

The Economic War Against Iraq

Gradually, we are beginning to discover what the war waged on Iraq by the United States and its allies is really all about. Last month the International Monetary Fund provided that unfortunate country with a loan of \$685 million on condition that subsidies on the price of oil be removed and that the economy be opened up to further private investment.

In Christian nations the end of December is about peace, goodwill and gifts. For Iraq 23 December brought a demand from the IMF that the government reduce wages and pensions and 28 December saw a report in the *Los Angeles Times* that the price of fuel in Iraq had increased five-fold in less than a fortnight. So much for Christmas presents. As for peace?

Well, for a start, and not counting the continuing bombing raids by the US Air Force, or the retaliatory attacks by various insurgent forces, the oil price rise resulted in protests across the country, with, for example, over 3,000 demonstrators in the city of Nassiriyeh being fired on by police.

How about goodwill? The Oil Minister, Ibrahim Bahr al-Uloum, asked, "Is this how we repay the Iraq citizens who risked their lives to participate in the elections, by raising fuel prices in this way?" For posing this question he got, not an answer, but the sack, and was replaced by — wait for it — none other than Ahmed Chalabi, the seemingly ubiquitous schemer and collaborator whose lies about weapons of mass destruction were used to justify the American decision to invade in the first place.

How many of the Iraqi citizens whose homes, families and health have been destroyed will benefit from that \$685 million loan? How long will it be before the Iraqi trade unions, banned by Saddam Hussein, again declared illegal under the occupying regime, and still not permitted to exist under the present government, can become effective at organising on behalf of working people? They are struggling under almost impossibly difficult conditions, but from accounts that leak out they are managing to present some small bulwark against that war which is being waged by the men and women in suits rather than in military uniforms.

Meanwhile production from Iraq's national electricity grid is still ten per cent below pre-war levels, with the average Iraqi receiving less than 12 hours of power a day. Billions of dollars of the money which was earmarked by the US Government for reconstruction has been diverted from the original purposes such as schools and infrastructure to the training of bomb squads, the digging up of mass graves to find evidence against Saddam Hussein and the erection of ten new prisons.

And now the US has decided not to allocate any funds at all in the forthcoming budget for reconstruction in Iraq. In 2003 President Bush said that the US aim was to provide Iraq with "the best infrastructure in the region." Last week, however, Brigadier General William McCoy, the Army Corps of Engineers commander overseeing the work, said "The US never intended to completely rebuild Iraq." Meanwhile a recent survey has shown that less than 30 per cent of Iraqis were even aware that any reconstruction was going on.

So much for the "staying the course" argument, the claim that the US needs to maintain a presence in Iraq until it has at least repaired what it damaged. Tens of thousands have been killed for what purpose? Democracy? There can be no real democracy in a country which, despite elections and a constitution, is still effectively under military occupation. There is

still no genuine democracy in such neighbours of Iraq as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan or Qatar, even though Iraq was to be as a shining beacon setting them an example. It's looking more and more as if the Americans have created just one more client state under the thumb of the IMF, where the notion of freedom applies only to capital, not to human beings, and wealth is measured by what is taken out of the country rather than by what remains.