

No War for Oil

DEFEND KUWAIT

No airforces, of no matter how many states, can return Kuwait to what it was before the Iraqi invasion. And they should not. The defence of Kuwait is in no way a defence of democracy. One of the least democratic "states" in the world, Kuwait's non-party parliament was elected by only 4% of its population. The rest of Kuwait, the 96% other "non-citizens" represent the Kuwait that should be defended. But nobody is defending this Kuwait. Not the United States. Not Iraq. Not the United Nations. Nobody.

Who is the Kuwait which is represented by no government and defended by no army? In 1983, it included 525,000 "overseas workers", as well as a large proportion of the 125,000 "indigenous" workers. The majority of the "overseas workers" were born in Arab or Asian countries. After the 1990 Iraqi invasion, they lost their jobs and were forced to flee over the desert to the Jordan border. In Jordan, some were grudgingly admitted to refugee camps with minimal standards of hygiene and subsistence. (European and American refugees, in contrast, got hotel accommodation). The border with Jordan was officially closed weeks before the outbreak of war.

This other Kuwait did the menial jobs in **their** adopted country which **did** not adopt them. They produced Kuwait's wealth. As workers, they created Kuwait. Can Kuwait still exist when the people who created it are deported? In a war where both sides claim to be defending the loftiest imaginable human values, the majority of occupants of the state both sides say they are fighting for have become stateless and destitute victims of war before the first bombs have been dropped and the first missiles despatched.

The war is being fought by servicemen and women prepared to die for flags and national patriotism. Those who once lived in Kuwait have no flag and no nation. The Kuwaiti government, in power or in exile, never represented them. The countries of their birth refuse to defend their interests. They are workers without a country. In every Gulf mini-state, the so called emirates, such workers are the majority of the people. In Iraq and Saudi Arabia, they form a substantial minority of all workers. Following in Iraq's footsteps, Saudi Arabia has sacked and deported all its Yemeni workers, scapegoated for their government's stance on the war. Whether Middle East governments are pro- or anti-American, their attitude to those who do menial jobs is the same: dismissal and compulsory exile.

Like many others, in other "states", the majority of those who lived in Kuwait no longer live within its disputed borders and will never return, no matter who wins the second Gulf war, if indeed anyone can "win" it.

What was Kuwait - its people - now only exist outside the contested frontiers of what once claimed - falsely- to be a country. Kuwait is everywhere people work in oil refineries, offices or factories to produce wealth for countries who disown them. Who can defend this Kuwait? If anybody, only the massive movement against war which Bush and Saddam Hussein between them have sparked off, a movement among whose ranks no national governments are to be found. What remains of Kuwait can only survive in a war without national boundaries and the national wars they engender. The same is true of the peace movement world-wide. Kuwaitis do not now have a country, never had, and there are millions like them in the Middle East. These are our brothers and sisters. It is they for whom the peace movement must fight.

Not only in the Middle East. The war in the Gulf came home before Bagdad was bombed. In the first waves of war hysteria, any one who as much as looks like an Arab may face abuse or attack, coupled with the questioning of their "loyalties". Most of those targeted by militarist racism believed themselves loyal Australian citizens. As war approaches, and then arrives, they find their patriotism rejected and scomed.

How can a country like Australia, which has a higher immigration rate than any other country except Israel, afford to treat its non-Anglo workers in this way? Australia does not deny citizenship to a privileged few, like Kuwait, but how little citizenship means repression and persecution in war periods. The Chinese, the Germans, the Italians, the Vietnamese, the Iranian and now the Arabs all have gone through their bitter experiences of what "Australian nationalism" means. One capitalist government after another tears up by the roots feelings of patriotism inspired by the high wages now disappearing in Australia's latest "planned" recession. When talk at smokoes turns to Australian patriotism, everyone knows that what is being discussed is the splitting of the Australian working class. Have non-Anglo workers in Australia a country? If nationalism is used to keep the working class permanently divided, has any worker in Australia country?

War demonstrates also the limits of democracy. The Hawke anti-labour government has rejected contemptuously the forms of democratic debate accepted even in the United States. Initiatives for the recall of parliament to discuss the war, as in the USA were first brushed aside by a war-crazed Prime Minister and only accepted after the war was in full swing. Even the United States model of democracy is flawed. A government that does not allow its people to decide by vote whether or not to go to war excludes from popular control the major issues of life and death confronting both individuals and their society. In the past month, Australia has shown itself to be among the "Western" states which most fears majority rule on the question of war or peace. The ordinary Australian has had as little say in the war in the Gulf as the ordinary Kuwaiti. The ordinary American has had as little say as the ordinary Iraqi. Whether or not there is a right to vote, whether elections happen or fail to happen, the inability of a people to decide whether or not to fight a war leaves the most important decisions in the hands of a privileged minority, which becomes a ruling class. It is time to attack what has passed for democracy in Australia in elsewhere in the name of a simpler idea: majority rule.

In opposition to the peace movement, militarist organisations are emerging to champion "collective security" and the "rule of law". They must be challenged on fundamentals. Yes, there is an international law. Yes, it must be enforced. International law, however, is not made by national parliaments or the United Nations. It is a "natural law" in a new sense of the words, a law written by a century of ecological research which forbids the human race to foul the planet they are living in and rules out mass murder to "control" scarce natural resources which should be common property. That law is higher than any national law, and outlaws war as the fundamental ecological crime. That law is now understood by millions. They, liberated from national loyalties like the Kuwaitis, can force all warring governments to obey it.

The only way a system can emerge which allows a free vote on vital issues such as war is when the interests of the planet are seen to override totally those of any nation, by the acceptance of a world that puts the earth first.

Governments that do not put the issues of war and peace to a vote must allow the conclusion to be drawn that they dare not, because the vote for peace would be overwhelming. The Government rejects majority rule for the same reason it rejects all law to preserve the planet: these things make governments irrelevant. The present war is therefore in every sense illegitimate, carried on by an authority itself illegitimate. The mechanism for war operation in Australia must be closed down, since the government has refused even the most minimal consultation on war with the population it claims to, but does not, represent. In order to think globally, it can be necessary to act locally: to abolish all "defence" departments everywhere, we must start with our own.

THE REAL ENEMY IS AT HOME!
CLOSE DOWN THE "DEFENCE" DEPARTMENT!

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