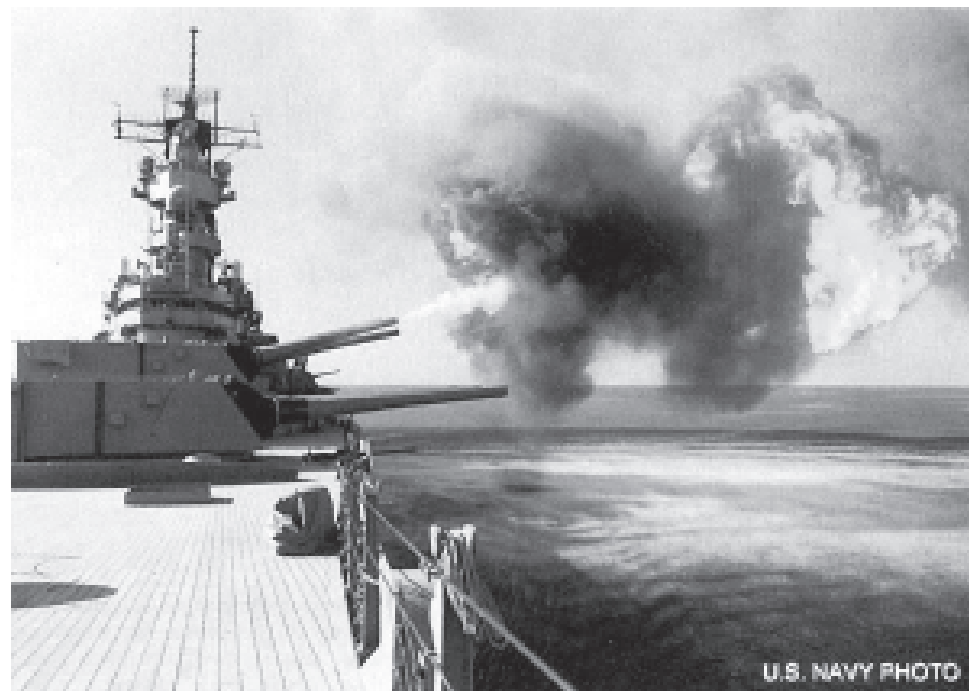


RESISTANCE TO THE 1991 GULF WAR



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This pamphlet was prepared for the Zerowar conferrence which was held in Wollongong on the 8th of December 2002.

“Sabotage the War Effort” is the text of a leaflet distributed by *No War But The Class War* (NWBTCW) at an anti-war demonstration in London in February 1991. NWBTCW was reformed during the 1999 Kosovo War and again in 2001 to oppose the “War on Terror”. They have a website at: www.geocities.com/nowar_buttheclawar

“Lessons from the Struggle Against the Gulf War” was written by the communist group *Aufheben* and appeared in the first issue of their annual magazine in 1992. *Aufheben* have a website containing most of their articles at: www.geocities.com/aufheben2.

“Do You Remember the First Time?” was written in early 1998 when a new US/British military assault on Iraq seemed imminent. *Practical History* have a website at: www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/7672

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 Bombardier 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 light 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 criticised Saddam as a member of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, was held for several weeks before being released after a well-publicised 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.

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’).

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 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 25 reservists publicly refused to serve in the war.

SABOTAGE THE WAR EFFORT!

We do not yet know the full scale of the massacre in the Gulf. We can be sure though that many have already been killed, and that many more working class people on both sides will die until this war is stopped. The idea that the war would be over in a few days is looking as stupid as the claim that World War One would be over by Christmas 1914.

It is not just in blood that our class is expected to pay for the war. As the Daily Mirror put it on the first day of fighting: 'All of us must steel ourselves for whatever hardships, shortages and sacrifices we may have to make. And we SHALL have to make them.' This doesn't mean that people like Robert Maxwell, the Mirror's millionaire owner, will suffer. It means that the rest of us will be told to put up with price rises, longer hospital waiting lists (7500 beds have been put aside for the military), conscription, ecological disasters and whatever else the war throws up.

Behind all the hypocritical garbage about freedom, democracy and liberating Kuwait, this war is about the naked pursuit of profit by rival capitalist gangsters. The real issues are control of the oil fields and crushing the class struggle in all the countries involved.

But we do not have to accept our rulers' murderous power games. There have been many occasions on which the working class, in and out of uniform, has stopped wars. The First World War ground to a halt as a result of uprisings in Russia, Hungary, Germany and elsewhere. British Government plans to start another war in Russia immediately after had to be abandoned when soldiers went on strike demanding immediate demobilisation.

The American war effort in Vietnam collapsed partly because of mass refusal to fight by troops. This ranged from sitting down on the battlefield to blowing up officers ('fragging') - in 1970 even the Pentagon admitted to over 200 fraggings.

During the Iran-Iraq War there was mass desertion on both sides. There were at least two occasions when the Iraqi Air Force was used to bomb mutinous Iraqi troops. Saddam Hussein's infamous chemical attack on Halabja in 1988 was carried out because the city was full of army deserters.

The war can and must be opposed on the home front as well as in the armed forces. There have been massive anti-war demos throughout the world. In France and Holland people have blocked munitions trains. In Spain and Italy millions of workers and high school students have gone on strike against the war. In San Francisco a cop car was burned on an anti-war demo and the Golden Gate bridge has been blocked several times. Anti-war groups are being set up in hospitals and other workplaces in Britain.

We can also refuse to pay for the war in any way by resisting attacks on our living standards - by carrying on refusing to pay the poll tax and other bills, by striking for more pay, by opposing cuts... Only class war can stop the bosses' war.

KEEP THE HOME FIRES BURNING!

LESSONS FROM THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GULF WAR

A new cycle of working class struggle is tentatively emerging in continental Europe over austerity measures required by the Maastricht Treaty. But here in Britain any optimistic anticipation of the prospect of struggles is tempered by the shadow of a recent defeat. For since the historic and inspirational turning point of the poll tax rebellion, the resurrection of autonomous and uncompromised class hatred in Trafalgar Square and the mass refusal of austerity, has come the defeat of the anti-war movement. The Gulf War may not have had an effect on the working class's ability to wage defensive struggles in response to coming offensives, but the revolutionary Left have still to come to terms with our failure to prevent the successful slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi proletarians. It is as if the blood of those thousands of Iraqi mutineers and deserters carpet-bombed on the road to Basra is somehow on our hands; the anti-war resistance in Iraq was so successful it rendered the Iraqi state incapable of defending its gains in Kuwait at all, while the impotence of the anti-war movement in the US and Britain virtually gave the murderous representatives of US/UK capital *carte blanche* to have Iraq bombed back into the Middle Ages.

In order to exorcise the ghost of this defeat we have to undertake a critical reappraisal of where the anti-war movement went wrong. Moreover, we have to reassess our own attempts to prevent the war and how we influenced the strategy pursued by the anti-war movement as a whole. It is not enough to say, as many who confined their opposition to grumbling over their pints must have done, that the outcome was inevitable, that the war couldn't be prevented, that we could never defeat the forces of war, backed by the UN, the police forces and the media. The Vietnam war is a recent enough reminder of how a seemingly omnipotent war-machine can be rendered impotent by concerted opposition amongst soldiers and the class from which they are drawn. And right up until the commencement of Operation Desert Storm, despite the propaganda which accompanied Operation Desert Shield and the lack of any effective redress to it by the anti-war movement, opinion polls suggested that around 50% of the population were opposed to military intervention. Not a bad foundation from which to build an active and effective opposition.

Our failure was not inevitable. Nor can it be solely blamed on the left-liberal leadership of the anti-war movement, for their success in controlling the movement reflected our inability to mount a successful challenge to the leadership, their positions, and most of all, their strategy. So, we have to look at our own role in resisting the war, what we did right and wrong, the strengths and weaknesses of our strategy.

ANTI-WAR STRATEGY

The experience of our class has shown us how capitalist wars can be effectively opposed. For the sake of analytical clarity this opposition may be divided into three separate strategies which are in reality particular yet inter-related aspects of the overall struggle. These may be roughly defined as:

- i) undermining support for the war by stressing the class antagonisms involved;
- ii) actively sabotaging the state's ability to conduct a war and;
- iii) precipitating a crisis 'at home'.

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 rumours 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 harbour 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.

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.

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 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 childrens 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 organised 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 hotted 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 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.

Let us consider these in turn.

i) Undermining the notion of a national interest

The war in the Gulf has served to decimate a once combative oil producing proletariat, to reassert the role of the US as global policeman in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, and also to stimulate another round of capital accumulation based on military procurement. These results may well have been considered during the build up to the war, and could have been factors in deciding to pursue the aims of the Allies by military means rather than through sanctions. But the primary aim of the Allies was to resecure the flow of Kuwaiti oil revenue into the US and UK banking systems, essential for the financing of the US deficit. In other words, the war was fought for the interests of US and UK capital, for their need of injections of finance capital from Kuwait, which have amounted to \$60 billion invested in the US alone.

On the other hand, it was to be the working class who would be made to pay the price for the war. The refusal of Iraqi troops to fight was not anticipated, so casualties amongst British as well as Iraqi troops were expected. On top of the despair of the families from whom they would have been taken, the working class as a whole was expected to suffer as NHS wards were to be denied to us in order to treat the troops. As it was, patients had operations cancelled in preparation for this eventuality.

Although the financial costs of the war have been largely recovered through reluctant contributions from Japan and Germany and other oil states such as Dubai, UAE etc, and the massive profits from subsequent arms sales to the region, the costs were always liable to be foisted onto the shoulders of the working class through higher taxes, cuts in public services, and price rises. The government also hoped for another 'Falklands' Factor', rallying a nation divided over the poll tax behind the flag of the bourgeoisie.

In order to successfully oppose the war it was crucial that the anti-war movement stress that the war was to be fought for the interests of the capitalist class alone, and to decisively situate itself in opposition to those interests. This could be done through the usual means of propaganda such as leaflets, banners, graffiti, fly-posting, public meetings, and through high profile actions.

Not only is this essential for building an opposition at home that knows why it opposes the war and can thus formulate tactics such as strikes and civil disorder which reflect the class basis of that opposition, but it is also essential to encourage 'disloyalty' amongst those troops expected to fight. Historical examples abound of desertions and mutinies making it impossible for rival capitalist interests to compete by means of war, not least in Vietnam where US troops were often more inclined to kill their officers than the supposed enemy.(1) And there is evidence to indicate that a concerted refusal to fight in the Gulf War was not an impossibility. Even without the social unrest 'back home' that formed the backdrop to resistance in Vietnam, many troops refused to go to the Gulf, including at least 23 of the US's elite force, The Marines, who are currently in jail for desertion. There were also cases of warships *en route* to the Gulf being sabotaged. And Bush showed that he did not have absolute confidence in the loyalty of the US army when ammunition was taken away from all enlisted men and women on bases he visited during 'morale raising' trips to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield.

Examples of this strategy were seen in Germany, both during the build-up to war and once it had started. In August of 1990 a live TV show debating the Gulf crisis was disrupted by anti-war protesters with a banner reading: "There's always German money in weapons when there's any slaughter in the world." And on January 21st 1991, anti-war protesters attempted to make clear in whose interest the

war was being fought by blockading the entrance to the Frankfurt stock exchange and pelting the dealers with eggs and paint bombs.

ii) Sabotaging the war machine

Fighting a war is huge logistical exercise requiring the coordinated movements of troops, weapons, ammunition, and supplies from wherever they are stationed to wherever they are required. The ability of military commands to perform this operation is clearly dependent on a number of factors, including the reliability of those workers not required to fight but who are nonetheless essential for this logistical exercise, and if cooperative themselves, on their ability to function without interference. This presents many opportunities for sabotaging the war effort, and indeed there were a number of instances of such sabotage against the Gulf War. For example in August 1990, 4000 maintenance workers on US bases in Turkey went on strike for higher pay, thus deliberately hampering the war effort. And in France in September 1990, workers held up a ferry carrying troops to the Gulf, albeit for only 12 hours. In Italy there were attempts to blockade Malpense airport near Milan in order to prevent it from being used to refuel USAF B-52's *en route* between bombing raids in Iraq and British bases.

In Germany frequent attempts were made to blockade military depots and barracks in order to disrupt the mobilisation for the war. Transport command supplies were also blocked, holding up the movement of the raw materials for the military bases of the British and American troops stationed in Munster, Bremerhaven, Frankfurt, Berlin and elsewhere. The tactic of disrupting the transportation of military supplies was also used in France on several occasions, and in Holland, where trains supplying troops in Germany were persistently sabotaged, derailed, and blockaded.

iii) Fermenting Crisis at Home

The backdrop to the end of the Vietnam War, a result of the refusal of American conscripts to fight for their state, was a severe social crisis in the United States and Western Europe. One of the ways in which that crisis manifested itself was through civil disorder in opposition to the war in Vietnam. Footage of the riot in Grosvenor Square may look like a Keystone Cops movie compared with what Britain has seen in the last decade or so, but it was nevertheless an important moment in the international crisis which led the US State to pull out of Vietnam and confront the crisis it was suffering in its factories, streets, campuses and ghettos.

Again, examples of this strategy were seen in opposition to the Gulf War. General strikes occurred in Pakistan, Italy, Turkey and Spain, although they seem to have been successfully restricted to one day only by union bureaucracies. A token 1/2 hour stoppage against the war occurred on January 18th 1991 at a firm in Bremen, Germany, and later that month, also in Germany, draft resisters forced to work as hospital orderlies went on a 3-day strike in opposition to the war.

Demonstrations against the war occurred virtually everywhere imaginable. And some of these, although not enough, spilled over into direct confrontations with the forces of the state. For example, in Bangladesh, police were forced to use batons to contain demonstrators on September 3rd 1990.

Waging Class War against the Bosses War.....

It can be seen from the above outline that there were a number of attempts, using various strategies, to wage the class war in continental Europe against the inter-capitalist war in the Gulf. One could no doubt find many other instances of anti-war resistance abroad if one was determined to search beyond these few examples which, despite a virtual media blackout on such activity, were available to the anti-war movement thanks to *War Report*, *Counter Information*, and a leaflet by *B.M. Combustion*. (2)

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 organised 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 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 Incirlik, 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-organisation 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.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME? RESISTANCE TO THE 1991 GULF MASSACRE

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 as 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."

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 flavour 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 despatch 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

One could criticize many of the actions which occurred as tokenistic, such as the one day strikes. But the point is that these actions, whether limited or exemplary, could never succeed in stopping the war unless they spread beyond those countries whose involvement in the war was relatively minor. Stopping the war meant that the class war against the Gulf war had to be taken up in those countries central to the UN backed coalition: the US and the UK.

.....Or not as the case may be.

Early signs from the US were encouraging. On the 20th October 1990, 15,000 marched in New York and there were demonstrations in 15 other major cities. And US activists appeared willing and able to take direct action. A San Francisco TV station was disrupted, a cop car set alight on a demo, and the Golden Gate Bridge was blockaded on several occasions. These actions were not generalised however, and it appears that anti-war activity soon became dominated by left-liberal campaigners, of whom someone wrote in *Echanges* 66/67(3):

"They have brought their experiences with a vengeance into the new movement by demanding compromise with the status quo ideology and calling for protest within the context of peaceful obedience to the authorities so as to gain their respect. Many urge 'working through the system'. They tell us we must put pressure on elected representatives.....we must elect better representatives.....They urge that we 'support our troops', not hurt their feelings by criticising the job they do, and that we should express patriotism while criticising government policy. We must prove that we deserve to be listened to by obeying the rule of law and order, and by respecting the police".

This strategy of constitutional protest was an absolute failure. The attempt to base the opposition to the war on an alternative interpretation of the interests of US capital, and thus exploit the divisions which emerged within the US capitalist class, meant that Bush was given a free hand once Congress had voted in favour of military action and the bourgeoisie buried its differences and rallied to his support. The failure of the anti-war movement to root itself in a class opposition to the interests for which the war was to be fought can be measured by the overwhelming support for the war registered in opinion polls, even allowing for their notorious unreliability.

Here in Britain the anti-war movement registered its disapproval of the government's policy towards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and, as in the US, sought to do so peacefully and constitutionally. Of course the anti-war movement was not a homogeneous mass, and contained within it many different perspectives united in their opposition to the war, many of which were fiercely critical of the CND/Tony Benn leadership. But the anti-war movement remained within the parameters set out by this leadership. These parameters derived from their political perspectives. They accepted the pre-supposition of a national interest. They accepted the legitimacy of the United Nations. They accepted the 'need' to re-establish the Kuwaiti regime's control over Kuwaiti oil. Their opposition to the war was thus based on a difference of opinion on how to achieve the goals of US/UK capital; they even advocated the pursuit of these goals by starving the Iraqi working class through sanctions.

As a result the anti-war leadership would never have countenanced the actions required for an effective opposition to the war. They wanted no repeats of the 1956 street battles in Whitehall against British intervention in Suez, a possibility they were only too aware of following the momentous re-emergence of class violence in Trafalgar Square only a few months before the Gulf crisis. The grip that the leadership maintained on the anti-war movement meant that it amounted to nothing more than a few peaceful marches to Hyde Park where any anger could be safely dissipated. No action was taken which challenged

the authority of the state or undermined its ability to wage the war. The movement was confined to peaceful protest while the state was engaged in the mass slaughter of Iraqis.

We have not yet answered the question, however, as to how it was that the forces of pacifism and social democracy were able to contain the anti-war movement. It is not within the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive answer to this question, comprising as it would not only a critique of Trotskyism and anarchism, but also discussions of the psyche of the British working class and its experiences of wars. But we can start to answer the question by undertaking a critique of one group that should have mounted a challenge to the leadership of the anti-war movement: No War But the Class War.

NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR

NWBTCW was a loose collection of revolutionaries who came together in opposition to the Gulf War. As they clearly pointed out in their leaflets, their opposition to the war was firmly rooted in a class-analysis rather than some form of moralistic liberalism. "We won't pay for the bosses war" was the headline on a leaflet distributed during the prelude to the war. "As in all bosses' wars, it's us who will be told to kill each other and die in the battlefields while those with most to gain from the war sit at home and count their profits" it continued. As well as providing the cannon fodder, "those of us not in the front line will have to pay in other ways.....it's us who will be told to tighten our belts and put up with cuts in jobs and wages."

NWBTCW also seemed to know what would be required for an effective opposition to the war: "Only escalating the class war can prevent the massacres of both war and peace. Strikes such as those by oil workers can not only make working conditions safer but can sabotage the national economy, making it harder to wage war. Struggles like that against the poll tax can also undermine national mobilisation towards war. Others can sabotage the war machine directly".

For various reasons however, NWBTCW limited itself to positing the class war ideally. Few, if any, steps were made towards actually realising it in practice. As *Workers Scud* (4) pointed out, "a call for general class struggle opposition to the war became an emotional cushion". How and why this came to be will hopefully become clearer as we follow the evolution of NWBTCW through the unfolding of the Gulf War.

Resisting the build-up to War:

Following the commencement of Operation Desert Shield in August 1990 NWBTCW was formed at a meeting in London to discuss ways of mounting an effective opposition to the war. Amongst those present were representatives from Hackney Solidarity Group, Anarchist Communist Federation, Class War, Anarchist Workers Group, Wildcat and assorted individuals including one of us from Brighton.

A proposal on the agenda was that we begin to organise a demonstration outside one of the major oil company offices in London. But rather than discussing this and other suitable actions the meeting soon became focussed on the fact that the AWG had adopted the Trotskyist line of supporting an Iraqi victory in the war. Their argument that they supported the Iraqi state militarily but not politically cut no ice with the rest of those present who pointed out that an Iraqi military success, in itself a virtual impossibility, could only be pursued by the imposition of military discipline on the Iraqi working class: suppressing the class struggle, shooting deserters and communists, torturing those who actively opposed the war etc.

The AWG were quite rightly expelled from the group. Had they not been there would have been endless problems over basic positions to be conveyed in the group's propaganda. With the rest of those

NOTES

(1) Eds' note: A short account of the quasi-mutiny by US troops in the Vietnam War is contained in the US-produced leaflet "The Persian Gulf War-A One Way Ticket To Atlantis", available from *Aufheben* for a SAE.

(2) BM Combustion, London WC1N 3XX. *Counter-Information* (quarterly bulletin), Pigeonhole CI, c/o 11 Forth St., Edinburgh EH1, Scotland. War Report, c/o *New Statesman and Society*, Foundation House, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ. It should be noted in passing however that the international circulation of counter-information and its dissemination could have been much more efficient. Hopefully the developing European Counter Network will facilitate a more rapid and co-ordinated circulation of struggles; see *London Notes* for more info on the ECN. London Notes, c/o Box LN, 121 Railton Road, Brixton, London, SE 24.

(3) *Echanges et Mouvement*, BM Box 91, London WC1N 3XX.

(4) *Workers Scud*, 40p plus postage, Box 15, 138 Kingsland High Road, London E8 2NS.

(5) Eds' note: Whilst we still know relatively little about the Shi'ite uprisings in Southern Iraq, the proletarian nature of the Kurdish uprising and the assistance given to the Ba'athist regime's crushing of it by the Allies and Kurdish nationalists have since been documented. See "Ten Days That Shook Iraq- Inside Information From An Uprising", available from *Aufheben* for a SAE. A much more detailed account, including an appendix on the Kurdistan Workers Councils or 'Shoras' is available for 65p from *BM Blob and Combustion*, London WC1N 3XX.



CONCLUSIONS

We made some serious tactical errors during our campaign against the Gulf War. We pinned our hopes on the anti-poll tax struggle, and left too much of the responsibility of organising autonomous resistance to the war to comrades in London. We have acknowledged our mistakes however, believing that self-criticism is an essential moment of revolutionary praxis. In printing this article we hope to contribute to a similar process of self-criticism amongst others involved in NWBTCW, who will know much more about what actually happened within the group than us. This article should also help others who were not directly involved to learn from our mistakes.

To be fair to NWBTCW, no-one anticipated that the war would be over so quickly; we all underestimated the potential for revolt of the Iraqi army. Had the war continued and the corpses and wounded started arriving in Britain then NWBTCW may well have been in the front line of agitation against the closure of NHS wards for the war effort. And the anti-war movement may well have been galvanised by the deaths of British troops in a way it wasn't by the slaughter of Iraqi civilians. But NWBTCW must acknowledge that it failed consistently over a period of six months to do what was so desperately required. Various practical suggestions were made by various members, but were not put into practice. Not, it would seem, because other proposals were deemed to be more effective, but because the group was ultimately content to defend the right position, the historic class position in all its purity.

In other words, the NWBTCW group seems to have seen its role as a predominantly ideological one. The truly internationalist position had to be broadcast to the movement and the Trots had to be denounced or attacked, leaving the grip of social democracy and pacifism intact. Even when the CND/Benn leadership were threatening the RCP with the police because they refused to toe the patriotic line, NWBTCW were more concerned with getting into fisticuffs with the RCP than challenging CND's complicity with the state. For many years positions regarding the nature of the Soviet Union have served as the 'litmus test' for determining the 'authenticity' of groups within the British left that have claimed to be revolutionary. Was it the collapse of the Soviet Union and the declining relevance of these arguments that led to members of NWBTCW becoming preoccupied with distinguishing themselves from the rest of the ('always counter-revolutionary') Left?

We cannot do anything to change what happened during the Gulf War but we can learn from our mistakes. And with it looking increasingly likely that the British state will be involved in a joint attempt to intervene militarily in Yugoslavia, to ensure that the carve-up goes along the lines desired by German capital, we must be ready to make sure that they cannot get away with their bloody crusades so easily again

present in agreement over the need to escalate the class struggle against the war in solidarity with the working class of Iraq, rather than implying that they should forsake their own struggle, the expulsion of the AWG *should* have allowed NWBTCW to press ahead with organising effective actions to sabotage the war effort. But as time went on it became clear that the meeting, and the argument with the AWG, had a different effect on those present. NWBTCW in many respects came to see its role as one of defending a class position on the war, rather than having a class position as a necessary but (in itself) insufficient prerequisite for taking practical steps to stop the war. Its concern with defining itself primarily against the position adopted by the various Trotskyist sects seemed to be at the expense of a practical challenge to the boundaries of peaceful constitutional protest imposed by the Benn/CND leadership.

Let us examine exactly how it was that this failure became manifested. Following the meeting the various groups and individuals involved threw themselves into the task of escalating the class struggle in order to undermine the mobilisation towards war. But rather than attempt this squarely on the terrain of anti-war resistance, as had been originally proposed, efforts were directed almost exclusively towards the on-going struggle against the poll tax.

Those of us in Brighton also directed our attention towards the struggle against the poll tax, and the important associated work of supporting poll tax prisoners. But the neglect of anti-war activity itself in the hope that confrontation with the state over the poll tax would be sufficient to counter the movement towards war must now be seen to have been a major mistake. It is obvious now, and indeed was clear at the time with the ditching of Thatcher, that the state was attempting to conduct a tactical retreat over the poll tax. Our attempt to turn their tactical retreat into a rout, and thus create a political climate in which the state would find it increasingly difficult to pursue the war was well intentioned, but there turned out to be no real practical way of pressing home our advantage and seeking out large-scale confrontations.

Only when the war actually began in January did the enormity of this tactical error become obvious. Not only had the rest of NWBTCW also devoted their practical energies towards other struggles like the poll tax, but any sort of organisational work in preparation for the outbreak of the war had been entirely neglected. No plans had been laid for an immediate response to the start of the war such as a demo or an occupation. No efforts seem to have been made to make contacts with other groups, such as those who had been involved in Cruisewatch and the like, who would be prepared to take some form of direct action against the war. There was not even a decent network for communication between and throughout the various organisations and individuals who had been involved in the initial meeting. This haphazard approach to organisation continued through the duration of the war and served to compound the earlier mistakes.

The War Begins

As the pictures came through of the bombing of Baghdad, following the passing of the UN deadline for withdrawal, many people were filled with horror and suddenly became aware of the urgency of the situation. In Brighton there were spontaneous demonstrations, and in London anti-war protesters converged on Trafalgar Square. But it soon became blindingly obvious that the neglect of planning of any sort of autonomous direct action had proved costly. The CND network had already established itself as the focus for opposition to the war. The fact that we could not immediately provide any alternative focus for opposition to the war, a focus that would have been capable of developing increasingly effective tactics and drawing in ever-larger numbers, as the town hall riots had done with the poll tax struggle, meant that we had to start from scratch and begin by operating *within* the movement as it had become constituted under the guise of Tony Benn and CND. We had to find ways of starting from within the movement and carrying people beyond the boundaries set out by the leadership.

Not only had organisational matters been so neglected that we found ourselves in this position, but it soon transpired that NWBTCW was in a worse state than it had been in at the start. Meetings began but the venue was apparently switched a number of times without keeping people informed, and so it seems that many of the original participants were thereby excluded. Sectarianism or stupidity? Worse still, the person who had the contact list disappeared for most of the duration of the war, making coordinating and communication matters even more difficult. Indeed, we in Brighton did not receive any mailouts whatsoever from NWBTCW, despite providing a contact address at the inaugural meeting and making subsequent requests to be kept in touch.

This haphazard approach to organisation may now, however, be seen as symptomatic of the shift in the group's *raison d'être*: The narrowed base was even less adequate for putting practical proposals into action, but was perfectly capable of putting together leaflets outlining the group's position and calling for escalated class struggle.

Here in Brighton we belatedly began to take action to sabotage the war effort. The local Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf, dominated by pacifists and supported by the SWP, had reduced anti-war resistance to "peace vigils", standing peacefully and if possible silently around a statue in the middle of town. Not surprisingly this inspired no one and went unnoticed by everyone. But a blockade/picket of the Territorial Army HQ was organised and attended by the NVDA elements in the peace movement, by hunt saboteurs, squatters and the members of Sussex Poll Tax Resisters. This was far more inspiring for those involved, spilling over into scuffles and forcing the TA to ring for the police, a van-load of whom arrived as we were leaving. A shame it had not been got together earlier as this type of action contained the seeds which could have grown into mass civil disorder.

There were various other low-key autonomous direct actions around the country, ranging from putting in the windows of Army Recruitment offices to occupying the toll booths of the Severn Bridge. But a national focus was needed, by necessity in London, and all that was happening were the peaceful marches to Hyde Park, largely ignored by the media.

NWBTCW distributed a leaflet on the demonstration following the outbreak of the war entitled "Sabotage the War Effort!" Following a brief outline of mutinies in WW1, Vietnam and the Iran-Iraq war, it continued: "The war can and must be opposed on the home front as well as in the armed forces", and cited the attacks on munitions trains in Europe and the burning of a cop car and blocking of the bridge in San Francisco. Then it urged that "We can also refuse to pay for the war in any way by resisting attacks on our living standards- by carrying on refusing to pay the poll tax and other bills, by striking for more pay, by opposing cuts." NWBTCW wanted to keep the home fires burning, but evidently this was to take place away from the demos and over issues only indirectly related to the war. They had made no plans to try to make the demonstrations we were on anything other than peaceful and inconsequential.

On discovering a few days before the next national demonstration that NWBTCW had not worked out any practical initiatives for it, we desperately tried to figure out a way of stirring up some serious disorder on it. But attempts to find out the route of the march were fruitless, so we were unable to work out any potential targets for a lightning occupation, impromptu picket or well placed brick. So on the day before the demonstration we were forced to settle for producing a leaflet which we hoped might fire the imaginations of the demonstrators, particularly those grouped around NWBTCW. Under the heading "Class War Against The Oil War" and an introduction it declared:

"Already nearly 50% of the population opposes the war, but so far this massive opposition has remained largely passive. It will only succeed when it actively confronts the forces for war and

once it goes beyond the boundaries, set out by CND and its friends, of peaceful constitutional 'protest' ...With much of the opposition to this war being censored by the mass media it is vital that we make our presence felt. It was a glimpse of our anger on the 31st of March last year that contributed to the downfall of Thatcher. Today we must show that anger again. We must refuse the state's right to define the nature of this demonstration. While they ask us to march peacefully between police lines they are murdering men, women and children."

Fighting talk is never enough, of course, so the reverse of the leaflet showed a suggestive map of central London locating the following buildings: the American Embassy, Shell Mex House, Esso House, Texaco HQ, Mobil Oil HQ, Vickers HQ, The Admiralty and the MOD. As it turned out the demonstration avoided all of these potential targets, only passing near to the American Embassy which was so heavily protected by police that it would have been the least desirable of them all. Still, we hoped that the leaflet might force NWBTCW to work something out for the next time. Just in case, however, we decided that we should formulate a concrete proposal of our own and attend the next NWBTCW meeting, to take place a week before the next national demonstration.

Just before the next meeting the Allied forces finally launched their ground offensive to retake Kuwait. The bombing campaign had continued for weeks, destroying residential areas, sewage plants, hospitals and other civilian as well as military targets, and now they were going to move in for the kill. We were all expecting to see the body bags donated by DuPont bringing the corpses back for burial. Once again we were filled with anger and a renewed sense of urgency. But at the NWBTCW meeting the discussion was primarily concerned with the necessary, but still insufficient, organisation of public meetings against the war and how to deal with Trotskyist hecklers. Then we put forward our proposal, and to the credit of those present, the urgency of the situation and the need to respond *decisively* was accepted.

We were to:

- i) Mobilise our forces as best as possible. All NWBTCW contacts and virtually every anarchist group in the country were to be informed of a meeting point near the main demo at which they were to converge at a specified time. It was to be made clear that we would move off immediately to take some unspecified form of direct action.
- ii) Conduct a lightning occupation of Shell Mex House, only a few hundred yards from the main assembly point and with no visible means to prevent our access.
- iii) Send others off to inform the gathering demonstrators of the occupation and persuade many as possible to join us or help defend the occupation with a mass picket in The Strand.
- iv) See how the situation evolved and respond accordingly.

We shall never know whether the plan would have worked in practice. It may have failed, or it may have been the moment at which the anti-war movement launched itself beyond its previous limits never to return. But we did not find out, for between the notification of contacts and the day of the demonstration the war was ended by the mass desertion of the Iraqi conscript army. The demonstration itself was small and dejected. But worse still, virtually no-one turned up at the secret assembly point aside from ourselves. It was a missed opportunity, for the first reports were already coming through of the heroic uprisings in southern Iraq; we could have at least discussed possible solidarity actions had there been enough of us. (5) As it was those present were simply demoralised by the failure of others, and the rest of NWBTCW in particular, to turn up.