ICP).

**1960** -Quasim cracks down on radical opposition. 6000 militant workers are sacked. Several Communist Party members are sentenced to death after for their role in the Kirkuk clashes. Despite this the ICP leadership continues to support the government, urged on by Moscow.

**1961** -War breaks out between the government and Kurds lasting intermittently until 1975. In the first year, 500 places are bombed by the Iraqi Air Force and 80,000 people displaced.

Kuwait, under British control since 1899, becomes independent. Iraq stakes a claim that Kuwait should be part of Iraq. Britain responds by sending troops to Kuwait.

**1963** -Quasim's government is overthrown in a January coup which brings to power the Baathists for the first time. The Arab nationalist Baath party favors the joining together of Iraq, Egypt and Syria in one Arab nation. In the same year, the Baath also come to power in Syria, although the Syrian and Iraqi parties subsequently split.

The Baath strengthen links with the United States, suspected by many of encouraging the coup. During the coup, demonstrators are mown down by tanks, initiating a period of ruthless persecution during which up to 10,000 people are imprisoned, many of them tortured. The CIA help to supply intelligence on communists and radicals to be rounded up. In addition to the 149 officially executed, up to 5000 are killed in the terror, many buried alive in mass graves. The new government continues the war on the Kurds, bombarding them with tanks, artillery and from the air, and bulldozing villages.

In November the Baath are removed from power in another coup by supporters of the Egyptian Arab nationalist, Nasser.

**1967** -After a split in the Communist Party, a group lead by Aziz al-Hajj launches guerrilla warfare against the state, influenced by Che Guevara and Maoism. There are assassinations of individual capitalists and wide-scale armed confrontations.

**1968** -The Baath Party power returns to power after a coup in July. It creates a state apparatus systematically dominated by the Baath party that enables it to remain in power for at least the next thirty years.

The Baath militia, the National Guard, crack down on demonstrations and

increase.

In Britain there was no strike action, but there was some workplace anti-war activity. 120 attended a London-wide meeting of Health Workers against the War and anti-war groups were set up in at least six London hospitals. At the London Hospital in Whitechapel and North Manchester Hospital there were small demonstrations linking the war to cuts in the NHS.

At Great Ormond Street, children's hospital in London wards were closed because fewer private patients were coming from the Middle East (the hospital relies on private sector income to help finance free health care on the site). On 10 October hospital workers staged their second demonstration against the cuts, demanding that the government provide funds to prevent them. A leaflet put out by G.O.S. Health workers Group says: "This war must end. It threatens the lives of millions in the Middle East and it is now endangering our health and our jobs".

Anti-war groups were also set up amongst media workers, civil servants and British Telecom workers.

At arms manufacturer GEC Marconi (makers of navigation, radar and missile guidance systems), the war coincided with the sacking of 800 workers. Workers opposed to the war organized an unofficial overtime ban and go slow on equipment headed for the Gulf, slowing down production and stopping some equipment from getting there.

### **On the streets**

Across the world, millions of people took to the streets to protest against the war.

On the weekend before war broke out 100,000 marched against war in London, 15,000 in Manchester, 10,000 in Glasgow, 3,000 in Bristol. There were also protests in many smaller towns.

On the same weekend a quarter of a million marched in 120 German cities. Well over 200,000 marched in 150 towns and cities across France. 100,000 marched in Rome, 40,000 in Brussels and 60,000 in Istanbul. More than 75,000 attended rallies in Madrid and Barcelona, which ended in clashes with police. There were demos in Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, in over 30 cities and towns in Canada, and all across the USA.

Thing heated up as the threat of war became reality on 16 January. 100,000 marched in San Francisco; in the same city 1000 people were arrested in a single day of protests. In Washington, 250,000 marched. Bank windows were bricked



it was held up for another 12 hours on 21 September on the dockside at Toulon, by workers opposed to the war. In February, dockers in Marseilles refused to load containers full of military materials destined for the Gulf.

In Japan, the shipment of supplies to US troops was delayed when seafarers refused to leave port without an additional 30% on base salaries to compensate for the military nature of the voyage. Spanish seafarers stopped a passenger ship from sailing to pick up French troops and take them to the Gulf; they refused to let it sail unless its crew had volunteered and were getting increased wages for sailing into a danger zone. The Spanish government had chartered the ship as part of its support for the war.

Even where strike action was not explicitly against the war, it often threatened the war effort. Early in August 4000 Turkish maintenance workers on US- run bases, including 1600 at Inchirlik, the main US air base, went on strike over pay. This threatened to hamper any plans for an air strike against Iraq- a military source stated "It is difficult to see how any major operation could be launched in current circumstances". The strikers were ordered back to work by the government who declared that the strike was "harmful to national security".

In December a strike wave spread through Turkey, starting with 50,000 miners in Zonguldak. Along with wives and supporters they set off in January to march on the capital Ankara demanding a 600% wage rise. 200 were arrested when riot police stopped the march. In Bursa, 30,000 in different industries went on strike, and 105,000 engineers went on strike from 26 December. 10,000 workers in the paper industry came out on strike in January. The strike wave even spread to east London where 200 Turkish and Kurdish workers went on strike in support of an illegal one day general strike at home. 55 people were arrested in clashes with the Metropolitan Police. The Turkish government responded with a two-month ban on strikes, imposed on the grounds of the war effort. Despite this ban there were anti-war stoppages and go-slows.

September also saw a virtual general strike in Greece, lasting three weeks, over plans to abolish public sector pensions- strikers were threatened with being drafted into the army. The country's only weapons factory was occupied by nearly 3000 armaments workers. In December 1990 almost every Greek college and 2500 high schools were occupied by students. They were opposing cuts, tighter discipline and re-organization of exams and entry requirements, but anti-war sentiments were also expressed. On marches slogans such as "Money for books not warships" and "send the education minister to the Gulf" were shouted.

There were also strikes against austerity measures related to the Gulf crisis. In January there was a general strike in Bolivia against a 33% petrol price

strikes. In November, two strikers are shot dead at a vegetable oil factory near Baghdad, and three are killed on a demonstration to commemorate the Russian Revolution.

**1969** -The regime begins rounding up suspected communists. The guerrilla movement is defeated, with many of its members tortured to death. Aziz al-Hajj betrays them by recanting on television, subsequently becoming Iraqi ambassador to France.

The air force bombs Kurdish areas, but the military stalemate remains until the following year when Saddam Hussein negotiates an agreement with the Kurdish Democratic Party. In exchange for limited autonomy, the KDP leadership agrees to integrate its peshmerga fighters into the Iraqi army.

**1973** -The Iraqi oil industry is nationalized.

**1974** -After pressure from the Soviet Union, the Iraqi Communist Party joins the pro-government National Progressive Front along with the Baath, but the Baath remain in sole control of the state.

War breaks out again in Kurdistan as the agreement with the KDP breaks down. The KDP is deprived of its traditional allies in the CP and the Soviet Union, now supporting the Baath. Instead it seeks and receives aid from the USA and the Shah of Iran. The Baathists launch napalm attacks on the Kurdish towns of Halabja and Kalalze.

**1975** -The Iraqi military continues bombing civilian areas in Kurdistan, killing 130 at Qala'Duza, 43 in Halabja and 29 in Galala in April.

Iraq negotiates an agreement with Iran, withdrawing help from Iranian Kurds and other anti-Shah forces in return for Iran stopping support to the Iraqi KDP. Iran takes back the military equipment it had given to the KDP, leaving the field open for the Iraqi army to conquer Kurdistan

**1978** -Wholesale arrests of ICP members it criticizes the regime. Twelve are executed for political activity in the army. All non-Baathist political activity in the army (such as reading a political newspaper), or by former members of the armed forces is banned under sentence of death. With universal conscription, this means that all adult males are threatened with death for political activity.

**1979** -Saddam Hussein becomes president of the republic, having increasingly concentrated power in his hands during the preceding eleven years.

**1980** -War breaks out between Iraq and the new Iranian regime lead by Ayatollah Khomeini. The conflict centers on border disputes and the prospect of the Islamic revolution spreading to Iraq. Iran shells the Iraqi cities of Khanaqin and Mandali; Iraq launches a bombing mission over Tehran.

**1982** -Popular anti-government uprising in Kurdish areas. The government decrees that deserters from the army (anyone who has gone absent without leave for more than five days) will be executed.

In the southern marsh regions, the Iraqi army launches a massive military operation with the help of heavy artillery, missiles and aircraft to flush out the thousands of deserters and their supporters in the area. Rebels do not only run away from the war, but organize sabotage actions such as blowing up an arsenal near the town of Amara. In the village of Douru armed inhabitants resist the police to prevent house-to-house searches for deserters. At Kasem in the same area armed rebels clash with the military. Villages supporting the rebels are destroyed and their inhabitants massacred.

**1984** -American support for Iraq in the war is reflected in the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Iraq has received military planes from France, and missiles from the Soviet Union. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait fund the Iraqi war effort. Western and Eastern blocs are united in a wish to see Iraq curtail the influence of Iran and Islamic fundamentalism. Jalal al-Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan calls a truce with its troops fighting alongside the Baath.

**1985** -Start of the "War of the Cities" with Iran and Iraq firing missiles at each other's capitals.

**1987** -In May there is an uprising in the Kurdish town of Halabja led by the many deserters from the army living in the town. According to one eye witness "the governmental forces were toppled. The people had taken over and the police and army had to go into hiding, only being able to move around in tanks and armored divisions". Hundreds of people are killed when the rebellion is crushed.

**1988** -Armed deserters take over the town of Sirwan (near Halabja). The Iraqi air force destroys the town with bombs and rockets. Halabja is bombed by Iran,

Despite the failures of the anti-war movement, we cannot allow it to be erased from history, especially now that airborne slaughter is back on the agenda and a new movement is needed. Across the world, millions of people took part in demonstrations, strikes, sabotage, desertion and other acts of resistance. This is not a comprehensive list of all opposition last time around. It doesn't include the massive movement of resistance in Iraq itself, which needs its own pamphlet. Nor does it include any critical analysis of the politics of the different movements opposing the war.

The aim here is simply to give a flavor of the range of different tactics that were used in order to inform attempts at resistance to Bill and Tony's new military adventure in the Gulf.

### Strikes

In several countries workers went on strike against the war, or against attacks on their working conditions resulting from the war.

In Bangladesh there was a one day general strike in September 1990 protesting against the dispatch of Bangladeshi troops to the Gulf. At least 50 people were injured when police used steel-tipped batons against demonstrators. In Pakistan there was a general strike in February against the US bombing of Iraq. Palestinians in the city of Jericho held a three day strike in mourning for the 300 killed in the US attack on the Baghdad bomb shelter. Militants defied the Israeli imposed curfew to call for action through their megaphones.

In the first week of the war, more than 2 million Spanish workers stopped work for two hours demanding an end to the war and the recall of three Spanish warships. In Germany draft resisters forced to work as hospital orderlies went on strike for three days in opposition to the war, and in Italy, 100,000 workers and 30,000 students stopped work on 22 February.

Students took action in many places. In Turkey, 70% of universities were hit by anti-war boycotts in November 1990. At a school in suburban Berkley (near Detroit), 30 high school students were suspended after staging a sit-in. On 22 January there was an anti-war strike at School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Students there organized against intimidatory security measures and racism against Arab students. One Egyptian student told of how "On the tube a guy looked at me and said 'Iraqi bastard'. And you get 'bloody Arab'"

Dockers and seafarers were often at the forefront of action, perhaps not surprisingly given the key role of ships in moving troops and supplies to the Gulf. The departure of French ground forces for Saudi Arabia was delayed when seafarers on a car-ferry requisitioned to carry troops demanded danger money before agreeing to sail. The ferry left Corsica after this dispute was resolved, but

*Kurdistan*(DPK), they used to have about 5000 armed peshmergas before the recent events and are not as significant a force as the media makes out. The Kurdish towns are being taken not by the political parties but the people. *Akhvan al-muslimin* is the last powerful Sunni organization being supported by both Egypt and at times US. All in all it must be said that the future of autonomous proletarian activity in Iraq is not very bright.

## **Do you remember the first time? Resistance to the 1991 Gulf Massacre**

*This text was written in early 1998 when a new US/British military assault on Iraq seemed imminent. It was distributed via the internet and amongst anti-war activists in London.*

I can't remember a worse time.... On 16 January 1991, the United States, with support from Britain and the other Coalition powers launched a massive military attack on Iraq. The so-called "Gulf War" was in actual fact a one sided slaughter. By the time it officially finished on 28 February 1991, an estimated quarter of a million people had been killed, most of them Iraqi civilians and conscripts.

For most people in the West, the war was just a TV spectacle. As some graffiti in Sheffield put it "Hi-Tec War kills and maims, but the media gives us video games". The depressing lack of a movement able to seriously confront, let alone stop the massacre has to be acknowledged.

The limited anti-war movement that did emerge failed to sustain itself. With a few exceptions, most of those active in it implicitly accepted the spectacle's definition of the war. Once the bombs stopped falling and CNN stopped broadcasting from Baghdad, the war was declared to be over. Troops returned home, and radicals moved on to the next campaign. But the war was far from over. The imposition of UN sanctions, backed up by the threat of military force, has killed more people than Operation Desert Storm. Much of the bombed out civilian infrastructure remains unrepaired because sanctions block the equipment necessary to repair it. Water-borne diseases are endemic, malnutrition common and medical treatments scarce, some of them subject to sanctions. In 1996, aid agencies reported that one third of children suffered from stunted growth or impaired intelligence due to lack of protein. Truly as Brecht put it "their peace finishes off what their war has left over."

and then on 13 March the Iraqi government attacks the town with chemical weapons killing at least 5,000 civilians. Poor people attempting to flee the town for Iran before the massacre are stopped from doing so by Kurdish nationalist peshmerga. Throughout this period of insurgency there is widespread suspicion of the Kurdish nationalist parties because of their history of collaboration with the state and their lack of support for working class revolts.

The Americans send a naval force to the Gulf after attacks on oil tankers. It effectively takes the Iraqi side, shooting down an Iranian passenger jet killing nearly 300 people, and attacking Iranian oil platforms, killing another 200. In August Iran and Iraq agree a ceasefire bringing to an end the first Gulf War. The British government secretly agrees to relax controls on arms exports to Iraq. 1990 -In July, the British government approves the company Matrix Churchill exporting engineering equipment to Iraq, knowing that they are to be used to manufacture shells and missiles. The following month, Iraq invades Kuwait.

1991 -In January the US military, with support from Britain and the other 'Coalition Forces' launches Operation Desert Storm, a massive attack on Iraq and its forces in Kuwait. The conflict is less of a war than what John Pilger calls "a one-sided bloodfest". The allied forces suffer only 131 deaths (many of them killed by 'friendly fire'), compared with up to 250,000 Iraqi dead.

Despite General Norman Schwarzkopf's public statement that the allies will not attack Iraqis in retreat, Iraqi conscripts are slaughtered even after the unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait has begun. The day before the 'war' comes to an end, troops (and civilians) retreating from Kuwait City on the Basra highway are massacred in what US pilots gleefully call a 'duck shoot'. For miles near the Mutla Ridge, the road is filled with charred bodies and tangled wreckage. An eye witness writes that "In many instances the human form has been reduced to nothing more than a shapeless black lump, the color of coal, the texture of ash" (Stephen Sackur).

Many civilians are also killed, most famously at the Amiriyah bunker in Baghdad where hundreds of people sheltering from allied bombs are killed when it receives a direct hit from two missiles.

In February and March, popular uprisings against the Iraqi government spread across the country. It starts at Basra in southern Iraq, where the spark is rebels using a tank to fire at the huge pictures of Saddam Hussein in the city. Inspired by rebellion in the south, people in Kurdish areas join in. Police stations, army bases and other government buildings are wrecked and torched. Shops are looted. Food warehouses are occupied and the food distributed. In Sullimania in the north, rebels smash up the prison and set all the prisoners free and then storm the secret police HQ where many have been tortured and killed. Baathist officials and secret police are shot. In some areas, self-organized workers' councils (shoras) are set up to run things. They set up their own radio stations, medical posts (to collect blood donations for the hospital), and militia to resist

government forces.

In Baghdad itself, there are mass desertions from the main barracks during the war, with officers who try to stop them being shot. Two areas of the city, Al Sourah and Al Sho'ela fall into the effective control of deserters and their supporters.

After a brutal repression of the rebellion in the South (made easier by the earlier Allied massacre of mutinous conscripts on the Basra highway), Government forces focus on Kurdistan. They reoccupy Sullimania in April, but the city is deserted with almost all the inhabitants having fled to the mountains.

The Western media present the uprisings as the work of Kurdish nationalists in the north and Shiite Muslims in the south, but they are in fact mass revolts of the poor. In fact the main Kurdish nationalist parties (the KDP and the PUK) oppose radical aspects of the uprisings and try to destroy the shora movement. True to form they announce a new negotiated agreement with Saddam Hussein soon after the uprisings are crushed.

**1991- 2002-**Although military action ceases, the war on people in Iraq is continued through other means - sanctions. The destruction of water pumping stations and sewage filtration plants by allied bombing is compounded by sanctions which prevent them being repaired. This amounts to germ warfare, as the inevitable consequences are epidemics of dysentery, typhoid and cholera. In 1997, the UN estimates that 1.2 million people, including 750,000 children below the age of five, have died because of the scarcity of food and medicine.

**1996** -The US launches 27 cruise missiles against Iraq.

**1998** -In February there is a massive military build up by American and British forces in the Gulf, threatening a new war on Iraq. On this occasion, armed conflict is avoided after a last minute deal on UN Weapons Inspectors.

On October 1, Iraqi authorities under the command of Gen. Sabah Farhan al-Duri execute 119 Iraqis and three Egyptians in Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. Twenty-nine of those killed are members of the armed forces, and fifty had been imprisoned for their participation in the March 1991 uprisings that followed the Gulf War. This mass execution is apparently a continuation of the "prison-cleansing" campaign launched by the government a year earlier which saw an estimated 2500 prisoners executed.

In December, following the expulsion of Weapons Inspectors from Iraq (and

feudal landlord to organize something, that they would name a 'nationalist movement'. In order to give these leaders credibility, the central government would move 'against' them.

At these times, there was no real Kurdish patriotic identity, it had to be artificially fostered. Arabs and Kurds viewed their struggle as one. Kurdish nationalist leaders who shared power with the central government, broke with them once they received support from the west and the Shah. But they lacked a popular base and had to escape to the mountains. They organized a militia but were defeated severely at first because their soldiers were *not* volunteers. Learning from their mistakes, they organized the Peshmerga - a guerrilla outfit - and looked for better weapons. They began to engage in sectarian murder. For example, they would get hold of an Arab driver and execute him for *being* an Arab.

**Q: Sounds a bit like Irish nationalists over here?**

A: Yes, very similar, Innocent Arab workers and students were murdered, and the government in turn would make capital out of this by publicizing 'Kurdish' atrocities, whipping up anti-Kurdish sentiments. Iraqi generals would deliberately send young, inexperienced soldiers into Kurdish areas, knowing full well they were cannon-fodder for the peshmerga. The next day, a Kurdish village would be destroyed by the regular Iraqi army in revenge. All these tactics helped to divide the proletariat.

But despite everything, nationalism hasn't managed to create unbridgeable obstacles. Proof of this is the latest uprising. When Iraqis in the south rose up against Saddam after the war, their efforts were supported by northerners. Arab soldiers in the north, voluntarily gave up their arms to the Kurds.

**Q: Finally let us talk about the future of the class struggle in Iraq. I think the Americans are still banking on a Romanian scenario, i.e. a popular uprising from below followed by a preplanned coup d'etat from above to oust Saddam. Do you agree?**

A : Yes, probably. But the Iraqi situation is more complicated than Romania, and the divisions between Kurds and Arabs, Arab and Turks, and Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims could easily lead to a prolonged civil war situation. And the next regime will probably be more religiously orientated. So there are differences with Romania.

The strongest party seems to be the *Al-Dawa* (Shi'ite) which receives backing from Iran. The *Radical Ba'ths* are not very popular and has connections with Syria. The I.C.P hasn't got the power it once used to have but mustn't be underestimated. Its base, however, seems to be amongst the elder generations and not the young.

As for the *Patriotic Union of Kurds* (PUK) and the *Democratic Party of*

journal, called *Darasat al-arabie*, which was critical of both Leninism and Marxism. We didn't always agree with them, but they influenced us greatly.

**Q: Did these revolutionaries develop their own independent critique of Leninism or did they borrow it from the west?**

A: Unfortunately us 'eastern' communists have always been awe-struck by our 'western' comrades, and looked in their direction for divine inspiration as Muslims look at *Kiblah* (Direction towards which Muslims turn in praying). Consequently we have always relied on them for an understanding of capitalism.

But gradually we came to realize that the previous parties we were involved in were like cages for our minds, stifling our independence. Consequently we rejected 'Third worldism' and 'Socialist' revolution and understood that the only worthwhile path is a *Communist* revolution (the abolition of wage slavery, money and the state). We began criticizing Lenin here and there but a complete critique of Leninism came later.

At this stage we decided to form a new organization called *Fasileh* (later renamed *Kar*). Our program was very eclectic. It contained good and also bad things. With the help of some Anarchists we started publishing a magazine in Arabic and Kurdish. The level of class struggle inside Iraq was very low, but the regime's repression was fierce. The state tried very hard to find us but we were careful. *Mokhaberat* (security service) would offer reward for our arrest and finally they raided us.

I got away but a comrade was later arrested, and most probably executed. We decided to send some comrades abroad to learn from the experience of the world proletariat and establish internationalist contacts. But when we got here, we found the level of class struggle was even lower! This coupled with the usual refugee problems led to petty personal quibbling which made us forget the purpose of coming abroad. But now that things are beginning to pick up again, we have once again started to organize ourselves and meet regularly.

**Q: The media here is explicitly giving encouragement to Kurdish nationalism. Can you tell us a little about the origins of Kurdish nationalism?**

A: In the mid 50's there was no such thing as a Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq. Sometimes at times of crisis, capitalism would financially induce a Kurdish

during the middle of President Clinton's impeachment crisis) the US launches Operation Desert Fox. Over a four day period, 400 cruise missiles are launched on Iraq, along with 600 air attack sorties. British aircraft also take part in air strikes. According to Iraq, thousands are killed and wounded in these attacks.

**1999** -In March Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq-al Sadr, the most senior Shi'ite religious leader in Iraq, is killed, with the suspicion falling on government agents. A major uprising in Basra is suppressed with hundreds of deaths, many killed in mass executions.

Western military attacks continue, ostensibly against Iraqi air defenses. On April 11, two people are killed when Western warplanes bomb targets in Quadisiya province. On 27 April, four people are killed by US planes near Mosul in the northern no-fly zone. On May 9, four people are killed in Basra province, including three in a farmer's house in Qurna. On May 12, 12 people are killed in the northern city of Mosul.

## **Ten Days that shook Iraq - inside information from an uprising**

*The following text was published as a four page leaflet in 1991 and was one of the first sources of information in English about the uprisings in Southern Iraq and Kurdistan. It was later published in the magazine 'Wildcat'*

The Gulf war was not ended by the military victory of America and the Allies. It was ended by the mass desertion of thousands of Iraqi soldiers. So overwhelming was the refusal to fight for the Iraqi state on the part of its conscripted army that, contrary to all predictions, not one Allied soldier was killed by hostile fire in the final ground offensive to recapture Kuwait. Indeed the sheer scale of this mutiny is perhaps unprecedented in modern military history.

But these mutinous troops did not simply flee back to Iraq. On their return many of them turned their guns against the Iraqi state, sparking a simultaneous uprising in both Southern Iraq and in Kurdistan to the North. Only the central

region of Iraq surrounding Baghdad remained firmly in the state's hands in the weeks following the end of the war.

From the very start the Western media has grossly misrepresented these uprisings. The uprising in the South, centred on Basra, was portrayed as a Shia Muslim revolt. Whereas the insurrection in the North was reported as an exclusively Kurdish Nationalist uprising which demanded little more than an autonomous Kurdish region within Iraq.

The truth is that the uprisings in both the North and South of Iraq were proletarian insurrections.

Basra is one of the most secular areas in the Middle East. Almost no one goes to the mosques in Basra. The radical traditions in this area are not those of Islamic fundamentalism but rather those of Arab Nationalism and Stalinism. The Iraqi Communist Party is the only bourgeois party with any significant influence in this region. The cities of Basra, Nasriah and Hilah have long been known as the region of the Communist Party and have a long history of open rebellion against both religion and the state. The "Iraqi" working class has always been one of the most troublesome in a volatile region.

In the North, there is little sympathy for the Nationalist parties - the KDP and the PUK - and their peshmergas (guerrilla movements) due to the repeated failure of their compromises with the Iraqi state. This is particularly true in the Sulaimania area. The inhabitants of the area have been especially hostile to the Nationalists since the Halabja massacre. Following the chemical attack by the Iraqi air force against deserters and civilians in the city of Halabja in 1988, the peshmergas initially prevented people from fleeing and then went on to pillage and rape those who survived the massacre. As a result, many villagers have long since refused to feed or shelter nationalist peshmergas. As in the South, the Communist Party and its peshmergas are more popular.

The uprising in the North was not nationalist. In the early stages Ba'athist officials and secret police were executed, police files were destroyed and the prisons stormed. People were openly hostile to the bourgeois policies of the Kurdish Nationalists. In Sulaimania the Nationalist peshmergas were excluded from the city and the exiled leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani, was prevented from returning to his home town. When the Kurdish Democratic Party leader, Massoud Barzani, went to Chamchamal, near to Sulaimania, he was attacked and two of his bodyguards were killed. When the Nationalists broadcast the slogan: "Now's the time to kill the Ba'athists!" the people of Sulaimania replied with the slogan: "Now's the time for the Nationalists to loot Porsches!", meaning that the Nationalists were only interested in looting.

him too seriously at first. His role in the attempted assassination of Qasim was exaggerated later. Gradually he made himself a power base with the help of his *Takriti* tribe and important landlords.

During the 60s there was a critical re-assessment of the I.C.P. policies of United Front with the Iraqi bosses which eventually led to a split by 'Aziz al-Hajj who was influenced by Mao and Che Guevara. His guerrilla actions were unsuccessful and the group was defeated, but his ideas remained very popular. He is now Ba'athist ambassador to France!

**Q: Unlike neighboring Iran where guerrilla activity by leftists never threatened the regime.**

A: Yes, in Iraq armed struggle was far more widespread. Assassinations of individual capitalists led to wide-scale armed confrontations, and it must be said these actions were extremely popular amongst the population. But the truth is that our security measures were inadequate. We temporarily controlled the streets because we had guns but when the '68 coup d' etat succeeded, we became very exposed. Even our leaders made horrendous mistakes, and a lot of comrades were arrested and executed.

I don't want to give the impression that the regime only used repression in dealing with the class struggle. No, they used the usual carrot and stick tactics and it worked. Between 1968 and 1974 the state became far more powerful. Again in 1972 the I.C.P. entered into a pact with Ba'aths. It is incredible how completely degenerate these Stalinists are. In 1975 the Algiers Agreement between Saddam and the Shah, meant that both leaders could turn their attention towards their internal problems. The Kurdish uprising collapsed very fast and Saddam became even more powerful.

**Q: Can you now talk about your own break first from Stalinism and then from Leninism in general?**

A: We knew some comrades in Baghdad, Basra and Kurdistan who were also dissatisfied with the prevalent ideologies. At that time, we thought armed guerrilla struggle was the be all and end all of the revolution, but gradually and under the influence of the Iranian revolution we became very critical of guerrilla activity.

I made two visits to Iran during the revolution and brought back new ideas. We became acquainted with Trotsky's critique of Stalin and later on we were introduced to anarchist ideas by comrades from Baghdad. There was a Lebanese

**Q: I hear that even the Koran was desecrated by the workers.**

A: Yes that's absolutely right. They understood the reactionary nature of Islam. Also in Kirkuk about 90 generals, capitalists and landlords were taken to the road, had a rope put round their necks and dragged around by car until they were killed. I.C.P. denounced the actions and tried to distance themselves from workers' "excesses".

But gradually with land reforms, the rising price of oil and loans from USSR, the government managed to stabilize the situation in the South. Kurdistan was more resistant. Armed peasants groups (e.g. in Halabja) were not intimidated by either the state or the I.C.P. and took over the land that the escapee owners had left (mostly fleeing to neighboring Iran). The absentee landowners would send assassins to Iraq and with the connivance of the military kill a revolutionary and then flee to the safety of Iran.

**Q: Why was there so much support for the I.C.P. and Kurdish nationalists despite their reactionary policies?**

A: That is a difficult question. The people were not happy with either group and especially felt let down by the I.C.P., but there was no real revolutionary alternative so people tended to give the I.C.P. the benefit of the doubt and apologize for their 'shortcomings'. They would say naively: "The Iraqi Communist Party is young and is bound to make mistakes, but soon they would mature like their Russian and Chinese counterparts" (!! ) I suppose there just wasn't the necessary consciousness to see these parties for what they are.

In 1963 Qasim was overthrown by the Ba'athists and a period of intense violence resulted in the death of thousands of activists. The Ba'aths were supplied a list of known 'trouble makers' probably by the CIA. During Qasim's last days the people demanded weapons from him for protection against the National Guards, but he refused to arm them. Even then the military were so unpopular that they had to trick the people in order to get into the cities. They put photographs of Qasim at the front of their tanks, the people thought they intended to defend them from the Ba'athists, so they were not opposed, until it was too late.

**Q: The Ba'aths first experiment In dictatorship was unsuccessful but they got Into power again In 1968. Can you tell us about Saddam Hussein's personal path towards power?**

A: Saddam was a cut throat petty gangster, which is probably why no one took

A revolutionary group, "Communist Perspective", played a major role in the insurrection. In their publication, "Proletariat", they advocated the setting up of workers' councils. This provoked fear and anger among the Nationalists, as well as the Communist Party and its splinter groups.

Faced with these proletarian uprisings the various bourgeois interests in the region had to suspend hostilities and unite to suppress them. It is well known that the West, led by the USA, have long backed Saddam Hussein's brutal regime. They supported him in the war against Iran.

In supporting Saddam the Western ruling class also recognized that the Ba'athist Party, as a mass based fascist party, was the only force in Iraq capable and ruthless enough to repress the oil producing proletariat.

However, Saddam's ultimate strategy for maintaining social peace in Iraq was for a permanent war drive and militarization of society. But such a strategy could only lead to further economic ruin and the intensification of class antagonisms. In the Spring of 1990 this contradiction was becoming blatant. The Iraqi economy was shattered after eight years of war with Iran. Oil production, the main source of hard currency, was restricted while oil prices were relatively low. The only options for redeeming wartime promises of prosperity in peace were a rise in the price of oil or more war. The former choice was blocked by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Saddam's bold leap to resolve this impasse was to annex Kuwait and its rich oil fields.

This gave America the opportunity to reassert its political hegemony, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world as a whole. With the hope of exorcising the specter of Vietnam, the Bush regime prepared for all-out war. The Bush administration hoped for a quick and decisive victory that would evict Iraq from Kuwait but at the same time leave the Iraqi regime intact. However, to mobilize the home front for war, Bush had to equate Saddam with Hitler and so became increasingly committed publicly to toppling the Iraqi leader.

With this commitment the American government now sought to impose such a military defeat on the Ba'athist Party would be obliged to replace Saddam with someone else. Indeed the Bush regime openly invited the ruling circles in Iraq to replace Saddam Hussein with the approach of the ground war in March. However, the mass desertion of Iraqi conscripts and the subsequent uprisings in Iraq robbed the American government of such a convenient victory. Instead they faced the prospect of the uprising turning into a full scale proletarian revolution, with all the dire consequences this would have for the accumulation of capital in the Middle East.

The last thing the American government wanted was to be drawn into a

prolonged military occupation of Iraq in order to suppress the uprisings. It was far more efficient to back the existing state. But there was no time to insist on the removal of Saddam Hussein. They could ill afford the disruption this would cause. Hence, almost overnight, Bush's hostility to the butcher of Baghdad evaporated. The two rival butchers went into partnership.

Their first task was to crush the uprising in the South which was being swelled by the huge columns of deserters streaming north from Kuwait. Even though these fleeing Iraqi conscripts posed no military threat to Allied troops, or to the objective of "liberating" Kuwait, the war was prolonged long enough for them to be carpet bombed on the road to Basra by the RAF and the USAF. This cold blooded massacre served no other purpose than to preserve the Iraqi state from mutinous armed deserters.

Following this massacre the Allied ground forces, having swept through southern Iraq to encircle Kuwait, stopped short of Basra and gave free rein to the Republican Guards - the elite troops loyal to the Iraqi regime - to crush the insurgents. All proposals to inflict a decisive defeat on the Republican Guards or to proceed towards Baghdad to topple Saddam were quickly forgotten. In the ceasefire negotiations the Allied forces insisted on the grounding of all fixed wing aircraft but the use of helicopters vital for counter-insurgency was permitted for "administrative purposes". This "concession" proved important once the uprising in the South was put down and the Iraqi state's attention turned to the advancing insurrection in the North.

Whereas the uprising in the Basra region was crushed almost as it began, the Northern uprising had more time to develop. It began in Raniah and spread to Sulaimania and Kut and at its height threatened to spread beyond Kurdistan to the capital. The original aim of the uprising was expressed in the slogan: "We will celebrate our New Year with the Arabs in Baghdad!" The defeat of this rebellion owed as much to the Kurdish Nationalists as to the Western powers and the Iraqi state.

Like all nationalist movements the Kurdish Nationalists defend the interests of the propertied classes against the working class. Most Kurdish Nationalist leaders come from very rich families. For example, Talabani comes from a dynasty originally set up by the British and his parents own luxury hotels in England. The KDP was set up by rich exiles driven out of Kurdistan by the mass working class uprisings of 1958 when hundreds of landowners and capitalist were strung up. As a result of these disturbing events a meeting of exiled bourgeois in Razaeia, Iran, organized nationalist death squads to kill class struggle militants in Iraqi Kurdistan. Later they carried out racist murders of Arabs. During the Iraq-Iran war very few deserters joined the nationalists and the PUK received an amnesty from the Iraqi state in return for repressing deserters.

rural areas. Peasant uprisings (e.g. in *Aali-azarchi* which lasted about 3 years before being violently suppressed) were a constant headache for the semi-feudal landowners and the state.

Urban struggles intensified with the nine-day strike of Kirkuk oil workers in 1946 (put down with loss of 10 lives). Unemployment and homelessness were rampant. There were thousands of *sarifas* (shacks made of palm branches) around and inside Baghdad.

1956 (Suez Crisis) had a massive impact on Iraq, with demonstrations against the Iraqi regime who were seen as British stooges. The Palestinian issue also helped radicalization. I still wonder why there wasn't a revolution in 1956! These internal and external events led to the formation of the *Free Officers* (nationalist/Nasserist) who had links with the Iraqi 'Communist' Party (I.C.P.) but not so much with the Ba'ths.

**Q: The way I see it there were two main contradictions in the Iraqi society at this time (1946- 58). One between the emerging proletarian movement and capitalism and one, left over from the past, between capitalism and the feudalist landlords. Do you agree?**

A: No, I don't agree with this neat and simple text book analysis, because even prior to '58 the feudals owned not only the rural areas but also a huge portion of the urban areas. Hotels, factories, and residential areas belonged to them as well as the village. The majority of peasants' were therefore proletarians, but with a far worse living standard than their urban counterparts.

**Q: In 1958 Qasim and the Free Officers seized power and ousted the Monarchy, but some of the gains were recuperated.**

A : That's true but the significant thing was the level of class struggle. The Monarch and some of his ministers were killed by those they called prostitutes. For one year or so no one could control the workers. Even the I.C.P. which unfortunately had a massive base within the population (despite its attacks on the working class) could not control the angry proletariat, basically because workers were armed. People took food from the shops without paying for them. For them money was obsolete.



\* \* \*

The situation of the Shura members is now fairly precarious. They have to keep up to date, hour by hour, on the activities of the Nationalists and the Baathist Army. The Shuras now have information networks from city to city, which largely involve individuals traveling at short notice around the area. They are worried that the Kurdish Front might secretly allow army divisions into Sulaimania or that they may have inside information about the movements of government troops.

A few members of the Shuras know from experiences in the Sandaj revolution that when the Nationalists scatter and desert a city without warning the inhabitants, a massacre is imminent. They are therefore on the lookout for mass movements of Kurdish Front forces.

One day a man in Kurdish clothes was shot dead, who was known to be a secret policeman. The documents he had on him showed that he had permission from Masoud Barzani to pose as a peshmerga. It is unclear who killed him, but it was definitely not the Nationalists.

On our way back, one of the interesting things we were told was that the agreement between the Baathists and the Kurdish Front was signed ages ago. It was kept secret because the issues of “compromise” and “autonomy” have become a farce and the PUK and KDP are aware of the mass support for the Shura movement. Proletarians are fed up with compromises and want to continue the fight instead.

## **The Class Struggle in Iraq - an interview with a veteran**

*The following interview was first published in 'Workers Scud - no patriot can catch us!' (London, June 1991), a collection of articles reflecting on the Gulf War.*

**Q: Can you briefly tell us about the class struggle in Iraq before the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958?**

**A:** In the 1940's and early 1950's the class struggle was mainly situated in the

These Kurdish Nationalists, like the international bourgeoisie, recognized the importance of a strong Iraqi state in order to maintain capital accumulation against a militant working class. So much so, in fact, that they merely demanded that Iraqi Kurdistan be granted the status of an autonomous region within a united Iraq.

In the uprising they did their best to defend the Iraqi state. They actively intervened to prevent the destruction of police files and state property, including military bases. The Nationalists stopped Arab deserters from joining the “Kurdish” uprising, disarmed them, and sent them back to Baghdad to be arrested. They did all they could to prevent the uprising from spreading beyond the “borders” of Kurdistan which was its only hope of success. When the Iraqi state began to turn its attention to the uprising in Kurdistan the Kurdish Nationalists' radio broadcasts did not encourage or co-ordinate resistance but instead exaggerated the threat posed by the demoralized Iraqi troops still loyal to the government and advised people to flee to the mountains. Which they eventually did. None of this is any surprise if we examine their history.

Although, as we have seen, there was much hostility towards the Kurdish Nationalists, they were able to gain control and bring to a halt the insurrection in Kurdistan because of their organization and greater material resources. Having been long backed by the West - the KDP by the USA and the PUK by Britain - it was the Kurdish Nationalist parties that were able to control the supply of food and information. This was vital, since after years of deprivation, exacerbated by the war, the search for food was an overriding concern. Many individuals were mainly content with looting food, rather than with maintaining revolutionary organization and the development of the insurrection. This weakness allowed the Nationalist organizations to step in with their ample supplies of food and well established radio stations.

The War in the Gulf was brought to an end by the refusal of the Iraqi working class to fight and by the subsequent uprisings in Iraq. But such proletarian actions were crushed by the combined efforts of the various international and national bourgeois forces. Once again, nationalism has served as the stumbling block for proletarian insurrection. While it is important to stress that Middle East politics is not dominated by Islamic fundamentalism and Arab Nationalism, as it is usually portrayed in the bourgeois press, but rests on class conflict, it must be said that the immediate prospects for the development of working class struggle in Iraq are now bleak.

The war not only resulted in the defeat of the Iraqi working class but also revealed the state of defeat of the working class in the USA, and, to a lesser degree, Europe. The western anti-war movement never developed into a mass working class opposition to the war. It remained dominated by a pacifist

orientation that “opposed” the war in terms of an alternative national interest: “Peace is Patriotic”. While it expressed abhorrence of the Allies’ holocaust it opposed doing anything to stop it that might bring it into confrontation with the state. Instead it concentrated on futile symbolic protest that simply fostered the sense of helplessness in the face of the state’s war machine.

Following the defeat of the insurrection, the Western media’s misrepresentation continued. The proletariat was represented as helpless victims, ripe for patronizing by the charities, grateful for the spectacles of pop stars flogging the Live Aid horse once more. For those that remembered the uprising a “Let It Be... Kurdistan” t-shirt was the obvious answer. Whilst the uprising was defeated we cannot allow its aims and the manner of its defeat to be distorted without challenge” hence this text.

The failure of the working class to recognize its own class interests as distinct from the “national interest” and sabotage the war effort can only serve to deepen the divisions amongst our international class along national lines. Our rulers will now be that much more confident of conducting murderous wars unopposed elsewhere in the world, a confidence they have lacked since the working class ended the Vietnam war by mutinies, desertion, strikes and riots.

## **OPPOSITION TO THE WAR IN IRAQ**

There has been a long tradition of class struggle in Iraq, particularly since the revolution in 1958. With Saddam’s strategy of a permanent war drive to maintain social peace this struggle has often taken the form of mass desertion from the army. During the Iraq-Iran war tens of thousands of soldiers deserted the army. This swelled the mass working class opposition to the war. With the unreliability of the army it became increasingly difficult for the Iraqi state to put down such working class rebellions. It was for this reason that Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against the town of Halabja in 1988.

Following the invasion of Kuwait there were many demonstrations against its continued occupation. Even the ruling Ba’athist Party was obliged to organize such demonstrations under the slogan: “No to Kuwait: We only want Saddam and Iraq!” in order to head off anti-war feeling. With the dramatic rise in the price of necessities - food prices alone rising to twenty times their pre-invasion levels - there was little enthusiasm for war. The common attitude throughout Iraq was one of defeatism.

Despite a 200% pay rise desertion from the army became common. In the city of Sulaimania alone there were an estimated 30,000 deserters. In Kut there were 20,000. So overwhelming was the desertion that it became relatively easy for soldiers to bribe their way out of the army by giving money to their officers.

militant organizations and workers’ power bases, shuras have become a reality, setting a precedent in the history of the Iraqi working class. However, they result from the experiences of more than 10 years social change within Iraq, as well as from the history of workers’ shuras throughout the world.

As the despotic Baathist regime weakened, workers were able to breathe more easily and began to carry out more large scale class activities...

The shura movement spread like gospel amongst the workers... The movement developed in spite of the weaknesses of our movement. However, it was weakness of organization, the isolation and separation of radical socialist avant-gard militants and a lack of communist vision and socialist perspective that allowed reformists to take over. As a result of this, the brutality of the state’s counter-offensive, the reinvasion of the towns and the short duration of the uprising, the workers did not have enough time to overcome their weaknesses with regard to the shuras.

The “exploited” had organized themselves into shuras in most camps, villages, and towns in liberated areas of Kurdistan, but the weakness of workers’ shuras had a bad influence on the creation and running of such “poor people’s” shuras.

The bourgeois opposition parties tried desperately to put their policies into practice, for fear of the class demands and economic, social and political program of the shuras enabling the workers to take power. The opposition parties made use of the institutions and organs of repression of the former regime.

In the south of Iraq, the reactionary “Shiite” movement set up its own “Islamic shuras” in order to discredit and manipulate the only radical workers’ shuras. In Kurdistan, the Nationalists didn’t hesitate to use all necessary force against workers’ associations. They shot at striking workers, threatened their leaders, protected and armed the bosses and broadcast workers’ demands as originating from “anarchists” and “troublemakers.” This antagonism between Nationalist forces and workers’ shuras determined the political climate in Kurdistan.

Now, following the reinvasion of towns by the Barbaric Baathist regime, social and political perspectives are as before with famine, misery, poverty, unemployment threatening the lives of workers more than ever. However, the dissatisfaction that sprung up well before the uprising will continue to spur on a battle against this world, carrying the memories of the uprising with it.

The military counter-offensive on the regime, the alliance between Kurdish Nationalists and central government can not be erased from workers’ memories and activities...” (PROLETARIAT #6, CPO)

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“The contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the working class, the development of proletarian perspectives and social change were all at the heart of the March uprising. Since then, struggle by the exploited in Iraq against the capitalist way of life has been apparent in repeated agitation against the state.

Widespread reinforcement of self-organization and the creation of workers' shuras signifies an important qualitative step in the revolutionary development of proletarian political activity.

Workers were fully involved in setting up shuras in many liberated towns. In Arbil, cigarette factory workers, weavers and chicken farmers set up shuras and subsequently a center for workers' shuras was established. The aim was to have a headquarters through which the activity of various shuras could be coordinated. Similarly, in Sulaimania, cigarette, electricity, clothes and municipal workers including “Tahir” and “Hmurabi” factory workers formed shuras at “Nassir” camp. Chicken farmers and the unemployed in Sulaimania set up a joint shura with petrol workers in Kirkuk.

The main point of discussion during the first workers assembly was the need for self-organization and its importance in class struggle. Speeches were made about the Shuras and their formation.

In subsequent meetings, workers, who were thrilled to take part, elected representatives in free and direct voting. Economic and political suggestions were made and basic aims and principles agreed. Municipal workers from Sulaimania read out a report, which was later published about links between workers and political parties.

These meetings showed workers what strength can be found in unity and they began to feel that Big Brother was no longer watching them. From time to time, from every corner, workers would stand up and describe the poverty and misery of life imposed by capitalism and the repression and intimidation they suffered under bosses and capitalists. They gave accounts of barbaric and inhuman behavior and the unbearable life of workers. Following on from previous worldwide historical experience, the bell of liberty, equality, and workers' government rang throughout Iraq... The creation of shuras is not only expressed in workers' power against the bourgeoisie by way of determined self-organization, but also gave them a useful and necessary instrument with which to acquire the unity of political and social demands and establish widespread political organization.

The sight of a liberated town gives an idea of the scale of battles fought by workers for freedom and true equality. As a socio-political force, workers emerged from the depths of society to a serious social and political role. As large

But these working class conscripts did not merely desert, they organized. In Kut thousands marched on the local police station and forced the police to concede an end to the harassment of deserters.

Two days after the beginning of the war anti-war riots broke out in Raniah and later in Sulaimania.

## **A comrades' testimony: A Journey to Iraq**

### **From Communism #7**

On August 1st 1991 there was a loud bang during the night in Tehran and we heard that a food storage warehouse had been blown up in protest at delays in distribution of welfare food allowances. People had been waiting two months for their social security food supplies. Apparently, nighttime explosions are quite common, public buses being the most frequent targets.

Tehran has 11 million inhabitants and the traffic and activity in the city at night is busier than most European cities during the day. Nearly every Iranian we met asked incredulously “why did you come here?,” saying they hate the system and describing how hard life is in Iran. However, it was difficult to find any written expression of the class struggle. Comrades living there confirmed that this is the case and explained that there are Pasdaran (“Revolutionary Guards” - government soldiers) specially employed to whitewash anti-government and anti-religious graffiti. We were unable to find any political leaflets or publications either.

The Pasdaran's most visible concern was with the Islamic dress code for women. Any man in Iran, whether an official Pasdaran or not, can make himself a self-appointed guardian of Islamic moral values and can reproach any woman he considers to be flaunting too much of herself. They are on the street, in the shops, in hotels... always watching to see whose scarf has slipped too far back or who is not wearing the mandatory socks or tights under her overcoat. Women “unsuitably dressed” are barred from offices, museums, will not be served in shops or restaurants.

The only advantage for women in this male-female apartheid is that they rarely get asked for their identity cards and rarely get searched. The examples given here actually represent a major relaxation in the dress code. Previously, women were stoned for showing a strand of hair and black chadors were obligatory.

Now people have gradually pushed back the limits imposed on them and wear “Western” clothes covered by European-style raincoats instead of a chador. They can show their fringe under the headscarf and men are now allowed to wear short-sleeved shirts. This change is also reflected in the distinct decrease in public Islamic fervor. Up until 1987, Friday prayers were held in a major, very long and wide street called Revolution Street. Thousands and thousands of people would go and the street was closed to traffic. We went back there one Friday, to find a Mullah preaching himself hoarse to only eight people, whilst cars and buses drove up and down. The government knows it can only reverse this trend at its peril.

The atmosphere in Tehran is very tense. Many people have told us that “Iran is pregnant with revolution,” and this is certainly the way it feels. People are impatient, tempers easily frayed, and they smile and laugh only rarely. Homelessness, unemployment, food prices, the number of drug-addicts and, very visibly, the anger of proletarians are on an upward spiral. Almost everybody we spoke to told us “Life is very difficult here... Everything is expensive... Our revolution wasn’t to bring these bastards to power...” As one taxi driver said: “Sometimes I am forced to take on so many jobs that I don’t see my wife and children for a whole week and this is certainly the case for most of my colleagues.”

In July 1991 there was a demonstration in which people demanded more food. They used a slogan “We have become beggars, the Mullahs millionaires.” The demo spread over Tehran, Asfahan and Hamadan. Seven women were killed in Tehran when they discarded their headscarves. Further demos occurred on August 18th 1991, and spread over Tuysarkan, Hamadan, Zinjan, Tehran, and Asfahan. The same slogan was used and there were clashes resulting in 2000 arrests and 5 deaths in Zinjan, 5 arrests in Asfahan, and a further 50 deaths in Hamadan. In Tehran a demonstrator set fire to the City Hall and killed the mayor.

As a result of increasing class struggle, the government has become roughly divided into two main factions - something totally contrary to the philosophy of the supposedly united “Party of God.” Rafsanjani realizes that liberalization and increased tolerance is necessary to avert another revolution. Khomeini and his followers still favor the hardline approach.

After spending days enquiring about the relative safety of various routes, we went to Sulaimania.

The border between Iran and Iraq is not marked, with often only a single Pashdar sitting at an apparently arbitrary place. He is not so much interested in preventing people crossing or scrutinizing travel documents as he is in assessing

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“The proletariat must distinguish itself from nationalism and the Parties of God and proletarian socialism cannot survive if it does not realize this separation. Nor can it remain standing without a powerful autonomous organization that can effectively take on the tasks of the proletariat and the exploited in general. In their daily struggles, proletarians and the exploited masses must express their autonomy, must show everybody that they have a social movement of their own, a different social perspective and that they are not followers of capital and its free market. They are not linked up with any American strategy (the New World Order), nor with any Arabic or Kurdish nationalism or any other Parties of God.

On the contrary, they must show that they oppose all of these and that they have a completely different aim - dictatorship of the proletariat and universal liberation. This is why it is essential for proletarians in their daily activities, in assemblies, in strikes, in their claims and watchwords... to put forward their political interests. In this process socialist proletarians, radical factions, and the avant-guards of the movement have the practical task of assuring the formation, propaganda and organization of proletarians within a different framework. We have to confront the miserable conditions of life, the economic blockade... If we are told that our unity and protests are inappropriate and serve the interests of the Baathist power, then the socialist proletariat’s answer is clear:

We do not want to sacrifice ourselves to inter-bourgeois antagonisms, and whilst against the economic blockade, proletarians are demanding wage rises for those contributing to production... Proletarians must fight against the pressure of the imperialist United Nations police force in Kurdistan and in the South, because these forces are not only not helping people, but on the contrary, put into practice capitalist policies to destroy revolutionary forces.

There is no doubt about the fact that current working class struggle throughout the world, and particularly in Iraq, has shown that the proletariat cannot achieve anything whilst divided. This is the reason why we must stick together and fight to set up general assemblies, to organize a centralized movement that can give strength to proletarians to “mount the world stage” and become truly active, representing the needs of their struggle... Only as a centralized and united movement will the proletariat be able to confront the bourgeoisie and get their message across to proles throughout the rest of the world. It is only in this way that, in the face of other tendencies existing within the movement, socialist proles and socialist groups will be able to develop and realize the communist content of proletarian struggle...” (WORKERS’ VIEW #1, CAG)

Instead the Shura members turned and ran - and they still cannot find words strong enough to express their regret for such a gross error.

\* In the beginning of September Communist Perspective Organization received a letter purportedly from the Shuras, asking to arrange a meeting with them in Halabja. On the day of the meeting, CPO members were waiting in their headquarters for them. However, when a comrade saw approximately 400 armed Peshmerga advancing toward the area, the comrades realized they had been set up. They positioned themselves on the roof to defend themselves and many Shura and CPO sympathizers joined them.

The PUK had intended to disarm them and had written the bogus letter in order to be sure that active CPO members would be in the building at the time... The Peshmerga realized that they were ready to retaliate and told them that they just wanted to talk, but CPO replied that there can be no point of common discussion between them and the Peshmerga. When the Peshmerga realized that the crowd were on the CPO's side, they turned back, telling people that nobody can to them, they are very aggressive...

#### **Slogans that were used by the Shuras**

“Bread, Work, Freedom. Shura’s Government,” “Long live rule by the Shuras,” “All power to the Shuras,” “The only alternative to the Baathist regime is the Shuras,” “Freedom of speech, opinion, and organization,” “Unconditional political freedom.” “We should be armed to safeguard the Shuras’ rule,” “Equal rights for men and women,” “We demand Workers’ Councils, not parliamentary democracy.” “Halabja, Budenan are the Hiroshimas of Kurdistan,” “For a 35 hour working week,” “Revolutionary people! Set up and join Shuras,” “The right of dispossessed villagers to return home,” “Rise up and fight! Break the institutions of fear,” “The occupying forces must get out of Kurdistan,” “Long live self-determination for the Kurdish Nation,” “Long live solidarity with all workers’ Shuras,” “No rebuilding police stations, Jash, and public militias,” “The Shuras will heal the wounds of Kurdistan’s exploited,” and “All administrative organs should be democratically elected,”

#### **Translation of leaflets distributed by various Shuras**

“Do the Kurdish Front and Nationalists share common interests with the Baathists? If not, how can it be explained why, when we attacked the secret police headquarters, the Kurdish Front seemed to share their pain and called for us to ‘Calm down... you have got them surrounded in any case...’ Why should it be that the KF shot soldiers, but spared the lives of secret policemen? And how is it that the day after the attack on the headquarters, the policemen were in position on the roof of the building fully armed? We saw how Peshmerga handed back commandeered tanks and artillery to government forces. Does this not mean that the KF is in fact protecting the State and its Baathist Regime? The answer is yes and we must recognize them as the enemy of the people.” (NEW LIFE - SSFA)

their “bribing potential,” searching for hidden dollars and goods obviously intended for sale in Iraq. He then frightens smugglers into bribing him to let them pass. This is a further example of the changing social climate, whereby previous “guardians of Islamic morals,” prepared to kill anyone threatening to corrupt the Muslim State, are now more interested in personal financial gain. We were not body searched - fortunately, as we had leaflets hidden in our underpants and dollars in our shoes.

The first town we entered, Nizarah, is a devastated area, now full of refugees from Sulaimania, Kirkuk, and Arbil provinces. There are several Red Cross and U.N. camps but people overflow in their thousands to the mountainsides. Their only shelter are lean-tos that they have built out of branches and leaves.

Between the border and Nizarah, there are two checkpoints manned by Peshmerga from the Kurdish Front. They levy taxes on smuggled goods and search for Arabs traveling in the area, most of whom are deserters and anti-government militants. In their attempts to keep “Arab” and “Kurdish” communist militants divided, the Peshmerga want to force Arabs out of Kurdistan (except those they can make use of). It is dangerous for Arabs traveling around Kurdistan and to gain any degree of protection they have to be able to prove that they are Peshmerga for the Kurdish Front (KF). The only Party in the Front that will accept them is the Iraqi CP. Any Arab found by Nationalist Peshmerga without KF documents is taken prisoner and then handed over to the Iraqi authorities, most likely to be shot. However, despite the risks involved, some Arab comrades working with the Shuras do manage to travel to and from Kurdistan, holding meetings with Kurdish comrades and taking information back to militants in Baghdad.

When Talabani was in Iran one day in his car he passed many of the refugees fleeing into Iran. At first nobody realized it was him, but when he stopped nearby one old woman recognizing him bent down, scooped up a handful of the mud she was walking barefoot in, and asked him to lean out of the car window so that she might throw the mud in his face. He remained composed. “Of course,” he replied. “I will do whatever the Mothers of Kurdistan request of me.” The woman dropped the mud and cried limply, “What have we done to deserve this? Why are you doing this to us?”

Since government-Kurdish Front negotiations, the checkpoints around Sulaimania are manned by Iraqi soldiers and Peshmerga of the Kurdish Front (mainly KDP and PUK) working together. The soldiers sent to man checkpoints and to go on patrols in the Sulaimania district are young conscripts and are terrified of the Kurdish Front. Firstly, they realize that a breakdown in negotiations may result in them all being killed in new fighting. Secondly, they know that if they try to desert, the Kurdish Front will round them up and send them back to their army units - to a certain death. Thirdly, and most importantly, the lack of a centralized

and well-organized proletarian group in Kurdistan means that there are very few places to which the soldiers can turn for solidarity and mutual support.

At the end of July there was further fighting and Kirkuk came back under the control of the Shuras and other insurgents. Militants found government documents marked "Confidential - Top Secret, June 1991" (when KF-Baathist negotiations were still in progress) in one of the secret police stations. These give orders to shoot "troublemakers from Shuras, Iraqi Communist Party, and Islamic organizations, and to kill, on the spot, any soldier who appears to have deserted or who cannot account for his gun...."

On arrival in Sulaimania, we went straight to see some Shura contacts. We were waiting for a comrade, who was to take us to one of the Shura bases. Suddenly, he rushed into the house, grabbed his gun, cocked it, acknowledged our presence with a hurried "Hi" and rushed out. We all followed, thinking that fighting had started up again. Out on the street we saw a man pointing a rifle at a group of women crouched on the ground. The comrade ran up behind him and shouted "Drop it or I'll shoot." People started running out of their houses, armed with pistols, and surrounded the man. He was forced to give up his rifle - but in the scuffle a few shots were fired and overheard by Kurdish Front Peshmerga out on patrol of the city.

They got out of their jeep and asked A. to show them his license for the rifle. Our comrade replied with derision, "You can wait all year and I wouldn't even show you a license for a bullet." He turned to the crowd and said: "The Kurdish Front want to take our rifles off us and hand them back to the Baathists, just as they returned our commandeered tanks to them." The Peshmerga were livid but they could sense the animosity of the crowd. After a short discussion amongst themselves, they climbed back into the jeep and drove off. Our comrade then took us to see one of the Shuras. They told us that we had arrived at a bad time and that the length of our stay would be determined by the danger of the ever-changing situation in Sulaimania. They had heard that 250,000 soldiers were going to advance on Sulaimania, so it was vital for them to constantly keep up to date with events. They warned us that long discussions may not be possible, as they would have to leave to assess the situation at regular intervals, especially during the day.

There were 56 Shuras in the beginning, each one set up largely according to district. Existing Shuras would call for people to set up further ones in their own areas. However, many of them had widely conflicting viewpoints and so people would tend to join the Shura most closely representing their own ideas.

All leaflets and publications produced by the Shuras and other organizations have, to a greater or lesser extent, democratic tendencies. The movement, as far

Kurdish Front headquarters in Zakho, injured and disarmed many Peshmerga and distributed the food supplies, going on to burn down the headquarters and the food warehouses. Some of the Peshmerga fled to Raniyah to get help and on their return searched houses for suspected "ringleaders," imprisoning them, making them pay fines, and releasing them after shaving their heads as an extra humiliating touch.

\* 7/17/91 - There was a violent demo in Arbil which the Peshmerga again tried to bring under control, extolling the virtues of peaceful demonstration, suggesting people wait for the outcome of negotiations with the government. However, they were ignored and the Shura led attacks on government buildings under a slogan "Bread, Work, Freedom."

\* 7/18/91 - Some of the Shuras held a meeting in Sulaimania and decided to support the struggle in Arbil by carrying out similar activities. They tried to keep their plans secret but Kurdish Front spies had infiltrated the Shuras, and knew that continued uprisings were inevitable but were determined to avoid a repeat of Arbil, where the movement left them behind. They thought of ways in which the struggle could be given the direction they desired: By preventing the Shuras from organizing themselves, by manipulating the movement into a purely violent struggle (guerrilla warfare, guns against guns, instead of class against class) a very successful policy, diverting people's attention from the true nature of the struggle and by broadcasting propaganda denying that they had supported the Iraqi Army, preventing looting and aided police in Arbil thus denouncing Shura members as liars, as they had published accounts of such Peshmerga action in Arbil.

The Peshmerga changed tack, shooting soldiers and burning their vehicles, but soon realized that they had nowhere near as much support as the Shuras, whose influence was increasing daily. They tried yet another tactic, calling for a stop to the bloodshed, parading the streets as if on a victory march and then announced "The agreement has been signed. We have autonomy for Kurdistan, democracy for Iraq!"

\* 7/20/91 - CPS, SWC and other leftist organizations organized another demo in Sulaimania. Their principal banner was again "Bread, Work, Freedom." Shura members heard that Barzani had given the Kurdish secret police permission to infiltrate the demos. The demo remained a peaceful march through the city, with the Shura members taking a back seat, only talking quietly to individuals, denouncing the Kurdish Front as the enemy, calling for formation of anti-nationalist Shuras, but this time from the sidelines only. The Shuras made the mistake of underestimating the degree of mass support for them, largely as a result of insufficient contact with Shura militants in central and southern Iraq. The Kurdish Front attacked them during the demo, destroying their banners, beating them up and imprisoning some of them. The Shura missed their chance of rallying massive public aggression against the Kurdish Front, which could have been sparked by a few militants turning their weapons on the Peshmerga.

about 2 hours around one factory. The insurgents were being shot at as they approached, but they outnumbered the factory's defenders. After a while, the shooting stopped and people were surprised to see nationalist Peshmerga coming out of the building, signaling for the people to hold their fire, which they did. The Peshmerga explained that the factories must not be looted as they are needed by the Kurdish state. (There you have it!)

\* 4/3/91 - A demonstration was organized by CPS, SWE and proletarian Shuras. They counteracted rumors spread by scaremongers about the imminently advancing Iraqi forces and the collapse of the Basra uprising, attempting to curb the tide of people fleeing Sulaimania. Slogans used were "We will stay and fight!" information was broadcast about the strength of the Shuras, not only in Sulaimania, but throughout Iraq and people were encouraged to stay and support the movement.

That afternoon fighting started up again in Sulaimania. The army only held out against the rebels for a very short time, being rapidly disarmed following a fierce attack. Yet again, the Kurdish Front returned captured heavy artillery to the army.

\* 6/29/91 - At the same time as the Nationalists were holding demonstrations in Duhok and Panjwin against the withdrawal of the Allied presence in Kurdistan (in contrast to Shura-led demos demanding that they get out) offices, shops, and police stations continued to be attacked in Arbil, Sulaimania, and Dehok, the insurgents commandeering further food and weapons whilst under fire by the Peshmerga. Similar struggles were also taking place in the Al-Thawra district of Baghdad.

\* July '91 - the Iraqi Communist Party Peshmerga, Shuras and other radical leftist group members went to Kalar (a town on the main route to Sulaimania) as they had received information that the Mujahadeen Khalq, who had massacred the whole population of the town of Tchiman shortly before, was advancing on Sulaimania. Kalar is very small and is split down the center by a dual carriageway. The insurgents hid themselves on the roofs of the houses and told everybody to be quiet until the unit entered the town. But when a woman saw that the soldiers were dressed in Kurdish clothes and had hung a portrait of Jalal Talabani on the tanks, she happily (stupidly) rushed out towards them. They then realized that the houses were inhabited and turned the tank guns on them and fired, first aiming at and killing the woman... the insurgents then started shooting, managing to blow up the tanks and kill all the Mujahadeen. Some of them didn't believe that they were Mujahadeen until they searched the bodies and found their papers.

\* 7/13/91 - Food Aid had been given to the Kurdish Front to distribute to the "needy." Naturally, the Peshmerga had shared it out amongst their closest friends and were living well while the poor waited, for over a month, for food and medical supplies.

By the 13th people could not be fobbed off any longer... They attacked the

as "practical activities" are concerned, has been overridingly anti-democratic. However, this dictatorship of the proletariat has gone largely unmentioned, even in publications written by comrades who were amongst the most radically active during the uprising. For example, when secret policemen were taken prisoner by the Shuras the organizers of one Shura consulted the PUK on how they should deal with them, as some members wanted to put them on trial, and convict them accordingly. While they were deciding how best to organize this, radical Shura members took matters into their own hands, breaking into the building and killing all the secret policemen themselves.

During the uprising insurgents had taken control of all government buildings except for the main secret police station. The secret police were shelling the city at random, killing many people, but it was clear that they could not defend the headquarters for much longer. A major mistake was made by the Shuras, mainly due to lack of centralization of information. The pro-nationalist Shuras sent for the Nationalist peshmerga who were in the mountains near Sulaimania, asking for their help in toppling the last Baathist stronghold. These Shuras hailed the Peshmerga as heroes who had saved the day. But the proletarian Shuras, for example Communist Perspective Organization, had been unaware of plans to involve the Nationalists, and were furious.

There is still a major problem with lack of centralization of activities and information today. Some members of proletarian Shuras, who had not heard about very strong anti-nationalist activities had been carried out by other Shuras and had therefore not been able to coordinate with them. In some parts of the city Shuras were welcoming Nationalist Peshmerga as "our brothers," whilst in other areas, Shura people shouted "Down with the Baath regime, Nationalism, and the Kurdish bourgeoisie!"

However, the movement was generally "spontaneous" and pro-working class, with slogans about the poor and exploited of Iraq, etc. Nationalism was initially very weak. The things that enabled the Nationalists to hi-jack the movement were:

1. The Shuras did not have a clear political direction. For example, instead of writing "working class" or "proletariat" in their leaflets and slogans, they used terms such as "the people" of Kurdistan, etc. They did not understand that "People power" - as opposed to "Proletarian power" - is the rule of people as citizens participating in capitalist society. It thus signifies the rule of money and profit, contributing to the health of Capital.

2. The Shuras did not have organized and centralized strategies during the uprising and did not take enough precautions against the Nationalists. For example, it did not occur to them to take over the banks and it was only when

the Nationalist Peshmergas did so that they realized their mistake. As a result of occupying the banks, the peshmerga strengthened their position enormously, having the means to buy and distribute food and other goods, thus increasing people's dependence on them.

3. All Shuras and organizations had democratic tendencies. Even proletarian Shuras were demanding the right to freedom of expression, demonstrations, publications, etc. It can be seen in all their activities that they did not have a practical grasp of the State as a social relationship, attacking concrete manifestations of the State in the form of Baathist party offices, etc., but neglecting to target anti-communist movements, such as Nationalism, as well. This represented counter-revolution within the Shura movement itself.

4. The western media and western aid agencies built up the Nationalist movement with propaganda and practical help. The Nationalists were able to use the local media to denounce the Shuras as "immature troublemakers and looters."

A dangerous consequence of the militants' open participation in the uprising is that most of them are now well-known as communist militants and, in their present defeat, are at great risk. We reminded them of the massacre of the militants of Sanandaj in Iran in 1980. We warned them to be very much on the defensive, if offensive action against Kurdish Front bases is no longer possible. Because of the geography of the Sulaimania province, winter makes it practically impossible to flee from attack. The only way to flee Sulaimania is into the mountains, and the city itself is surrounded by a 60 mile wide ring-road. This was built as a military strategy for greater control of the city, in response to mass desertion and strong militancy in the region.

During discussions two main areas in which comrades in Europe could be of help were highlighted:

1. Financial. They are planning to send some comrades to live abroad, within easy access of Iraq but where they would be able to form a point of contact. We were very happy to hear this and agreed that we need to support such moves toward centralizing and developing communist activity.

2. Written material - they said that the political climate in Iraq is such that the demand for proletarian publications is very high. They clearly have a lot of practical obstacles in their way with regards to writing leaflets, etc. and want us to send them leaflets so that they can photocopy and distribute them. They also asked for books documenting proletarian history that still remain banned in Iran and Iraq, their working class-oriented reading matter being restricted to Marx and Engels.

ies, they started rumors that government and Mujahadeen Khalq army units had arrived in Chamchamal. They frightened people into leaving en masse; first, because there was a great fear of the Mujahadeen Khalq and secondly, because they heard that that evening Jalal Talabani had been at Sheikh Salari Havids' house and had told him to advise all peshmerga families to leave as soon as possible. That same day the peshmerga and their families left the city and told people "The Army is coming.." as they went. Thirdly, the Shuras' propaganda against the Kurdish Front and the Nationalists had been grossly inadequate and insufficient to convince people of the Kurdish Front's lies and quell their fear, particularly in the light of past massacres.

On the same day the Shuras organized a demo, telling people through loud-speakers, "We will stay and fight... those who are leaving are cowards and the gravediggers of this city..."

70% of the city left. 5000 soldiers and 60 tanks arrived the following day.

Sulaimania was taken over after a fight, but there were no subsequent "gratuitous" killings carried out by the Peshmerga against the population. However, in Kirkuk and Chamchamal, revenge was wreaked on insurgents, including old people, children and even hospital in-patients...

\* The cities of Kirkuk, Sulaimania, Chamchamal, etc, were recaptured soon.

This was done mainly by the Iraqi Communist Party, CPS, and other Shura militants. Tanks and military vans were burned down. Nevertheless, the end result was the same, as the State (Kurdish Front, Nationalists) returned and took over remaining property, "to keep it in a safer place," i.e., to give it back to the government. Some Shura members got "very angry" (in an entirely ineffectual way) and argued with the Kurdish Front, telling them that issues of life and death were at stake and should not be played like a game of chess.

\* 5 days after the start of the uprising in Sulaimania, Shuras were holding daily meetings in Amin Zaki Bak School, attended by about 1000 people. Representatives from all the different Shuras came and raised various points for discussion. There were many arguments and some representatives stormed out of the assembly. The main points put forward were: The need for solidarity with Shuras in the South, religion should be separated from the State, the need for political freedom (Democracy), rule by the Shuras or by Parliamentary Democracy (?), self-determination for the Kurdish nation, equal rights for men and women, the Allied Forces must pull out and the class struggle or Nationalist struggle?

\* 3/21/91 - one of the Shuras was keeping 9 secret policemen hostage but killed them without consulting the Kurdish Front.

\* 3/23/91 - The Shura in Kirkuk took over the radio station and broadcast to the city. They also distributed all the food they had found in government supermarkets, and divided the houses of secret policemen up amongst the homeless.

\* During the second uprising in Kirkuk, the insurgents went to take over the oil and gasoline plants outside the city. We were told that there was a battle lasting



control of the insurgents. They occupied all the commandeered government vehicles, the bank, and took over government properties, thus influencing people to concentrate on looting rather than the struggle.

\* 3/16/91 - The anniversary of the Halabja Massacre. A memorial was organized by the Shuras, Kurdish Front, religious parties, Iraqi Communist Party, RF, and some small leftist groups. There were more than 10,000 Shura sympathizers, and the first speeches were made by various Shura groups. The CPS spoke about working class struggles in Turkey, Brazil, etc, how the proletariat and communism are against all nationalist movements, and the conflict in Kurdistan is the same as all others, between labor and capital, bourgeoisie and proletariat. The main slogans used were: "Bread, Work, Freedom," "Bombs, tanks, planes will not chase us from this city" and "Only workers can bring about a different life"

The Kurdish Front, nationalist Shuras and the religious people shouted them down, mocking and ridiculing their political positions.

\* 3/17/91 - The Kurdish Front had not been paid the respect they felt they deserved at the memorial day and realized that the Shuras had widespread mass support. They started to broadcast lies on the radio about the Shuras, saying that many of them were ex-Baathists, looters, troublemakers and emphasizing how the Shuras despise religion, in an attempt to alienate any Muslims from supporting them. They tried to spread rumors that the Shuras had collapsed because of their inability to lead the people and run the city and they announced the establishment of a Kurdish Peace Force.

\* 3/18/91 - On hearing this, the Shuras arranged a meeting and decided to send 5 representatives to see the Kurdish Front, to discuss the rumors and solve the problem. However, many Shuras did not agree with this and organized demonstrations, using loudspeakers denouncing the reactionary and dangerous policies of the Kurdish Front.

CPS made it clear that they are not only against the Kurdish Front, but also against the Kurdish Nation and, along with the members of Hasta and Militant Front (Shura), disrupted the meeting...

This dispute clarified the positions of various Shuras and their individual members and they divided into three main factions: the Communist Perspective Shura, Radical Leftist Organizations and the PUK and KDP, or Kurdish Front

\* 3/18/91 - Fighting began in Kirkuk. CPS and Leftist Shuras went to support the struggle. Many peshmerga went and returned with looted expensive cars, etc.

\* 3/20/91 - Kirkuk was taken over and six Shuras were set up.

At this time the radio reported that Jalal Talabani was in Sulaimania and called for all inhabitants to go to the Peshmerga headquarters to hear "what good news he has to give you." The only people that went were their supporters and when they realized that support for the Shuras had increased and spread to other cit-

We told them that the reason we came was (besides giving financial help and obtaining information) to make a step towards centralizing our activities, to build a basis for continued contact, to develop communist activity through shared experiences and to give direction to the movement. They agreed with all of these points. In discussions, the Shuras members and we agreed on most main points. However, on the whole, they had not thought out clear political principles and our discussions were largely one-sided, with us talking and them listening. They often contradicted themselves which made things quite confusing. They explained how it had been practically impossible to be actively organized for years, up until 6 months before the invasion. They had had to deliberately avoid meeting up with comrades for discussion to prevent the secret police from knowing he had contact with them. Any gathering of more than 3 people was highly suspect in the eyes of the police. Possession of a pot of "TIPEX" (white-out), let alone a typewriter was punishable by hanging, if you had no license for it. Even secretaries had to hand in their typewriters to a private police office every day after work... It was therefore logistically very difficult to produce leaflets, etc. However, 6 months before the invasion, the state appeared to lose its grip and it became comparatively easy to contact comrades, etc. Discussions were then about practical issues of how to arm themselves, how to organize physical attacks and later, how to set up Shuras. Clearly, they have not had much chance to develop opinions on "political theory."

This is one of the reasons why they are so desperate for written material. They kept interrupting, asking us to send them communist literature on our return. "Before the war, which was obviously planned to crush and manipulate the expected uprising, the working class was beginning to start and lead activities to destabilize the State. Events, particularly because of the war, are developing at a much faster pace than the proletariat is prepared for," said a comrade.

### **The main discussions**

Here, in summary, are the main points of discussion.

1. Since the existence of capitalism the world has consisted of two opposing classes, and despite competition amongst themselves, all states are united in a common interest - exploitation of the proletariat.

2. Communism cannot be built in one country. The Iraqi state cannot be abolished by armed uprising confined to Iraq. Uprisings like the one in Iraq are products of the historical experience of the working class, revolution being a continuous - and not isolated - process.

3. We do not advocate guerilla warfare alone as a means of bringing about communist revolution. However, we are under direct armed attack by capitalist forces and on occasion our class needs to retaliate and if possible, go on the

offensive. Obviously, sometimes it is against the interests of the struggle to take up arms and expose ourselves further to capitalist attack. We are an historical class fighting the capitalist class in the form of a social movement, not as one machine against another.

4. Nationalism is a capitalist policy to crush the communist movement, its aim being to hide the true nature of the class struggle. Neither workers nor capitalists are national, they both belong to international opposing classes. "Nationalist" workers have been brainwashed.

We disagreed that nationalism is a planned capitalist policy. The nation exists as a result of the capitalist mode of production. Nation and Nationalism, the differentiation made between Black and White, Men and Women, Queer and Straight, Arab and Kurd, etc, reflect the needs of capitalist society and are not cynical policies. Patriotism is a real characteristic of the bourgeoisie. In this regard, international capitalists seem to be opposing each other, but this only constitutes the competition they need. It is their nationalism which unites them as an international class against the proletariat. Nationalism is not something imposed forcibly by the state on society. It is an integral part of the capitalist social relationship and is not confined to the ruling class. Millions of workers have died and are still dying in defense of the Nation. We cannot say that they have been brainwashed and are sacrificing themselves out of a robotic subjugation to the state. Their sincere patriotism results from the capitalist social relationship and class contradictions.

They contradicted themselves many times, but still insisted that nationalism is a planned capitalist policy rather than a movement evident in human beings subjected to capitalist social relationships.

5. A large proportion of our time was taken up with stories of events in Sulaimania.

6. Party and Class.

Party: All communist struggle and activity aiming to destroy the capitalist way of life since its emergence represents activity by the party of the proletariat... so that your participation in the uprising, our journeys, etc, represent, whether we like it or not, activity by the party, albeit only very weakly centralized. The ICG, for instance, is a centralizing force of existing class struggle. The reason why past revolutionaries were defeated is not because of the absence of the Party, but because of the balance of class power between proletariat and capital.

Class: For us, being "proletarian" is not synonymous with being a "worker." The proletariat as an international class is determined by its struggle against

crowds through loudspeakers. "These are our headquarters, a base for councils of the exploited. Set up your workers' councils. Make the Shura your base for long-term struggle. Bring looted goods and food here and we will distribute them. Class consciousness is the arm of freedom. Revolutionary people, revolutionary exploited, the achievements of the revolution have cost us our own blood! Keep it going! Don't waste it!"

Shura supporters captured six hundred secret policemen and brought them to the headquarters. Some Shura members went to consult PUK leaders in the mountains regarding the 600 prisoners. Noshirwan, a military commander, said that they should not be killed: "they could be useful later." The Shura members themselves wanted to parade the policemen, listing their catalogues of torture in front of the crowds before killing them. However, the crowds were livid at Noshirwan's suggestion and even prevented the Shura from parading the men, pouring into the building and killing them all themselves.

\* By the time the city came under control, there were 56 Shuras in existence, including the Refuse Collectors, Cement, Cloth, Cigarette, and Sugar factory workers' Shuras.

\* Communist Perspective's Shura (CPS), which included some of their members and many sympathizers, were in close contact with the above 5 workers' Shuras. They held meetings in which they discussed how the workers had taken over the factories, killing Baathist managers and employees, etc. Communist Perspective Shura stressed that factory machines should be protected and not destroyed in the heat of the uprising. They anticipated a time when the uprising would be cut off from any external supplies and would have to support itself for food, clothes, etc.

\* 3/10/91 - Shuras were set up in Arbil and took control of the city in 3 hours; there were 42 Shuras.

\* 3/12/91 - Shura's representatives from Sulaimania went to Arbil and held meetings regarding the centralization of work. The Awat Shura told all the other Shuras that a central committee should be formed. This was set up and they started to produce Shura membership cards, to be able to identify those attending their meetings and armed Shura militants. However, there was some conflict and unity broke down as a result of three different viewpoints: Members of the central committee must be politically pro-working class, the Shuras represent "the people" and anyone should be allowed to sit on the central committee, not only communist militants, the members should be democratically elected and anyone opposed to the Baath regime should be allowed to vote.

\* The peshmerga arrived in the city shortly before it came under the complete

whisky inside the shrines, and made love to women...” (London Independent, July 1991)

\* On the 5th of March insurgents took control in Raniyah. Their main slogans called for people to set up Shuras.

\* 3/6/91 - City of Chwar Korna joined the uprising.

\* 3/7/91 - Militant groups and individuals made preparations to attack government offices and installations in Sulaimania. Some insurgents who were unaware that militants had been planning an uprising for months and that much of the points of attack had already been organized, tried to inspire others to join the rebellion. They did so by spreading a rumor that the police headquarters had been occupied by the Peshmerga, thus inadvertently spreading very useful propaganda for the Nationalists (which was very successful!).

\* There were armed insurgents in every area of Sulaimania. Some had been given weapons by Jash sympathizers, others had forced the Jash to hand over weapons if they refused to fight with them. 2-3 hours after the fighting started on the 7th, some insurgents “decided” to form Shuras, which actually came about as a result of communist militant activity, past and present, and the influence of the 1979-80 Shura movement in Iran.

#### **Particular motivating factors to form Shuras were:**

1. A need for more organization and practical direction of the movement by militants, to prevent nationalist peshmerga appropriating the struggle to their own cause. However, at the same time, another group of rebels were, also in the name of Shuras, calling for the peshmerga to return to fight in the uprising. They thought that they could follow the Leninist idea of using the local nationalist bourgeoisie to fight “the greater evil” of the Iraqi state. Most of these insurgents now work with the Kurdish Front.

2. A need to prevent massive looting. Opportunistic sharks were clearing the city of, for example, hospital beds and electrical equipment and taking them to Iran to sell. As hospitals came under the control of the insurgents and increasing numbers of rebels were wounded, such items became vital to the struggle.

3. They saw a need to organize militant action - where their main targets should be and how they should attack them. For example, 48 conscript soldiers were picked up and then hidden by one of the Shuras, to protect them from indiscriminate killing by the Nationalists. They were later released in a safer area. They also aimed to develop their activity and spread it to other parts.

\* The same day nearly 30,000 people, some armed and some not, converged on the Shura headquarters at Awat School, where Shura members talked to the

capitalist society and has a deep meaning which cannot be defined solely on the basis of income, degree of exploitation, etc. In short, the communist movement consists of the anti-capitalist activity of the proletariat. They agreed that, although it is an international class, globally the proletariat is very weak and does not centralize itself internationally as a “class” and a “party.” We discussed how the power of the proletariat in any one country is dependent on our power throughout the world. The same interdependence is true for capitalism - if Bush catches a cold, Saddam sneezes.

7. We had a discussion about Marxism and Marx. A comrade said he considered Marx’s work to be a product of class struggle and Marx to be a fallible militant. We all agreed that capitalism had portrayed Marx’s work as the be-all and end-all of communist theory and Marx as the God of the working class. Communism is a dialectical and social movement and did not start from, nor does it stop at, Marx. It is a movement that digs a grave for idol worship. To illustrate these points, we talked about class struggle before Marx, e.g., the Qaramita and Mazdaq revolutions, and how individuals and organizations existed in Marx’s lifetime, who were not members of the 1st International, did not know Marx and yet had very similar programs to him, e.g., El Productor in Cuba.

8. Peace and War. They totally agreed with the statement used by the ICG in our leaflet: “They drag us to work as they drag us to war.” They agreed that the existence of capitalism signifies war in itself, and “peace-time” can never exist for the proletariat. However, they criticized us for saying “Neither peace nor war,” which we explained was a reaction to the very strong peace movement in Europe, which sees war only as military conflict, not as illnesses, accidents, isolation, work, etc.

9. We strongly criticized and rejected the contents of their publications (and some comrades totally agreed). They by no means reflect the nature of the movement in Iraq, nor even the eyewitness accounts they related to us. They tried to justify the weaknesses of their articles by explaining that they wanted to write them in a language that people would understand and that the situation appeared to demand. Our reply was that we wouldn’t be surprised to hear such excuses in Western Europe, where “social peace” reigns and “getting the communist message to the masses” has assumed a disproportionate degree of importance. However, to hear this in Iraq, where the issue of the class struggle forms part of everyday conversation, was disappointing. The bourgeoisie does not only try to crush us by the use of prisons, massacres, torture, isolation... but also makes us feel we have to modify the language of communism, so that “people will understand.” However, the result is to distort our history and our positions. We pointed out all the leaflets in which they had made demands for the “the right of free political discussion, the right to hold political meetings.” Some comrades told us that it is impossible to find an ideologically sound, or in the communist point of view, a good leaflet produced in Sulaimania.

We asked them where and when they have seen a State grant communists “the

right to destroy all States” (!), which can be the only historical program of our movement. In many places they have written “people” instead of “proletariat,” which is not a mere word, but reflects ideology and we pointed out the danger of this. They explained that as far as they were concerned, “people” means proletariat and that the bourgeoisie are not “people!!” The most striking thing is the contradiction between what they say and what they do. In practice they are against democracy, the nation, free rights... As we mentioned earlier, the past political climate prohibited them from reading communist literature, active discussion, etc. Another reason was that they underestimated the movement, thinking that the “people” would never understand concepts such as the “proletariat.”

### **Leading up to the invasion of Kuwait**

\* About 8 months prior to the invasion of Kuwait, the government announced that those entitled to welfare benefits would be allocated 250 grams oil, 250 grams sugar, 500 grams rice, 1 bar of soap, and 5 kilogram of flour per month per person. Before, the daily wages of government employees (teachers, bank employees, etc) were enough to buy 2 kg of rice and the daily wage of the average worker was enough to buy 14 pieces of bread. Before the Iran-Iraq war, monthly social security food tokens had provided far greater amounts than this per person. Benefits had stopped during the war and this recommencement, albeit at a much lower level, was desperately needed. However, tokens were only distributed for 2 months and now people do not receive any of their allowance. People, desperate for food, started selling their TV, fridge, radio, etc. 80 kg of flour used to cost only 6 dinars, but rose to 400 D. in the North and 800 D in the South. Most of the rotten, rusty factories that had been closed for years were reopened. The cheapest food, potatoes, became a meal for the rich. 1 Kuwaiti Dinar (1000 Fils) was worth 950 Iraqi Fils in 1980, but in 1991 the Iraqi Dinar had been so devalued that 1 Kuwaiti Dinar was worth 10 Iraqi Dinars.

\* Shortly before the invasion the government stopped the conscription of farmers and their sons and announced an amnesty for many prisoners, on the proviso that they return to and start working their land for agricultural production.

\* Conscription (from the age of 17 to 45) was reinstated as soon as Kuwait was invaded. However, vast numbers of soldiers deserted, especially in Sulaimania and in the Marshlands. Many of them couldn't desert, because they didn't have any money and had been sent there without their official papers. In general, most people, in the hope of getting rid of the Baath regime, did not want the government to withdraw from Kuwait. (Another sign of the hopelessness and desperation of the movement.)

\* At the beginning of February the Clan Army leaders in Kurdistan tried to calm the populace, spreading rumors that a Republican Guard Unit had been

set up in Sulaimania. They warned that any popular uprising would result in the decimation of the area in which it arose by the Republican Guard.

\* On the 5th of March 1991 (just before the uprising) there was a meeting between the Clan Army leaders and a representative of the Baath Party in Sulaimania. The Shuras have the documents recording the minutes of this meeting, in which the Government gave the Clan Armies free reign to kill all those involved in any uprising.

\* The night before the uprising, militants (who were to go on to form Shuras) paid a visit to the Jash (Clan Army soldiers) and asked them to help them by giving them weapons. They were given 2 pistols and a Kalashnikov going on to use them to attack houses belonging to the Jash and disarm them. Some of the Jash immediately and willingly came over to fight on their side.

\* One organization, Communist Perspective Organization, was set up about 6 months before the uprising. Shortly before the uprising, another one was formed, called “Uprising Group.” This was based purely on direct action and did not publish any leaflets, etc.

Communist Perspective Organization had developed their political positions and organization before the uprising. They had coordinated their activities with other militants and had clear political objectives. Some of them had already been arrested for militant activity before the uprising.

The militants who took weapons from the Jash had been in contact with Communist Perspective Organization and had asked to work with them in practical anti-State activities. Communist Perspective Organization wanted, above all, to avoid becoming a populist organization only serving to coordinate anti-government attacks, regardless of individual insurgents' positions. They only wanted to work with proletarians dedicated to the same aim.

\* The allied bombing was in progress and the uprising had not yet started in Sulaimania. Deserters came back to Kurdistan from the South and told people that an uprising had started in Kut, Ammarah, Naseriyah, Samawah, and Hellah.

\* On 2/29/91 deserters reported that Basra had been taken over by insurgents and that army units, complete with weapons and tanks, had come over to their side. There was also an insurrection in the Al-Thawra area of Baghdad. The comrades and people we saw also assured us that the movement in the South is far from being lead by the Shiites. In a rare moment of honesty - and against the best interests of capitalism - the media divulged that: “All the damage was the result of anarchists and saboteurs... They were anarchists, criminals. They drank