

## **The Politics of the Gulf War: A Sketchy Outline**

by Dave F.

The following is basically my outline for a talk I presented at a forum in Detroit on the "Crisis in the Gulf: Will the U.S. Intervene?" The forum was organized by a hastily assembled Emergency Coalition Against U.S. Intervention in the Gulf, which was initiated by a small group called the Committee to Support the Revolution in Iran. This Committee consists primarily of independent Iranian and American revolutionaries. The Coalition also included the I.S., ISO, Committee Against Registraton and the Draft and a few other sponsors. While the meeting was poorly attended due to problems of hasty organization and a narrow political base, people who attended felt my talk was useful. The following outline supplements some of the points raised in the November *Changes* editorial.

**A. What are the politics of this war?** While some of its aspects are very complicated and confusing, some key things stand out:

1) *The timing of the Iraqi regime's invasion of Iran.* This cannot be explained on purely military grounds or by Iraq's territorial dispute with Iran over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Iraq has had military superiority ever since the Iranian military command was broken up by the revolution of January-February 1979, and U.S. spare parts have been cut off from Iran since the U.S. Embassy was occupied one year ago. The timing of the Iraqi attack reflects a political decision by the Iraqi government: to establish itself as the new superpower and regional policeman of the Gulf, and to claim for itself political leadership of the Arab world. Whether this move was made in direct collusion with the U.S. is not clear, but there is evidence that it was.

2) *This development cannot be separated from the entire background of United States involvement*, in the Gulf and the Middle East as a whole. The political vacuum into which the Iraqi regime is trying to step is a result of three main factors:

a) the discrediting of the Egyptian government throughout the Arab world as a result of Camp David and the Egypt-Israel so-called 'peace' treaty, which was entirely written and orchestrated by the Carter Administration.

b) the fall of the Shah of Iran, whose army basically represented an extension of American power in the region.

c) the grave internal weaknesses of the remaining governments heavily supported by the U.S. as "pillars of regional stability," in particular Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. According to published reports, the CIA feels the Saudi regime is unlikely to survive the next five years. The "pillars of stability" the U.S. has created rest on political quicksand. The Iraqi regime believes it can exploit this.

3) A secondary factor, but one which cannot be overlooked, is the *shifting political alignment resulting from Soviet involvement in the region.* Iraq, for example, has been the most vocal Arab state in condemning the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan and has won some backing from some other Arab states for this stand. However, whatever you may think about Afghanistan, you should understand that this Iraqi position flows from power politics, not principles. After all, this same Iraqi regime which has condemned Soviet violation of Afghan self-determination is now proclaiming it is "liberating" the Arab Iranians of Khuzestan Province from the so-called "Persian racists" — while the vast majority of the people it is "liberating" are fighting in the streets against the Iraqi army. So rhetoric about Afghan freedom rings pretty hollow coming from this source.

At the same time, the threat of Iraq's military ascendance in this war is pushing some other Arab countries, which are not necessarily pro-Soviet but are afraid of Iraq, such as Syria and Libya, to

strengthen their own ties with the Soviet Union as a kind of insurance policy.

4) It is notable that the most right-wing, pro-U.S. states in the Arab world are the only ones who most openly and actively side with Iraq. However, the one Arab country which is actively aligned with the Soviet Union, i.e. the PDRY (South Yemen), appears to be taking a cautious position and supporting both sides to some extent. The leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization is also being extremely cautious in its approach. The left-wing organizations within the PLO, who have been most forthright in their solidarity with the Iranian revolution, are reported to be assisting Iran (in particular, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). There is also a wild card: the strength of popular sympathy for Iran inside the Arab world, especially the Gulf states and even parts of Iraq.

5) If all these apparently contradictory alignments seem confusing — and they are — there are basically two reasons: a) This is *not* an "Arab vs. Persian" war, despite Iraqi claims. b) It is my personal opinion that this war may be the beginning of a drastic realignment of political alliances and forces in the Middle East, possibly as fundamental as the changes that followed the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. A lot of this is unpredictable at the present time, and this is partly why both of the Great Powers (US and USSR) want to maintain some degree of influence with both Iran and Iraq. Everybody wants to be on the winning side to be positioned for the next political carve-up of the region. Because the history of U.S. involvement in this region has contributed not to peace and justice, but to war and preserving the structures of oppression in the region, it is critical for the American people to oppose the escalation of this involvement which is clearly pointing toward military intervention and even the possibility of a major war.

**B. Where does the danger of U.S. military intervention come from?** Basic factors to be noted are:

1) The specific facts about the U.S. military buildup. (Lots of information can be found in recent MERIP Reports among other sources.) In addition, the significance of the AWACs and hundreds of U.S. military personnel shipped to Saudi Arabia in this war — not an act of "neutrality" but a very concrete intervention against Iran. (A magazine called *Strategy Week* has confirmed that AWACs were used to assist Iraq.)

2) Fundamental fact that the *assertion of U.S. military power in this region results not from political strength, but from weakness.* The political weakness of the U.S. in this area arises from some of the factors cited above: Camp David, U.S. support of the Shah, etc. In particular, Camp David, which was launched by the U.S. as a strategic initiative to "solve" the Palestine-Zionist conflict in a way that would freeze the Soviet Union out of all influence in the area, has backfired. No one trusts the U.S., but this is *not* because the U.S. lacks military muscle.

What must be understood about U.S. policy throughout this region is that it is not only reactionary politically and indefensible morally (in its denial of basic human rights of Palestinians, Iranians, etc.), but that it is politically bankrupt even in its own terms. It is unable to maintain a stable policy toward anyone, because those on whom it relies to preserve "stability" are either its own creations (the late Shah) or the most artificial and medievalist regimes in the world (Saudi Arabia) or those it has simply bought and turned into its own dependents (Sadat).

It is no wonder that the United States, even though many of the crises in the Middle East are the product of its own manipulations, is unable to control the consequences of its own policies. The introduction of U.S. military power in this area is a substitute for politically viable strategies. In this respect the U.S. military escalation in the Gulf resembles the early period of the Vietnam war, but its potential implications may be even more dangerous.

WRITING FOR CHANGES

Last week, a writers' workshop was held in Rochester, Michigan. 2,000 would-be writers attended to hear the gloomy news that they would probably never get published.

As a member of the I.S., you are fortunate that you do not face the same dilemma. Your magazine, *Changes*, is eager to publish what you have to say.

The Political Committee has been discussing ways to improve the magazine—in content, in circulation, and in its usefulness to us as an organization.

One of the most urgent tasks is to expand the pool of writers. The I.S. has many talented writers whose skills are not being utilized. Others may not fall into the category of "talented," but their opinions and experiences could nevertheless broaden and enliven *Changes*.

You may have observed that the first section of the magazine with short articles has dwindled in size—and it was this very section that many members wanted expanded when *Changes* first appeared. Well, the major reason why that section has disappeared is because people are not writing for *Changes*. Few members send in unsolicited articles; we get almost no letters, no reviews, etc. The result is that the writing falls on fewer and fewer people, the range of topics covered is therefore narrowed, and staff people are called upon to write things at the last minute which turn out to be of poor quality.

Many people find the length of articles in *Changes* to be intimidating. But this is a weakness of the magazine—not a strength. There should be more short, lively articles. They don't have to be theoretical. They might describe experiences you have had that made you look at a political question in a new way; they might be responses to articles in previous issues; reviews; commentary on issues like the actors' strike, the Citizens Party's bullshit ad, childrearing under capitalism, etc.

Although I wrote this article in a lively style, this is a serious subject. The magazine is the best public face we have. We are fortunate that the quality of the magazine is already high; it's a good place to start from. But unless we make this our magazine, and unless we can get it out to more people, we are not taking advantage of an important tool.

So send in your articles. Give Dave Finkel a call to let him know if something is coming in that is time-bound so we can reserve space. If you absolutely cannot write, let us know what you would like to see in the magazine. We will try to get someone else to write it. (Although it's been observed that people who say

they can't write still write for rank and file publications, or send letters to the editors of their local newspapers, or their doctoral theses).

At the writers' workshop (which I did not attend, already being widely published by the I.S.), the pros urged new writers not to wait for the first, perfect sentence. We urge the same of you!

Elissa C.

LERP

The Labor Education & Research Project brochure included with this mailing describes LERP's activities and the services it can provide. If your organization or group would like an "expert" speaker on any number of topics, you may well find LERP useful. This includes local unions. If you would like to introduce LERP to other people, write to them for more copies of the brochure and/or *Labor Notes*.

LERP WORKING WOMEN'S PROJECT

The LERP Working Women's Project has begun holding workshops on sexual harassment. Elissa and Jane spoke at Antioch College, for WYSO public radio, and for Dayton Women Working, and will also speak at a meeting of steelworkers in Gary. Enid spoke at a union meeting in Detroit, and will speak at Karen Silkwood Day in Cleveland. The handbook continues to sell very well, with many internationals and locals ordering copies (employers too). The Project just received a grant of \$5,000 from the Aetna Foundation for the handbook.

Women's Project speakers are also available on occupational health and safety for women workers and on equal pay for work of comparable value ("pay equity"). Contact Jane if your group would like to have a speaker, and let other groups know of our availability. The new LERP brochure contains a section on the Working Women's Project. Write for more copies to hand out to those who could use the Project's resources.

NEW MEMBERS?

Congratulations to Mike and Joanne on the birth of Elizabeth Anne.

Congratulations to Bob and Laverne on the birth of Alexander.

Looking for a revolutionary idea in holiday gifts?

# Gift Subscriptions to Changes

Here's your chance to purchase the perfect holiday gift—and keep the money circulating in the revolutionary movement where it belongs. Give gift subscriptions to *Changes*. We hope every member will buy at least one or two. Gift subs are only \$7.50 each. No limit on purchases! The lucky recipient will receive a card informing her/him of your gift.

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## ASSOCIATION FOR UNION DEMOCRACY CONFERENCE

The Association for Union Democracy (AUD) held its first conference in Detroit October 24-26. Over 300 people attended at one time or another, the average attendance at most sessions was about 250. About half those who came were trade unionists, while the other half were sympathetic professionals, mostly lawyers.

AUD was set up about ten years ago by Herman Benson, who has been publishing union reform newsletters for 20 years. AUD has helped various reformers with advice, publicity, and legal aid. Most of these have been obscure, but AUD played an important role in Miners for Democracy and the Sadlowski campaign.

The AUD's definition of union democracy is formalistic—limited to due process, rights as defined by Landrum-Griffin, anti-corruption. Publically, Benson will hold up the UAW and its Public Review Board as a model of democratic unionism. Although they are not hostile to rank and file organization, fighting the employer, etc., these are not things they talk about in their newsletter. Similarly, the emphasis of the conference was meant to be of this narrow sort. It did not turn out that way.

There was an underground political tension between the official AUD version of democracy and the broader conception of rank and file organization, militancy, etc. Also, many UAW members present took strong and vocal exception to Benson and

Victor Reuther's description of the UAW as basically democratic. Generally, the more militant trend within the conference pointed to TDU as their model rather than the UAW's Public Review Board. A majority leaned toward the TDU, i.e., towards our view of union reform, though probably most of them did not know there were two poles. For this reason, it is possible AUD will embody a certain contradiction if it really tries to become an organization, which was the talk at the conference.

In spite of the fact that the tone of the conference went past what AUD sees as its realm of operation, the conference was a big success for them. They certainly expanded their network of union activists and put themselves on the map. The conference was also a boost to us, to TDU and to *Labor Notes*. Ken Paff of TDU was one of the two people to receive a standing ovation (the other was Reuther). IS members from various unions were

impressive and were among the best speakers there. *Labor Notes* was well known in this milieu, but also made some good new contacts.

Kim

[See *In These Times* for Kim's report on the conference.]

## REINDUSTRIALIZING THE IS

The corporate elite and their politicians have declared the need to reindustrialize America. Our nation's basic industries, auto and steel in particular are hard hit. The trucking industry is being convulsed by deregulation.

As goes capital, so goes labor, including its industrialized ISers. To a large extent the current recession has deindustrialized the group. The longer term structural problems of basic industry will mean that some of us will not get our old jobs back. This is particularly true in auto.

The Steering Committee views this as a serious political problem. We have spent the last ten years trying to provide a link between the working class and socialism. Our organization prides itself on its trade union work and on the things we have learned from a genuine dialogue with working people. We don't want to lose this.

At the moment there are a number of comrades who are trying to make decisions about future employment. For the most part they have been left to fend for themselves. We believe the organization would be playing a more active role. In Detroit the District Committee is trying to set up a program for people looking for work. We urge other branches to do likewise.

We would like to offer some guidelines for this effort, in prioritized order:

1. Get back to your original job.
2. Work in the same industry/union.
3. Work in another priority situation.
4. Work in a union setting most like our priorities—a place where you can do political work. This would include industrial unions like rubber as well as some public sector unions like AFSCME.
5. Some people are considering working for unions. In this situation we recommend that people get jobs as organizers instead of working as staffers for the officials.

## BRANCH REPORTS

### CLEVELAND

Cleveland had the honor of being the host city to the Carter-Reagan debate, an occasion which was commemorated with a demonstration. The demonstration was one of those affairs that brings together the entire left—and can leave one with a kind of hopeless feeling. The good thing about the demo was that the Citizens Party got credit by the media (who were too far away to see what was happening) for beating up three Nazis who showed for a counter demonstration.

In late October, the Citizens Party held a public meeting at which Commoner spoke. One hundred and fifty attended, which was a good turnout. The Citizens Party held a meeting last week to discuss the future of the Party.

On November 16, CLUW, North Shore Alert, and others are sponsoring a Karen Silkwood memorial meeting. Enid Eckstein from LERP's Working Women's Project, will be one of the speakers on women's health in the workplace, along with speakers from the IAM and other unions.

A benefit for EFCO (a pro-choice organization) with Kristin Lems is planned for November, and work with Hard Hatted women and TDU continues.

### NEW YORK

Branch members active in the Citizens Party have started meeting with other socialists to discuss future perspectives for the Citizens Party.

Branch members were invited to attend the August 7 Network (NAM's left wing) conference in Philadelphia November 15-16. Although NAM's merger talks with DSOC have run into major hitches (DSOC's right-wing objects), we expect that August 7 will decide to become independent from NAM at this meeting.

### DETROIT

For a full report on the outcome of the election in IBT Local 337, see the October 28 issue of *Labor Notes*, and the next issue of *Changes*.

In brief, the Rank and File Slate won two positions, Secretary-Treasurer and trustee. Both winning candidates are TDU members. While there are many problems to go with a partial victory, it is a plus that this is seen as a victory for the rank and file and a crack in the Holmes machine, especially since Bobby Holmes Jr. was ousted. At present we are working on protests to overturn the election (which seems likely but may take years) and to build and consolidate the organization that came out of the campaign.

A TDU Skills Workshop is planned for the beginning of November.

Our last district meeting was held October 19. Reports were given on the TDU Convention, Local 337 election, Association for Union Democracy conference, and the Labor Committee for Safe Energy and Full Employment national conference. A new member, Mark, was voted in.

We also had a preliminary discussion on the future of the Citizens Party. There was general agreement that our experience in the Citizens Party here has been a positive one. It has been a turn outward for the district and we have met a lot of new people. It was also clear that many political questions, including what our future role should be and how many resources we can put into the Citizens Party, need to be answered. Further discussion is planned for after the election.

The IS class series is continuing to meet, through mid-December. The most recent class on the economic crisis and American politics sparked a good discussion. Two people from the class have expressed a desire for further political

educational, and we plan to set this up soon.

On October 22 the Citizens Party held a fundraising spaghetti dinner at which Commoner spoke. About 350 people attended; some commented they considered it the party's best event yet. Large meetings have been held in cities throughout the state, including a walking tour of Lansing. Response to canvassing has been fairly good, though the spectre of Reagan may cut into the Citizens Party vote.

While much of the party's future hinges on next week's election, if we are successful in getting the 19,000 votes needed for permanent ballot status people in Michigan are serious about maintaining an organization. The question after the election will be the party's direction and what issues it should focus on. A Midwest Conference is planned for the beginning of December.  
—Marilyn P.

#### GARY

On Sunday, November 9, Kim spoke to IS members and friends in Gary on the topic of "REindustrialization." The meeting was well attended and included four people from the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters group in Chicago. There was agreement that reindustrialization would mean an intensification of the attack on labor, particularly the Reagan version, and that the left needed to develop ways to fight some of the policies associated with reindustrialization and its effects.

The following weekend, Jane and Elissa will speak and lead workshops on stopping sexual harassment for LERP at a meeting of the USW Local 1010 Women's Committee.

IS members continue to be active in a number of locals as well as in the Women's Council in District 31. Balanoff, reform Director of District 31, faces a difficult challenge in the next election for District Director. Although his challenger, Parton, is somewhat of a crook, he is backed by the International, which includes most of the District 31 staff (Balanoff has never been allowed to appoint his own staff).

#### PITTSBURGH

The Ad Hoc Committee to Counter Ku Klux Klan Activity held its first action in Uniontown, Pa., about 50 miles south of Pittsburgh, and drew 500 people in pouring rain to counter a Klan rally of 2-300. There were speakers from the NAACP, Urban League, TDU, and various religious groups, as well as the mayor of Uniontown and the presidents of USW District 15 and UMW District 5. The Klan has gotten a very positive response in the mills in Pittsburgh, where their shtick is anti-affirmative action. However, Steelworker officials supported the rally and sent a busload.

The Ad Hoc Committee includes people from NOW, TDU, the Committee for Lesbian & Gay Rights, the YWCA, religious organizations, black organizations, and various left groups. The left groups worked together well, even agreeing not to hand out their own literature at the rally.

TDU members have been involved in supporting a wildcat which drew a good deal of TV and radio publicity. A steward who belongs to TDU was fired (he had been leading a fight against a new plan of the company's). The wildcat lasted five days and no one was fired. TDU grew out of the strike, will hold a raffle for the fired steward. Wives were active on the picket line.

Hard-Hatted Women is concentrating on writing a grant proposal while it continues to get speaking engagements.

The steelworkers who have been active in the layoff committees are planning an event in January to attack the "tripartite" (union, government, industry) plan for saving the steel industry, as it provides no voice for union members. They hope to get speakers from each of the three "parts."