

# West turns its back on Iraq refugees

by Mary M. Burdman

World War III will be total war, fought with stones and fists as well as the most advanced weapons, Lyndon LaRouche has emphasized in his warnings of where the Gulf crisis could lead. Right now—much to the sick glee of the U.S. news media—battles with stones and knives are going on in the camps where at least 80,000 refugees, mostly Asians who were working in Iraq and Kuwait, are caught on the Iraqi-Jordanian border.

In stark contrast to the billions being spent on the massive U.S. war mobilization, and the mass publicity given to a few thousand Western hostages, next to nothing is being done to prevent disaster among the Asian refugees. About 490,000 people have flooded Jordan fleeing the war zone, and hundreds of thousands more remain inside Iraq and Kuwait, facing immediate hunger. Only Egypt has been able to mobilize the means to move its nationals on home; those from further away, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Thailand, cannot get out.

This is the result of one of the greatest population movements in history, the mass migration of people, many of them engineers, skilled workers, and professionals, from the developing sector to the Middle East, United States, and Europe, to find work—the legacy of 20 years of Anglo-American economic dictatorship in the Third World.

Anglo-American callousness continues. The London daily *Independent* reported Sept. 6 that “the plight of the refugees is seen by some diplomats in New York as an unfortunate sideshow threatening to distract the world’s attention from the main objective—the removal of Iraq’s forces from Kuwait. ‘A lot of people are saying send the bill to the Iraqis,’ one Western ambassador said.”

Developing sector leaders are reacting with anger. In an interview with BBC radio Sept. 6, Indian government spokesman Ataf Set denounced those “laying down the rules.” The BBC journalist attempted to badger Set because India wants to ship food to its 100,000 nationals stranded in Kuwait, which could break the U.S.-imposed food embargo on Iraq. India’s people are really suffering, Set answered. Indians, he pointed out, are “not living in five-star hotels, unlike the British or Americans. . . . We think the Iraqis will see the great humanitarian need,” he said. “There are people laying down the rules and then deciding how they will be implemented and who they will be applied to. This is not being done equitably.”

Jordan’s Crown Prince Hassan, normally very restrained, expressed outrage Sept. 4. The Prince strode into the middle

of a U.N. bureaucrats’ press conference in Amman after visiting the refugee camps. “While the attention of the world is rightly focused on the Iraqi-Kuwait conflict, a human tragedy of the widest dimensions has received but scant attention,” Prince Hassan announced. Jordan is faced with the largest repatriation effort since World War II, and disaster is imminent unless the U.N. “alerted the international community to the scale of the human tragedy. . . . The situation has evoked only the faintest response from the international community. This could not come at a worse time for Jordan, whose citizens bear the main brunt of the sanctions.” Jordanian officials say they have seen almost nothing of promised Western aid.

## Infernal conditions in the camps

“I fear there will soon be a breakdown of morals,” one Indian engineer caught in the camps said Sept. 4. “Please ask our governments to do something.” The nights are the worst, when refugees fight with stones and knives for what little food, shelter, or water is available. In the day, exhausted women struggle in the five-hour-long water lines for enough water to keep their children alive. Authorities have already given up attempts to distribute food and water in an orderly way.

A live broadcast by the BBC Sept. 5 reported refugees rioting as they tried to reach water trucks coming into the camps.

One man has died already from vomiting and diarrhea, and more may have died. There are only 18 portable toilets available in the Shaalan camp, which holds at least 40,000 people, and only 5-6 water tanks.

The president of the French organization Doctors Without Borders, Xavier Emmanuelli, who has been working on disaster relief efforts for 20 years in Africa and Southeast Asia, said, “I have never seen a situation of such gravity and singularity. Most of these people have gone from a good standard of living to survival effort in an instant. . . . If the international community does not turn its attention to them, it will invite a catastrophe, because more, perhaps hundreds of thousands more, are coming.” He compared the situation to Europe in 1940, when many thousands fled from the invading German armies south from Belgium and northern France.

Jordan, a poor country of 3 million, cannot deal with the crush. At the present rate of repatriation, it will take *months* to get the Asians to their home countries. The International Organization for Migration is spending \$7 million on 55 charter flights, including using huge Antonov 124 “Condor” aircraft to get 10,000 Bangladeshis and 4,000 Sri Lankans home in the next 2-3 weeks. But this will accomplish little. Many tens of thousands more are in the desert, with an estimated 95,000 Sri Lankans still in Kuwait. India has repatriated 13,467 people since Aug. 12; 120,000 still remain in Kuwait. A full-scale airlift for 100,000 people would cost \$50 million.