
As Madrid Conference Opens

What is Middle East 'peace' for, if thousands of Iraqi children die?

by Katharine Kanter

During the European Parliament's debate on the Middle East the week of Oct. 21, the National Front (France, Le Pen group) Deputy Martinez intervened as follows:

"The Madrid Middle East Peace Conference is opening. Fine. But what is that peace for?

"Thousands upon thousands of Iraqi children have died of hunger already. Tens of thousands of others will die, without bread, without milk, without sugar, without food of any kind. In the maternity wards and hospitals, there is nothing left to treat people, not even drinking water. This is the result of 14 months' embargo which you have imposed on the people, on the children. The mortality rate is now 104 per 1,000. Whose fault is this? Not theirs. You are all responsible, all of you, for having backed up blind bombing raids and the blockade, which have meant hunger, thirst, suffering. You are responsible for what is turning into genocide, a crime against mankind, which Maurice Allais, the Nobel Prize winner, has also denounced.

"Many other children, of course, are also dying of hunger in the world. But the starving children of Iraq have one point of difference: It is the U.S.A., and their allies, the Western democracies, champions of human rights, who are causing their death. This misery is organized by the richest, most powerful nations on earth.

"Dr. Malhuret, Mr. Ford, Mr. Cot, Mrs. Veil, ye great spokesmen of anti-racialism, can you not hear the silent scream of the Arab children. . . . Or are they subhuman in your eyes?

"Mr. Dankert, what are you waiting for to lift the embargo, to save 7 million children? Why are convoys of food and medicine not leaving for Baghdad?

Censorship

All of the following was excised from the European Parliament's official published record of the debate:

Reply by Mr. Dankert (President-in-Office, European Political Cooperation): I refuse to reply to Mr. Martinez's question.

Martinez: Why, Mr. Minister?

Dankert: Because we are talking about the Middle East

today.

Martinez: Is Iraq not part of the Middle East?

Dankert: Interpret this any way you like. I will not reply.

But, censorship being what it is, errors creep in. The censor forgot to cut the interjection by Peter Crampton (Labour, England) supporting Martinez:

Crampton: Mr. President, I am a little confused about what it says in the agenda, and what the President-in-Office has said. He would not answer a question on the situation of children in Iraq because he considered that nothing to do with the Middle East Peace Conference. I think there must have been some mistake in the translation of the agenda, because the English version says there would be a statement by the President-in-Office on the "situation in the Middle East." Very clearly, the position of children in Iraq is part of the situation in the Middle East, even though it might have very little to do with the Middle East Peace Conference. Could you tell me whether there is an error in the agenda or not?

President of the Session: Mr. Crampton, I think the agenda is very clear. It was up to the President-in-Office to interpret the scope of the debate, and if he felt it related more to the Peace Conference, than to the other issues, that is a matter for him.

British MPs question Iraq policy

In the course of the defense debate in Britain on Oct. 15 Labour Member of Parliament Jeremy Corbyn (North London), outspoken opponent of the war and the blockade against Iraq, said the following with respect to the continuing air raids into Iraqi territory: "[In August] I visited the village of Xerezok a week after it was bombed by the Turkish Air Force. It was claimed that the village was a Kurdish PKK [terrorist] base. It was not. . . . American-built jet fighters screamed over the hill and bombed the village with phosphorus bombs which are still there and are still live. The children, however, are dead. . . . I am led to believe that the coalition forces are operating air security. I cannot believe that Kurdish Air Force planes are taking off without the knowledge, and if it is with the knowledge, it must be with the agreement, of the United States and British military personnel in the region.

Health care delivery crisis in Iraq

An International Study Team visited Iraq and released its report in October, assessing various aspects of the economic and health crisis there as a result of the war and embargo. The team included three medical doctors and two public health specialists, who visited 29 hospitals and 17 community centers throughout the country. They conducted studies of patients, interviewed medical personnel, and analyzed medical records of malnutrition and disease. The following is the synopsis of their published report.

The health of the Iraqi civilian population is compromised by a health delivery system that remains under siege due to precariously low levels of drugs and medical supplies.

Variations in climate and population displacement have created qualitative regional differences both in the disease burden and in the level of health care offered to the population. In the Kurdish north, persons displaced during the civil uprisings will require decent shelter, adequate nutrition, and clean water to survive harsh winter conditions. In the southern areas, including Basrah, the extreme summer heat and badly polluted water systems enhanced the rapid transmission of water-borne communicable diseases to the pediatric population. The vastness of

the south, as well as lagging international attention, may place the southern populations at a higher risk than those living in other areas of the country.

Throughout the country, strained health facilities offer services equivalent to a fraction of their pre-war levels. Most lack even the most basic resources—medicines, anesthetics, syringes, and surgical supplies are all in short supply. X-ray units, laboratories, neonatal units, and operating theaters are either not functioning or are providing only limited services. Generally, antenatal care, supplementary feeding programs, and outreach programs (including immunization) throughout the country remain insufficient at best, suspended at worst.

The health delivery system is also hampered by a lack of potable water and inadequate food supplies for the civilian population, despite minor improvements in the health infrastructure, including water supply, electricity, and transportation, which have occurred over the past six months.

Water-borne diseases including typhoid, cholera, hepatitis, and other non-specific forms of gastroenteritis continue to thrive. Lack of immunization and poor sanitary conditions have resulted in outbreaks of previously uncommon, and completely preventable, childhood diseases such as poliomyelitis, measles, and tetanus.

Finally, poor access to, and limited availability of, essential foodstuffs has resulted in detectable increases in the rates of malnutrition among children and anemia among pregnant women.

... If they are taking off with the agreement of the British and Americans, that is a disgusting spectacle. People who have suffered enough over the past 70 years should not be expected to suffer any more."

In the same Defense Debate, Tam Dalyell (Labour, Linlithgow, Scotland) said the following:

"The Honorable Members seem to assume that the Gulf war was a success, but 4.5 million children are suffering in Iraq, and are dying at the rate of 500 a day. Those are the figures produced by the University of Illinois. . . . I should like to ask the minister the following questions about sanctions:

"What is the legal position in the committing of the international crime of genocide in violation of the international convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide of 1948?

"What is the position in relation to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which this country has signed?

"What is the position in relation to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which this country has signed?

"What is the legal position about the systematic violation of the special protection of international humanitarian law that was guaranteed to children by the Fourth Geneva Con-

vention and the additional [Helsinki] Protocol of 1977? It is reported that the conditions for children are inhuman, degrading, cruel, and genocidal. We must distinguish between the humanitarian problems and any others that may exist, which I do not have time to go into relating to chemical, biological, and indeed, nuclear weapons. The bombing of Tuweitha should at least be monitored for radioactivity.

"What is the government's position on the termination of the international economic embargo and all forms of bilateral economic sanctions? Massive humanitarian relief is needed. That is not only the opinion of my honorable friend Mr. Corbyn and several others on the Labour Back Benches, but the considered judgment of the most senior officials of the U.N. who in name were responsible for organizing the force that went to the Gulf.

"Precisely what is the government's attitude to the problems that have been clearly identified and the need to raise some of the sanctions on Iraqi oil sales, identified in particular by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan? We as members of the U.N. are going against precisely some of the assessments that the U.N. has made. Do the government accept those U.N. reports, or do they not?"