

# War Crimes Tribunal convicts U.S., allies for actions in Iraq

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

"The truth can make you free. . . . But beyond the truth is the requirement for action. Truth is the foundation on which you stand to change the world." Thus Ramsey Clark summed up the function of his International War Crimes Tribunal, at its final session in New York City on Feb. 29. Drawing the conclusions of dozens of hearings held during the last year in as many cities throughout the world, the tribunal summed up the charges, presented the documented evidence, and issued the final verdict against George Bush et al.: guilty of war crimes in their preparation and conduct of the war against Iraq.

The truth, artfully covered up by the complicit media, emerged in the course of the tribunal's ambitious undertaking. Not only the truth regarding the atrocities committed by the U.S.-led coalition in the war (like the bombing of the Ameriya civilian shelter, evoked by Mohammed Khader, who lost his wife and four of his five children there), and the continuing killing of innocent children through the embargo, but the truth regarding the deeper motivations and policies driving the war effort.

Clark, in his opening remarks, characterized the war as the "bloodiest use of military might in history." In fact, "It was not a war at all, because those who perpetrated the massacre knew they had the power to kill with impunity and they did." This occurred through massive bombings and, according to material presented by Joyce Chediak, included deployment of advanced laser weaponry capable of blinding. Officers returning from Kuwait reported having seen aerial assaults leave dead bodies in their wake, but no sign of blood, explosions, or of bombs having been dropped.

## Food production destroyed

The destruction of infrastructure, including that associated with agricultural production and food processing, was deliberate. Clark cited the case of a date-processing plant, "bombed in order to make people hungry, bombed two, three times, so it was no mistake." Charlotte Paquet, who had traveled to Iraq in September-October 1991 with a team of experts to assess the damage to agriculture, reported that a seed plant had been bombed three times, as had a veterinary complex for vaccines, taken for a "chemical weapons factory"; dams regulating the flow of water for agriculture had

been destroyed, as had the only baby milk factory, a joint project with France. As she pointed out, "U.S. experts say they would rather feed the Iraqi people than let Iraqi agriculture recover." In other words, the purpose of such destruction was to place the country and its people at the mercy of the victors.

Clark's list of targets in this context was appalling: all eight major dams used for hydroelectric energy and irrigation had been hit; all pumping stations; 32 separate food storage centers; 90% of poultry production, and 80% of fisheries, destroyed; access to pesticides eliminated. Clark laid bare that the aim was simply to "cripple the population for a generation." This intent, Clark stressed, had been made clear by former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Dugan back in November 1990, when he said that they wanted to "make a parking lot of Baghdad," and cripple the nation so that it could not be a factor in the region for a generation.

Further pieces of the truth of the war included documentation of how the food weapon was wielded not only against Iraq but also against reluctant coalition partners. A Japanese speaker, Yuriko Okawara, who is leading an effort to sue the Japanese government for unconstitutionally supporting the war, reported on how the United States used its leverage with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to force compliance with the war vote. China, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Iran, the Soviet Union, Ethiopia, and Zaire were all bribed with debt forgiveness or aid, to vote for war. The case of Egypt, elaborated by Dr. Sherif Hetata, was typical: enmeshed in debt, Egypt, he said, depends for 80% of its wheat on imports, particularly from the U.S., Canada, and Australia. "Egypt therefore cannot make its own decisions. It is a neo-colony of the United States. If Egypt were involved in a war against our Iraqi brothers," he concluded, "it was because we were not independent." This was explicit: "The Egyptian foreign minister was told that he could not depend on the U.S.—i.e., he could not count on wheat imports—if he did not go along with the United States against Iraq in the U.N."

Bill Doares, testifying on the U.S. role in the Middle East, drew on historical precedents for the Gulf war, seen as a means to gain colonial control over Iraq's oil. He recalled how Mossadegh had been called a "madman" by the West for having nationalized Iran's oil, and how John Foster Dulles

dubbed Nasser the "Hitler of the Nile" for having asserted control over the Suez Canal. "Now, it is Iraq that is considered a threat to civilization, and its leader the devil incarnate," because of the country's ambition to allocate its oil revenues for industrialization. That the U.S. wanted the war long before the Kuwait crisis, he said, was clear in its creation in 1980 of a rapid deployment force based in Saudi Arabia. Iraq was identified as the probable enemy in 1989, and Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf met repeatedly with the Kuwaiti royal family, encouraging them to steal Iraqi oil. "The Pentagon, the White House, and Wall Street," he concluded, wanted this war." As speaker Shreeram stressed, the U.S. wanted to ensure "the flow of cheap oil and the flow of oil revenues to the West." Furthermore, Washington "wants a stranglehold over oil there in order to have a stranglehold over the economies of Germany and Japan." He too cited Schwarzkopf, in testimony to the Senate on Feb. 8, 1990, when the Desert Storm butcher had warned that one power in the oil rich region could pose a threat to U.S. interests which would "require military intervention."

### **Depth of economic dislocation**

The truth about the dimensions of the economic dislocation caused by the war came out in the testimony by several witnesses from Third World countries. Bassam Haddadin showed how Jordan is still suffering the social effects of the expulsions of masses of guest workers from the Gulf states. A country of only 3 million, Jordan is ill-equipped to assimilate new workers, and is suffering 30% unemployment rates, increased pressures on its education system (where 80,000 students have no schools to attend), and housing. In addition, since Jordan was cut off from Saudi and other Gulf state markets, where it had formerly sold 55% of its exports, the economy was shattered, along with its trucking and shipping sectors. The economic shock was felt as far away as Tanzania, as Alsha Nyerere documented. Particularly hit were Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia, whose men, who had worked in the Gulf states and supported families at home, were turned out without documents or savings, forced to trek across deserts, and live in concentration camp conditions, hoping to make it home. Dr. M.A. Samad-Matias, presenting her testimony on its impact on Yemen and the Horn of Africa, estimated that 55 countries in all had been affected by the war. She voiced the tribunal's demand "that reparations should be paid for these victims of the war," and charged indignantly, "How dare they ask Iraq to pay?"

When the verdict was read by Deborah Jackson, and "Guilty!" rang through the auditorium, the 1,000 or so participants rose to their feet to second the conviction. It was recommended, furthermore, that all embargoes and sanctions be immediately revoked; that public action be taken to prevent further military action, as threatened against Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, and others; that the power of the U.N. Security Council, now manipulated by the U.S., be vested in the

General Assembly; and, that the report be preserved and distributed, and the option to pursue further charges be left open.

In his final remarks, Mr. Clark brought his audience again to its feet in a stirring speech calling on them to take the painful truth laid bare as the "foundation on which you stand to change the world." Realizing that the work of the tribunal, though laudable, cannot become an end in itself, the former Attorney General outlined the main points contained in a 30-page working paper on preventing war crimes in the future. First, regarding Iraq, he called for preserving the country by providing food and medicine, ending the embargo, aiding all refugees, and forcing reparations payments by the guilty to the victims. His war prevention proposal entailed drastic reductions in military expenditures, elimination of all militaries, etc., as well as the general reform of the U.N., to vest power in the people. Though sketchy, his most interesting proposals were those calling for true accountability on the part of government, and bringing criminals to justice. This he proposed be achieved through institutionalizing the international war crimes tribunal and giving it governmental powers.

### **The fight for economic justice**

The area which Clark acknowledged to be "the most difficult," involves economic and social justice; though the final goals he identified well deserved the enthusiastic endorsement they received—increasing food production to prevent hunger and malnutrition, providing universal inoculation to prevent disease, launching a crash program to defeat AIDS, ending exploitation of human labor and of the Third World—there was no indication of the means by which this new, more just economic ordering of society could be brought about.

What most fired up his listeners was Clark's call to "liberate America," to wit: overcome hunger and illiteracy, and, on the basis of the resolution presented in January 1991 by Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.), to impeach George Bush and put him and his co-criminals on trial.

Although the tribunal's final session had been systematically blacked out of the major press, attendance at the Martin Luther King High School exceeded the most optimistic expectations of its organizers, a fact which underlines the quasi-revolutionary mood gripping large parts of the American population. Many participants were veterans of the 1960s anti-war ferment, apparently content to revive that movement, but others, particularly those coming from layers directly targeted by the war—Arab-Americans, Muslims, and citizens originating from developing sector nations—seemed to be looking for a more concrete perspective of how to finally right the wrongs of the world. Whether or not the tribunal and its leadership can provide such programmatic initiatives is what the most thoughtful participants were asking themselves as they left the hall.