

**The Kurdish Uprising and Kurdistan's
Nationalist Shop Front and Its Negotiations with
the Baathist/Fascist Regime**

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The Kurdish Uprising and Kurdistan's Nationalist Shop Front and Its Negotiations with the Baathist/Fascist Regime

The following is an account of the uprising in Kurdistan in 1991 together with an historical critique of the Kurdish nationalist parties. It buries the lies of the western media which presented this proletarian uprising as the work of nationalist parties in the north or Shi'ite religious fanatics in the south.

* * *

The great popular uprising of the exploited of Iraq in March this year threatened the aims and interests of both contending sides in the Gulf war. From Kurdistan to southern Iraq the poor rose up against the Baathist/Fascist regime and against the consequences of the war created by both this regime and the coalition allies. The allied coalition of western capital — particularly Bush, who was worried about extending the war into another Vietnam scenario — stopped the war in order to allow Saddam to crush this uprising. Essentially, they didn't want a successful uprising because it would be an inspiration throughout the Arab world — and probably elsewhere. The Saudi government was especially worried about this as the Iraqi uprising — in the form of placard carrying demonstrations — had already begun before the ground war got underway. These demonstrations on the whole condemned both sides, although in some pro-western sympathies were expressed — for example, a demo with photos of Bush held aloft: this didn't mean that the demonstrators were *for* Bush like that, merely that their hatred was so intense that they were prepared to use anything and anybody to express that hatred. Sadly, though the vast majority were not pro-Bush, many had illusions in being 'saved' by the West. Saddam was prepared to give in to all the coalition's conditions in order to crush the uprising and stay in power. His fascist regime was taking revenge on the uprising for losing the war. That's why, in a very barbaric way, he attacked the very soul of the uprising from Basra, Dewania, Kabala and Najaf to the Kurdish cities of Kirkuk, Sulliemia and Hawlir. Like a butcher's shop they had on display the carcasses of Turks, Arabs, Assyrians and Kurds.¹ In that sense it was an international, and not just a Kurdish, affair: a truly public and popular uprising.

The very barbarism of the regime's army and police, and the nightmare of another Halabja was enough to drive 3 million rebellious (mainly poor) people into the mountains, all the while being targeted by helicopter gun-ships towards the disease, starvation, cold, misery and death of the

¹There are 200,000 Turks living in Iraqi Kurdistan — descendants from the soldiers who decided to stay on from the days of the Ottoman Empire. Hostility between them and local Kurds is virtually non-existent. On the contrary, they tend to join in with the periodic Kurdish revolts. The same goes for the Christian Assyrians (in a generally Moslem country), numbering about 100,000 — the original people of the area, whose ancestry goes back to the days of Nebuchadnezzar and have no connection with modern day Syria.

Kurdish mountains in the north and to the parched deserts of the south. In the mountains they went right up to and over the Turkish/Iranian border, thus threatening the stability of national frontiers enough to bring in the Turkish and Iranian army and police. We all witnessed the inhuman treatment meted out by, in particular, the Turkish armed militias. They treated Kurds like enemies. On the other hand, we saw hundreds of thousands of Iranians – not all of them Kurds – generously giving as much help as they could. So much so that it nearly became a threat to the internal stability of Iran² and Turkey. There was Kurdish unrest in the Kurdish part of Turkey and there were demonstrations in the city of Diyarbakir and other large towns in Turkey. Indeed, some Kurdish towns in Turkey were bombed by the RAF and USAF during the war. One must also remember that a lot of Kurdish workers were involved in the Turkish rolling General Strike which took place during the war build-up and which certainly had a big impact on the strong anti-war movement within Turkey.

The refusal of several millions to submit to the regime, preferring to choose the terrible mountainous terrain, brought the Kurdish question to world attention via the TV, the newspapers and the U.N. But the allied coalition was to deal with the problem in the same way as they deal with the mass starvation in Africa. Their solution is to send in the “too little too late” charities (with food parcels which are surplus to the western economies) at the same time as they send in their armies to further their interests and maintain some of their control over the situation.

The Kurdistan nationalist shop front is a continuation of the reactionary social and political relations left behind from a feudal, tribal system (landowners etc.) and a more recent, weak, small-time bourgeoisie. Their wheeler-dealing with the central government in Baghdad in the name of the rights of the Kurdish people has always turned against the interests of the majority of Kurds. There is no doubt that there is a direct relation between this form of negotiation and a recognition of their mutual class interests. As much as they call themselves representatives of Iraqis and Kurds, both are criminally responsible throughout their history for the past and present situation of the people of Iraq and Kurdistan.

After the Kurdistan shop front used the genocide in Halabja, at the same time washing their hands of it, their credibility was extremely weakened in Kurdistan (this was compounded by the fact that different nationalist factions brutally fought each other, dragging innocents into their sectarian battles). Their ensuing weakness and increasing lack of support among the local population caused the different factions (KUP/KDP) to re-think and join forces to form the Kurdistan Front. They started to lavishly spend money on expensive trips to adjacent countries (Iran, Syria, Turkey, Lybia), searching for commercial and political contacts in the name of the Kurdish people. After that, they really tried to sell themselves to rich western countries, receiving a little success in Europe, but none in America. It's worth adding here that there seems to be a growing difference, as yet tentative in its outlines, between the proposed new federal superstate of Europe and America. Europe sees its interests in having influence through a Kurdish State, just as they favour having a Palestinian State. America wants a Baathist regime without Saddam and for

²One wonders if this had a knockon effect on the trouble that had been breaking out inside Iran for some time. For example, the long and successful big teacher's strike in autumn 1990. And the oil workers strike which spread from Abadan Oil Refinery to Esfahan and from there to other oil refineries throughout Iran, in the first 2 or 3 weeks of 1991. In Tehran workers at the oil refinery initially went on hunger strike, and then continued with a strike. Towards the middle of the strike a representative from the Ministry of Labour came to the refinery and called on the workers to return to work and to nominate a representative for talks. The workers responded by saying they had no representative and demanded that the Oil Minister or the Minister of Labour must come to talk with them.

Israel to continue in its present form with a few modifications. “The proposals for a “safe haven”, as a possible prelude to a mini-Kurdish State, originated in Denmark, then France, before the UK’s P.M. Major opportunistically made a big thing about it.

When the spontaneous popular uprising began in March ’91³ (it was so completely spontaneous because the parties had lost all credibility), the Kurdistan Front had in mind to control it by taking charge of the money in the Kurdish banks and by controlling government Kurdish buildings, Kurdish State institutions and the arms trade in the area, which was being conducted at the time through open street markets. In those crucial days this is what they were doing — not assisting the uprising. A lot of people complained about this and worried about that lack of real, on-the-ground organisation which was one reason for the speedy defeat of the uprising (it was so easy for the Baathist regime to re-take the Kurdish cities). Some of the arms at the time came via arms traders in northern Iran, others were seized from the army secret militias and police or handed over to the insurgents by the Jash, the armed Kurdish units of the Iraqi army. In practice, they turned out to be far more radical than the peshmergas, in so far as they were mutinying against their masters, whereas the peshmergas were submissive to theirs.⁴ The insurgent public in Kurdistan were well in front of the Jash and the Peshmergas, who played virtually no useful part in what happened. In no sense was the Kurdistan Front like a western trade union with a rebellious membership at certain moments getting completely out of hand and the bureaucrats just looking on bewildered, trying for ways to pick up the reins once again. They exerted a tight control over *their* units.

The uprisings took different forms in different areas of Kurdistan. In Sulliamania, for example, the revolt was started by students taking to the streets against the secret police. The secret police responded by shooting some of them and, as a consequence, the revolt became more general and more people joined in. From reliable hearsay, it seems that about 50 spontaneous, self-organised workers’ shoras (councils or soviets) were formed in Sulliamania by the people in popular quarters, squares, small factories, etc., in order to discuss practical problems. The nationalists didn’t recognise them and waiked all over their form of democracy (revocable delegates etc.). During the Iranian revolution in 1979, shoras (workers councils) were formed everywhere, including amongst the Kurdish peasants of northern Iran. At the time speeches in assemblies would end with shouts of “Long live the shoras!” (repeated 3 or 4 times, accompanied by loud cheers). Many of the most vocal elements ended up being executed by the Iranian mullahs⁵. In Hawlir, the uprising was started by a woman who, desperately furious at the killing of her son by a security cop, disarmed the cop, killed him and then stormed off to the building of the security cops

³March had a special significance in Kurdish history. Fires are started not just to celebrate the beginning of spring but also the legend of the killing of a particularly vicious tyrant — Zohak — by Kawa, a steelworker, centuries ago. March is the month when various recent events happened: 1970 — the granting of “autonomy” for Kurdistan; 1974 — the napalming of Halabja and Kalaze; 1988 — the chemical bombing of Halabja; and other events.

⁴In fact, the Jash and the Peshmerga wear the same standard Kurdish yellow military uniform, in a way symbolic of the fact that they are so similar in defending the status quo.

⁵In the Iranian revolution shoras appeared all over the country. They were classic workers’ councils. In Iranian Kurdistan, Kurds set up shoras in most small factories, especially the many brick factories. And in the countryside Turkoman peasants set up their own shoras. But they were uneven — there seems to have been as many different instances of ‘workers’ control’ as there are factories in Iran. One of the main problems was that there was no generalised national, or even local, co-ordinating bodies. Consequently, it was relatively easy for the fledgling Islamic State, united — for the moment at least — with private capitalists, to crush this developing autonomy and this real threat to both fundamentalism and to capitalism.

to shoot some more, followed by a snowballing crowd of angry, curious, people. In fact, angry people throughout the whole of Kurdistan attacked, wrecked and torched police stations, local government buildings, Baathist centres, army bases, security headquarters etc. — often making off with various trophies. Baathist officials and secret police were executed. Such a general pattern of spontaneity remains; The bombing of a police station in the coalition-controlled area of far northern Iraq in late spring '91 was the work of the public again (although, perhaps, this time with some peshmerga support, probably aimed at helping to gain some credibility).

The northern insurrection, although nationalist in form (it was confined to the geographical parameters of Kurdistan), was nevertheless against the nationalist parties. We've heard reports that peshmergas were excluded from Sullimania for some time and that Talabani, the exiled leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, was prevented from entering the city too. Apparently when Barzani, the leader of the KDP, went to Chamchamal, near Sullimania, he was attacked and two of his bodyguards were killed,

Of course, many other groups and leftist factions (even ultra-leftist) were involved in the uprising, but one mustn't overemphasise their impact, if indeed they had any. As individuals they made contributions along with everybody else caught up in the euphoria — but not as groups with some message or other. The insurrection was almost purely spontaneous without much ideology — and that was a good thing. Although it wasn't simplistically nationalist (generally people were too involved in attacking government institutions to care about raising nationalist slogans) it would be wrong to dismiss the popular Kurdish sense of identity that many of the insurgents had. Nevertheless, at its height, the uprising did threaten to overflow into the rest of Iraq, but wishful-thinking can make too much out of all this — for example, the slogan, shouted by a few people, "We will celebrate our new year with the Arabs in Baghdad" (we all tend to indulge in this wishful-thinking, but it obscures an understanding of the problems and contradictions in any particular situation). On the other hand there was trouble among the Arabic population of Baghdad at the time among the poor, students, office workers and other workers. But the capital is so well-policed that it was easy to suppress. Insurgents in Kurdistan were even handed guns from Arab conscripts but the peshmerga, trying to keep everything neatly nationalist, sent some Arab deserters back to Baghdad, although their main concern was to stop Arab conscripts from joining the uprising.

Because the insurrection lasted such a short time positive link-ups weren't made. The uprising in the marshlands of The south didn't last long enough. Presented by the western media as Shia-inspired, it's far more complex than that. Basra (before it was virtually destroyed by the Iran/Iraq war and the coalition's bombs) was a city of great contrasts. It has a strong secular tradition of various old time socialists, together with a Pan-Arabic nationalism that has social dimensions (workers' rights, welfare rights, etc.). There's also a considerable amount of people like the religious Shias who go to the mosques, though there are a helluva lot of atheists who openly reject the mosques too. This is all made more complex by the tribal system in the marshlands, with one tribe allied to the C.P., another Baathist, etc., although by far the strongest influence among the tribes is the C.P. But one must remember that CP allegiance goes hand in hand with nationalism. Recently there's nearly been a split between the Kurdistan branch of the CP and the others (although most Iraqi CP leaders are Kurds). There's even a branch in the middle trying to reconcile both factions. It's all over national definitions. Iraqi CP members feel attached to the Iraqi borders, even though they were drawn up arbitrarily, in the space of a few weeks, at the inception of the British and French Mandate under the auspices of the League of Nations at the

conclusion of the First World War. They only want self-determination, and not independence, for Kurdistan and get quite heated about it.

Kurdistan's reactionary nationalist movement has always shown its basic class loyalties to the central State in Baghdad by displaying its policing services when required — i.e. when the central regime was incapable of carrying out direct repression because of its periodic weaknesses. However, before the Baathists came to power Kurdish nationalism as an organised political force didn't really exist, at least, in any modern capitalist sense.

Before Baathism — between 1958 and 1963 — there took place some quite radical developments in Iraq partly under the influence of Nasserism in Egypt. A kind of state welfarism came into existence as a result of the massive uprising of the Iraqi poor in 1958, when generals, landlords and bourgeois were attacked and killed by the working class in revolt. Out of this came health and education reforms and major building programmes for poor people and the government confiscated land from rich landlords. A law of work was passed defending workers and peasants from arbitrary sacking. Under the influence of the Communist Party becoming part of the government coalition, atheism, to some degree, became part of the whole culture, although one shouldn't overemphasise this. Although the Koran was publicly burnt, this didn't happen on anything but a small scale. Most workers under the sway of 'radical' ideas went to the mosque too. However, at the time one heard more damning things against Islam from communist-influenced workers in Baghdad's popular quarters than ever came from Salman Rushdie.

In 1963 the national chauvinistic Arab Baathists came to power on a tide of blood, mainly attacking the Communist Party. About 10,000 people were killed and many workers were strung up with telegraph wire. The Baathists were a party moulded by British Intelligence in the late '50s in Lebanon. They mimicked Nasserism but with a more aggressively capitalistic edge which became stronger and stronger over the years. Initially the Baathists didn't abolish the reforms, and in some cases extended them. The reactionary movement of Kurdish nationalists made deals with these 'civilised' barbarians with the aim of setting up a quasi-autonomous regional government assembly, subservient to the central state. This was the basis of the network of contacts between them. Essentially though, modern Kurdish nationalism started the moment the Baathists took over. After the deal, Kurdish nationalists launched armed attacks on rebels in the Kurdish mountains — on places like Sharazoor, Garmyan, Zardy, Kharadakh, Klakasmak and other bases in the Hawlir and Badinan areas, which were hideouts for people with some kind of basic radical communist outlook (in the sense of being against property and money, etc.). Some were Communist Party members. From these hideouts, the rebels had attacked army and police units. The nationalists killed hundreds of them, sending the rest to Kurdish nationalist prisons in Mawat and Khalan (a lot of these creeps who are into this dirty policing are still around). In these 'liberated' areas in the mountains, Baghdad's authority was weak and had no control over these prisons. In fact, the Baathist government never became really strong until 1972 after nationalising the oil (the previous Dutch, British and American owners were mightily compensated, just as happens with nationalisation virtually everywhere else). Before that, it merely controlled the major cities.

After the barbarian Baathists established themselves they also started attacking the Kurdish people even as early as the summer of '63. They buried hundreds of Kurds alive and destroyed and burnt a large number of villages (a hundred or more), which had stood opposed to the new central regime in Baghdad. The Baathists did this after the negotiations with the Kurdish nationalists had made no progress.

In 1964, after the Abdul Salam Afrif coup d'état (a national bourgeois socialist unionist effort), the Kurdish nationalists movement, like a pet puppy being offered a munchie, started wagging its tail in front of this mad chauvinist killer who had insulted the Kurds by openly referring to their origins as “ghostly apparitions”, and reconvened negotiations. Again the Kurdish nationalist movement turned on the Kurdish population. They unleashed their cut-throat gangsters on the Kurdish areas because of their constant resistance to the central regime in Baghdad. For example, in Kanymacy, in broad daylight, the psychotic Osmani Amu gang, following orders from their nationalist superiors, committed an horrendous crime, killing 9 heroic and faithful sons⁶ of poor Kurdish people (Hama Kolabal and his comrades) from nearby Sulliemania. They were particularly fine people who, through the way they lived, were a kind of general inspiration (people really rated Hama Kolabal; these murders went down like a lead balloon among the local population).

After a short while, the Jalalists, followers of Jalal Talabani (the one on TV screens seen recently adoring and kissing Saddam his opinions ranging from left to right, depending on the circumstances) signed an agreement in July 1966 giving his organisation official status as mercenaries of the State. They started to take over the role, with Baghdad's assent, of fully policing the Kurdish areas. They killed and tortured thousands of young Kurds in faction fighting between them and the more feudal, tribalist, Barzani KDP faction. Both factions were fighting for preeminence over who should control the Kurdish areas. Often taking sides themselves, but just as often not, young kids were killed all over the place.

In 1968 the Baath fascists came to power again by means of a military coup. The Jalalists became closer to the Baathists, continuing their pact with the central State, this time presenting the Baghdad government as an anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist progressive regime on the side of the so-called socialist bloc. The faction fighting got even worse. After a time the Baathists realised that they could have control over Kurdistan through making deals with Barzani's KDP because the Jalalists were too much into power-broking with Baghdad and had therefore too little credibility in the eyes of the Kurds. The Baathists in some ways also disliked the Jalalists left-wing rhetoric. In 1970, for the first time, the KDP got an agreement granting some autonomy for Kurdistan. It involved power sharing with Baghdad. During this period after 1970, because they were having some power, the Kurdish bourgeoisie came to life somewhat. The KDP still had a policing role against the opponents of the regime who'd fled to Kurdistan to seek safety. For example, they handed over to the authorities several members of the Liberation Army (a mainly Arabic outfit living in Kurdish areas because it was safer) to the Baathists to face immediate execution. In turn too, the KDP handed over the fate of the Kurdish people to Parastin — a party within a party — which directed the movement of the KDP, and also involved an informal alliance of Mossad, Savak (the Shah's secret police) and the CIA who spread their influence mainly through money and guns. Parastin decided policy and controlled the movement's finances. The top bods in the KDP knew all about this as did Kurds outside the party network. Indeed, Mossad helped train guerillas and at least one Israeli officer was in the mountains teaching armed techniques. It was during this time that the Parastin-run KDP handed over Iranian Kurdish opponents to Savak. The KDP also killed some of these opponents. People like Mala Awara and Sulliemanny Moeny

⁶“Heroic and faithful” is the kind of language generally used when describing rebels in the Arabic and adjacent areas of the world. To western ears it sounds a bit wooden and Maoist but basically it means courageous people who stick by each other, ever ready to express practical solidarity — great guys and gals.

— Kurdish nationalists in the Iranian KDP (which had strong connections with the Iraqi KDP) — principled good people were handed over to the Shah. Their bodies were then dragged through the streets of Iranian Kurdish towns.

Here we musn't forget the role of the central committee of the Iraqi Communist Party. Between 1973 and 1978 there was a Baath/CP pact. The CP had no governmental power but were used as a fighting militia to put down the Kurds. In the name of a progressive national patriotic front they served the Baathists both nationally and abroad. Because of the ferment in Kurdistan (autonomy hadn't been granted — it had all been a card-sharper's trick) and because it had got too much out of hand, the Baathists launched a brutal attack on Halabja and Kalalze in 1974. The inhabitants were napalmed with chemicals made in the USSR — part of the deals made via the auspices of the Iraqi CP. The CP supported this genocide because for them the Kurds were agents of the CIA through the Shah of Iran's influence. The CP compared Saddam with Castro at the time. In Kurdistan, it all went to show yet again how inter-imperialist rivalry and conflict cynically and bloodily uses a national terrain and often well-meaning but naive insurgents for its own ends.

This is how the people of Kurdistan were treated as a pawn in the chess game of improving relations with the west and of rival political factions (nationalist and so-called communist). March 1975 and the Barzani leadership calls everything off as a result of the agreement between the Shah of Iran and Saddam in Algeria. Saddam gave the right to look for oil in the Gulf to Iran in exchange for Iran backing off from Kurdistan. He also handed over to the Shah 3 islands in the Gulf. Unofficially the deal invoked more imports from the West as opposed to getting more east European commodities. The Kurdish leadership, literally with their suitcases full of money, cleared off to Iran, Europe and America. The burden on the Kurdish people after the relinquishing of struggle, meant that the Baathists forcibly transported thousands of Kurds to the desert camps of southern Iraq whilst their villages were destroyed. They then had to fend for themselves, although many southern Iraqi Arabs helped them — or else they went to southern towns and got jobs in the construction industry etc. This is how for several years faithful peshmerga and Kurdish people were sacrificed to the class interests of nationalist and Baathists who now took over more completely than ever the Iraqi areas of Kurdistan which had previously escaped their control.

The people's revolution in Iran and the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, followed by the inter-capitalist war (Iran v. Iraq), initiated by Iraq with the support of the USA, which was ranged against the Iranian and Iraqi poor — all this created new conditions for a further uprising in Kurdistan. Whilst the Baathist regime was weakened, the fore-runner of Kurdistan's Shop Front — the PUK — in 1985 started once more to negotiate with the Baathist Fascist regime — and their role became clear yet again: undermining the uprising which again was in the offing. Through their radio station they called on the people to call off the uprising after many demonstrations in major towns, student ferment, etc. (There was agitation but not strikes in the Kurdish oilfields — most of the oil workers in the oilfields around Kirkuk in particular were now Arabic, as a result of the Arabisation policy throughout Kurdistan, which included the sacking of Kurdish workers. Link-ups between Arabs and Kurds — that essential jump — was not made at the time). The PUK started killing many opponents of the Baathists regarded as rivals. This included killing CP members. In Pshtashan; one of the strongest CP bases, they killed 80 Kurds and Arabs.

It was the same Talabani, this creep now bevyng with Saddam and kissing all of his *four* cheeks, who said at the time in 1986, "Saddam is not the enemy but the referee between the different factions of the Iraqi people" and also, "Anybody who is fighting the Iraqi army is com-

mitting a crime and a backstabber of the patriotic Iraqi army,” — this army which has never been anything but the blood-curdling torturers of poor Iraqis and Kurds in the hands of various — mainly Baathist — regimes.

The negotiations between the PUK and the regime, as before, ended with fighting again in Kurdistan because the negotiations did not succeed. But this time the new PUK strategy was to “liberate” Kurdistan via a co-ordination with the Iranian army and the Islamic revolutionary guards, the latter being a professional army elite and not conscripted soldiers.

Saddam’s fascist regime attacked Kurdistan once more and for the first time used chemical weapons against Kurdish people and Shi’ite Arabic people in the south who opposed the war. So in March ’88 Saddam’s military killed over 5000 people in Halabja and more in nearby villages. When the Iran/Iraq war ended, referee Saddam, in systematic military attacks under the codename “Anfals” (meaning Rentokil-type insect exterminators), destroyed some more villages in Kurdistan. Many more were killed and 8000 disappeared. Nobody knows what happened to them (sold into slavery? maybe to Kuwait?).

Saddam’s regime, with 8 years of war aid killing and a million Iranians and Iraqis dead, still wasn’t enough. So, with his military advisors, he invaded Kuwait, killing further thousands and laying the ground for the most concentrated forces of world capital to destroy the whole social and economic structure of Iraq (of Kurds, Iraqis and minorities) and the first step of the New World Order (perhaps, more appropriately, the New Old World Order...?).

The Kurdistan Shop Front, as a representative of the exploiting Kurd class, shows through its nature and class history that it could never defend the exploited of Kurdistan. Both the Kurdish PUK and the Baathists represent the same barbaric and ugly system against Kurds and Arabs alike. The life of one depends on the other even if they’ve got some differences at times — largely over the spoils and their share of power. Both are pitted against the interests of the people, which is why they see their solution for Kurdish people in these negotiations.

Still the blood of Kurdistan hasn’t dried up. The Kurdish children in their shrouds took ages to be buried. Mothers still haven’t got any news about their dead sons. People separated from each other in the rush to get away from the exterminators still haven’t found each other. Everyday in the winter of this year they were dying from starvation and disease in the mountains. But the ruthless and shameless leadership of the Kurdistan Shop Front, before the eyes of the world, were kissing Saddam and presenting their smiles in a cynical embrace.

This at a time when Saddam’s regime has been weakened and is opposed by the majority of the Iraqi people. Under the pressure of world public opinion, even those who yesterday supported him financially (arms purchases, etc.) don’t dare make deals with him. The majority of people in Kurdistan and southern Iraq are very angry. But in reverse we see the smiler’s cynicism of the nationalists shaking hands with Saddam, This must be the plan of world reaction against the Kurdish people’s movement: to save the Baathist regime and the Kurdistan Shop Front from their demise.

The Kurdish uprising was for liberation from slavery and the half dead/half live existence that goes with it and not for a renewal of the March 11th 1970 agreement under the same regime. Three million Kurdish people have lost their homes, land and villages, choosing death on the mountains rather than death under Saddam. So under whose auspices have the Kurdistan Shop Front been doing the negotiations? There’s no force to save Saddam’s regime from imminent extinction (although Saddam does keep selected groups of workers around Baghdad reasonably content through big wage hikes; they’re the ones on recent demos supporting the regime). But the

hatred and misery of the Kurds and southern Arabs against the dirty plans of the negotiations and any attempt to re-invigorate the dead duck institutions of Saddam's rule is stronger. The coalition of world capital are against the interests of the people of Kurdistan and Iraq — as elsewhere.

The various recent deals between the Kurdish nationalists and the Baathist state is just so Saddam can bide his time and get stronger again. It's all manoeuvring with false programmes of democratisation. And he can get stronger through making surreptitious deals with the West by, for instance, sending oil to Kuwait and other western countries. Also, despite the bombing,

⁷“Simple Truth” was a face-saver for the greedy predatory Archers — with Mary Archer immediately after the Kurdish appeal trying to set up her own charity to bail out the filthy rich Lloyd's Names' gambling debts, with her being among the most prominent. The rock concert was the latest in a long line of automatic bourgeois reflexes in response to criticism of the horrors that arise out of their own actions. It's no coincidence that its forerunner, Live Aid, was launched at the same time as loads of people were giving money and gifts to the anti-State miners' strike in 1984. Some journalists made direct comparisons between giving to the deserving poor (starving Ethiopians) and giving to the undeserving poor (striking miners). These collections for the miners, whilst having some of the defects of charity (insofar as they were often seen as substitutes for solidarity action, and were extremely unevenly distributed, sometimes lining the pockets of Trade Union bureaucrats) were also self-organised expressions of identification with a real movement of opposition. Loads of people up and down the country used the collections as a point of contact, a place where people talked about the news, what was happening in the strike and themselves. That's why the police often expropriated collection boxes and arrested people doing the collecting. No such luck with the Archers' “Simple Bollocks” concert — the collectors collected a packet with the help of cops of all varieties. “Simple Truth” recognised the obvious ‘moral defeat’ for the coalition which the coalition's decision to let Saddam crush the uprising exposed for all the world to see, and tried to obscure and compensate for this to the West's advantage. ‘Operation Desert The Kurds’ (as the superficial critics of Private Eye and Spitting Image called it) was meant to be exorcised by Archer & co.'s Nice Image of the West: forget the horror of the war and the political hypocrisy — just sit back, watch and listen to the Fun and Musical Frolics on behalf of the starving Kurds. Before the concert Chris de Burgh, one of the organisers and performers, said “We supported this Gulf War, so it's only right we should give something to the Kurds”: hoping by this charitable means — along with all supporters of the war — to be absolved not only of all responsibility for the massacres there but also to be patted on the back for giving with the left hand what had been machinegunned with the right. Many people know that this is true, but say that name of this critique matters — all that's important is that lives are saved. Apart from the fact that this is hardly true, it ignores the fact that charity supports and is part of the whole system that starves and kills in the first place (e.g. Bob Geldof saying how vital it was to uphold the monarchy). Before Live Aid, the tendency was for people to give money, but not make a song and dance out of it, with a lot of people even feeling a bit embarrassed about giving. But since Live Aid — which involved a big leap in the spectacularisation of Giving — the tendency has been to make a big moral thing about how much or often you give, people more and more feeling the need to wear their pure hearts on their designer sleeves. And of course, now the rich and famous become even **more** rich and famous through their apparent altruistic charitable efforts, for them, above all, charity begins at home. And the higher people are in the hierarchy, the cruder the hypocrisy. What could be more gross than BP's chairman being kissed by Lenny Henry in front of millions of people watching him give a cheque for £1,200,000 to Comic Relief, money not given away by BP but accrued from the sale of red noses at BP garages, just a few weeks after one of the biggest massacres in the ‘Third World’ fought to defend, amongst other things, oil companies like BP? If Hitler had given money to the oppressed Jews, maybe we'd have seen Mel Brooks kiss his arse on the telly. This is not to contemptuously dismiss all those who give to charity — merely to point out that if they were genuinely concerned about saving lives they wouldn't just opt for the easy short-cut of money generosity, but would also subvert the brutal world that charity, and the system of which it is a part, depends on. Unfortunately, for most of those who caught up to these rackets, charity is simply an instant redemption for the ‘sin’ of being better off than someone lower down the international hierarchy, who are seen merely as victims to be pitied, not fellow proletarians in struggle with whom one can express practical solidarity. “There's always someone worse off than yourself” just keeps the international division of labour going: on the one hand, it provides ‘solace’ to those who remain passive before their **own** misery, on the other hand, it substitutes mutual recognition and a sense of responsibility for changing the world with mere guilt. Is it just coincidence that ‘Simple Truth’ arose in this country, the one country directly involved in the war which had such a pitiful opposition to it? Isn't all the £30m. given an attempt to be forgiven for having been so passive before this horror? Charity has become the all-forgiving Great Redeemer.

there's unlikely to be mass starvation in Iraq as the rich agricultural land in the north and south can feed the cities — although disease and malnutrition, particularly amongst children, will be massive.

In Kurdistan everybody wants to get back to their buildings and homes they left during the winter migration. It was a migration based not just on fear of a bloodbath threatened by Baathist army units, but also caused by peshmerga encouragement: they knew it would look good on western TV- and helpful for them. And so it has been. All the aid and charities are controlled by the nationalists. The money has mostly gone to the peshmergas for political purposes and virtually none to the poor distressed people. With factories, hospitals and schools destroyed, kids are queuing up to join the peshmergas for at least it means reasonable wages and some job security (one shouldn't underestimate another factor the romantic image of being a guerilla, with its Guevarist-type dreams, which lures many a young Kurd into the peshmergas; the reality of following orders in a highly hierarchical structure proves, however, to be somewhat mundane, banal even). The charity organisers have been able to present themselves as liberators — angels from helicopters — as if the war hadn't existed. The £30 million, for example, collected by former Tory Party chairman, Jeffrey Archer and his 'Simple Truth' rock concert⁷ went to the K.C.C. (Kurdish Cultural Centre, a registered charity organisation and an outfit which publishes Kurdish books, literature and music as a front for the Kurdistan Front) and then was almost certainly syphoned off into the political parties' bank accounts. They're just doing business in the name of the poor Kurds. In Halabja and lots of other areas absolutely nothing has got through to the people.

Elsewhere there's one or two sops to help people survive but more or less you've got to have some commercial project or scam to ask the nationalists for dosh. Or, if the money hasn't been given to peshmerga cadres in the form of salaries and wages, it's remained in the banks earning high interest rates. All charity foods given to the Iranian government has been passed on by them to black marketeers who then sell it for high prices to needy Kurdish people. Charities became a tax rip-off source of revenue for the Turkish government, whilst the Iranian government complained about the fact that many foodstuffs were beyond their sell-by date, and then promptly sold them off on the black market. To add insult to injury, on the Iran/Iraq border the nationalists are taking extra taxes from people and on the streets of Kurdish cities are openly stealing anybody's car to sell them off in Iran! A dog eat dog situation has quickly come into existence. The fate of all charities was repeated yet again: a handy means of lining the pockets of gangsters and spivs!

However, the southern rebellion refuses to give in and shows remarkable spirit despite the murderous forces unleashed against it. At the same time attacks on the Iraqi army in the coalition/UN zone of Kurdistan have increased so consequently the peshmergas are now openly collaborating with the Iraqi army in order to put a stop to it. Recently a big demonstration in Hawlir was put down by 150 peshmergas. Basically they discourage people by speaking to them at demos, brandishing their weapons, and if that doesn't work, using force. There have been big demos all over Iraqi Kurdistan (particularly Sulliemania) and Saddam has specifically asked the nationalists to put down the demos (which are both about basics — food and money — and also against the collaboration).

This collaboration has now become so blatant that leftist guerilla groups have suddenly swelled in number and taken to the mountains again, openly despising the nationalists. The Maoists have made the most capital out of this. The PKK (Kurdish Socialist Workers Party) guerillas situated

in Turkey have moved across the border and have become active there, linking up with the recently formed PAK in Iraq (Kurdish Socialist Party) which describes the nationalists as a club of feudal landlords. But the PKK is used by Syria because they're against the dam built across the Euphrates by the Turkish government and which starves Syria of water. Patronising the PKK, the Syrian government has given the leadership safe headquarters in Lebanon's Bekhar valley. The Maoist-oriented parties go back to the early 70s and they want a system of peasant collectives, nationalisation of the land, etc. But throughout their 20 year history they've killed people they've got minor ideological disputes with – individuals who leave the party, etc. Also, in attacking collaborators they tend to kill simple and harmless peasants from the same villages as the collaborators – creating a climate of fear.

But the majority of the exploited cannot possibly give up the fight as they have no stake in the racketeering or party organisations.

Shame on those who make business from the blood of the martyrs!

Victory to the uprising of the Arabs, Kurds and other minorities against Saddam and the coalition!

* * *

Statement by a former peshmerga with some assistance and additions from English friends (from someone who left the nationalists before the real heavy inter-fratricidal killings because it was becoming like a partisan army – killing soldiers, etc. – and completely outside the real movement).

Produced by: B.M.BLOB, London WC1N 3XX and B.M.COMBUSTION, London WC1N 3XX

July 14th 1991

* * *

Postscript

This text went to press almost at the same time as renewed fighting developed between people in the Kurdish areas and the Iraqi armed forces. The news so far is of the destruction of the town hall in Hawlir (Arbil in Arabic), of rioting in Tuz Khurmatu, and of the surrender of over 1000 Iraqi troops (it appears that they had no desire to fight whatsoever) and of the capture of 14 tanks in Sulliamania. Barzani, head of the KDP, clearly revealed his collaborator role by denouncing "people opposed to any deal" for instigating the clashes. The Baathists have denounced "Iranian infiltrators". At first glance this appears to be pure propaganda. But it probably has a partial truth to it. Certainly in March the Iranian government tried to intervene through the intermediary of an Islamic fundamentalist organisation – the Al Dowa party – in the hope of using the uprising to further their aims. At that time they supplied lorry loads of food, together with placards saying "No to the Communists! No to the Baathists!" They know they can use the desperation of the people to manipulate their allegiances through the power of money and food.

Desperation has produced two tendencies. On the one hand, many Kurds are flocking to the political parties (especially the Kurdistan Front, but also many of the Marxist-Leninist groups) as

a means of survival and protection, finding in these organisations some form of external “hope”. In fact, many, whether they join the KF or not, are looking to their negotiations with Saddam as their only hope. This is ironic, since Saddam is clearly playing a waiting game, dragging out these negotiations for as long as possible, whilst, in the meantime, the KF is splitting up into fratricidal antagonisms — with fights and killings between the small social democratic Socialist Party of Kurdistan (part of the KF) and the larger stronger sections of the KF (the PUK and the KDP). On the other hand, there is an increasing hostility on the part of much of the population towards all these political groups. Whether these two tendencies come into open conflict remains to be seen. Clearly this text will be partly overtaken by events, and we obviously have no pretensions to providing a definitive analysis of the situation there.

The Monument, otherwise known as ‘The Victory Arch’

The techniques used by Saddam to consolidate the Baathist regime combined terror and mass spectacles obviously indebted to German fascism and, further back, to Bolshevism — and urban re-(de-)generation. Popular quarters were bulldozed and the centre of Baghdad turned into a monumental post-modernist (or “regionalised international style”) exhibit, echoing Baron Hausmann’s transformations of Paris in the 19th century but with a far greater emphasis on sculptural monumentalism. This uncomprehended dream — nightmare, rather — could easily be taken from the outside as an example of cynical “art/anti-art” domination if it wasn’t so deadly serious, covering layer upon layer of horror. Going back to 1968, the Baathist rise to power is comparable, for example, with Premier George Pompidou’s plan in the early 70s to turn the central core of Paris into a necropolis of art, finance and overpowering monuments from which all popular life would eventually be banished. Saddam’s version, though obviously not in response to an insurrectionary anti-art movement (which aspects of France May ’68 were), nonetheless focussed on bringing artists “from the atelier into the street” (to quote from the Arabic daily Al Hayat) creating a kitsch version of ancient Babylon, Aladdin/Sinbad etc. and filtered through Saddam’s favourite Hollywood movie, Errol Flynn’s “Thief of Baghdad”. But Saddam’s swashbuckling erections have been more or less confined to the capital. Kurdish cities like Kirkuk or Mosul, despite Arabisation policies, have been virtually left untouched.

The Monument was built after the conclusion of the Iran/Iraq war. The Pop Art/Hollywood-style sculpture built at the base of Saddam’s arms holding the crossed swords forming the ‘Victory Arch’ is of a giant torn peanut bag out of which is pouring 2500 Iranian helmets. It’s like a horrendous diversion of the Surrealists’ urban proposals for the transformation of Paris.

An Account of Halabja, March 1988

During the Iran/Iraq war, when the Americans were taking the side of the Iraqi army which had the upper hand, the Iranian government tried to open up a new front. At that time the Kurdistan Nationalist Front had an agreement with Khomeini and his Iranian government, who’d promised them some kind of Kurdish autonomy. Together they planned to “liberate” Halabja, a town of 100,000 people which was about 36 kilometres from the Iranian border. With that in mind, they occupied it. The Iraqi army was weak in the Halabja region and basically only in situ to keep the Kurds down, its offensive might concentrated in the middle and south of Iraq.

In order to insure the success of the occupation of Halabja, the Iranians attacked army bases with rockets, but many missed and killed civilians in the town. People there were, in any case, very cautious about the occupation and now, after the poorly-aimed rockets, tried to leave. But the peshmergas kept people in, only allowing out those who could pay them loads of money. The town itself was pretty rebellious, full of army deserters and recently there had been demos condemning both sides in the war. So on March 17th, 1988, in order to crush the occupation and Halabja's rebellious inhabitants, the Iraqi regime bombarded the town with chemical weapons (cyanide and mustard nerve gas, manufactured in the West, especially by the German company A.G.Farben, and sold to Saddam). Thousands died instantly and among the casualties were workers, students, children and conscripts. The final death toll was well over 5000. It was the most serious incident of the war and was a factor in bringing it to an end a few months later. That, together with a general stalemate in which both sides saw that there was no economic advantage they could gain from it. Increasingly, Iraq's position had weakened, with Iran on the offensive, although, to counteract this the Americans had given more weaponry to Iraq. The war which cost a million lives devastated the economies of both countries.

After the genocide in Halabja many locals became refugees in the Iranian mountains, where they were treated quite badly in camps. Consequently many returned to Iraq, although not to the Halabja region. But further punishment was in the offing: because of the stigma of Halabja, many workers couldn't get jobs and students couldn't return to college etc. There were suicides and some former residents were left to starve in prison camps. The stigma even extended to the far south and Halabja workers couldn't get employment even there.

The Nationalists' popularity in Kurdistan, already scarce, vanished completely because they'd been a part of this equation which had resulted in genocide. Moreover, after the attack, the peshmergas went through the empty town, looting houses, nicking fridges, cookers, etc. — even bracelets from dead women — to sell them elsewhere, in Iran. The money didn't even go to funding the parties but lined their own pockets. Needless to say, peshmerga officers thieved the most — so publicly, that some of their names are well known to the people of the area.

The Kurdistan Workers' Councils or 'Shoras'

Introduction

The following documents were received from Kurdistan in the summer of 1991. Originally in Kurdish, they've been translated as accurately as possible. Obviously we don't agree with all that's said in them but the information is invaluable.

In 1979, at the time of the fall of the Shah of Iran, the western media acknowledged the existence of Shora Workers' Councils in the Iranian social upheavals, although, even then, it falsely limited their scope to the country's oilfields. Now, this same media, reaching even greater depths of stupefaction, doesn't even mention shoras in the continuing Kurdish revolution — and perhaps also in southern Iraq! In their disinfected account of events, workers don't even exist now.

However, as to be expected, there are complications. The document on "A government of Workers' Shoras" produced early April '91 stating their aims, hasn't been produced but we get a good idea of what it was about by reading the remarkable second letter from Kurdistan published here. The shoras were workers' councils expressing many of the contradictions workers' councils have almost always faced: in particular, the confusion over whether to openly attack the political parties as external authorities with their own separate interests or to compromise with them and thus weaken the power of the councils. Some tendencies pushed towards the shoras becoming autonomous revolutionary bodies (an armed people answerable to and protecting the shoras' authority, all power to the shoras; permanently revocable delegates, etc.). But this tendency also coexisted with those pushing for social democratic demands and deals with, in particular, the Kurdistan Front. The point, however, is to first of all consider the practicalities of Kurdistan at this time. The shoras were borne of pressing survival necessities in a pretty desperate, though also euphoric, situation concerned with food distribution, clothing, housing and first aid. Initially set up in Sulliamania, they spread over Iraqi Kurdistan, including the oil-rich area around Kirkuk. In many instances, they continued after the return of the refugees from the mountains, into the beginning of the summer.

Whilst the demands of the shoras (when dealing with survival, expressed within the framework of political economy and the seemingly eternal world of money; when dealing with 'politics', demanding liberal 'rights', bourgeois 'democracy', etc.) are an aspect of their confusion, equally important is the fact that this workers' democratic forum can move against capitalist social relations and the capitalist mode of production (the market economy), depending on the changing tempo of what is still a very volatile situation in that area of world capital. More concretely, many strands of the shoras' practice implicitly went beyond their explicit demands.

Conflicts immediately arose within the shoras and, like the past history of Workers' Councils elsewhere, were prey to all kinds of political racketeering. They have yet to become the authentic voice of the exploited and alienated creating a new world. Kurdistan, so far, has been no exception. The first letter from Kurdistan verifies some of this, with its very confused angle on the conflicts within the shoras. Whilst it condemns the Marxist-Leninists for their politicking, it also attacks

them from a silly liberal stance: it wants the shoras to involve everyone — bourgeois, cadres and professionals included (If this means including doctors, o.k. — but he's also implying that all the other sections of the professional and bourgeois class be included). At one and the same time, it criticises the Kurdistan Front, whilst feeling some sympathy for these pigs. Its tone seems to insist on some independent stance, reflecting partly a tendency moving towards autonomy, but then ends up wanting to compromise with the KF and places all its hope in the negotiations with the regime. In fact, its attitude could well be a prelude to some kind of reformed social democratic take on things. The last 20 years or more has seen, in the vast majority of instances, the beginning of an insightful critique of Marxist-Leninism fall into this trap or worse — an unfettered market individualism. Real steps towards a theoretically clearer autonomous grasp have been pitifully weak. Nevertheless, in its confusion, it raises practical nitty-gritty points about concrete problems (such as whitecollar v. blue collar workers) and the facts are very interesting. On the other hand, the second letter is crystal and a joy to read. This account of the Kurdish shoras, dealing with real problems raised within their expanding parameter is relevant to workers everywhere in the world, including those in the English-speaking nations: Third World status doesn't come into it.

To end on an affirmative note. After the party politicking which discredited somewhat the shoras among the population of Sullimania in early April '91, two texts are reproduced here illustrating that perhaps the shoras are getting into their stride once again, at least in the early summer months: although one has clearly Marxist-Leninist sympathies, the other, from street hawkers, is basic and straight forward. Both condemn the discredited Kurdistan Front and their attack on the forum of a genuine workers' democracy, and it's now known that many of the people who made the uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan haven't quite been marginalised within the shoras, despite suffering from heavy calumnies. What this might portend remains to be realised.

English/Kurdish comment (September 1991).

Leaflet from a Shora Workers' Council of Street Hawkers. Not to Accept Being Buried Alive.

We, Sullimania's street hawkers and itinerant barrow traders, with immense difficulty and fatigue, can only get a few dinars working every day for 12 or 13 hours standing under the glaring sun. We can't make a living for ourselves and families. Our tables are empty.

Today, unemployment and high prices confront us. We aren't satisfied with this grinding existence. Poverty and starvation leave us no room. We don't walk the streets for the joys and liberties of so doing, it's our work. Why then doesn't the government stop harassing us and keep moving us on? What do they want from us? Why then are they insulting us and determined to bury us alive?

We do not accept the harassment of our work and trade by the government or the Kurdistan Front because any force which doesn't look after our lives, children and families doesn't mean anything to us.

We therefore declare that until the government sorts out our living we will in desperation carry on with our work and trade.

Honoured Street Hawkers!

We need each others' unity and solidarity. We need to assemble together and to resist the attacks on us, to impose or have our demands validated by the authorities. We shouldn't be satisfied with our work today but be united for the social security rights denied us. Our life must be guaranteed by all the wealth and the oil which exists in our country. Otherwise, what do we want this or that government for? To carry on with this near impossible life in front of their eyes? And yet all the money and wealth are in the hands of the rulers and authorities and they want to bury us alive in poverty, starvation and unemployment.

Let's build street hawker unity in Sulliemania City.

Committee of Street Hawkers of Sulliemania.

July 2nd 1991.

Statement From a Sulliemania Shora Workers' Council

Workers, Exploited, Honoured Revolutionary People!

The brutal Baathist capitalist regime for more than 22 years has continued to crush, destroy and kill individuals, groups and our sons always in order to stabilize its dark authority. In a very barbaric way it attacked the revolutionary people of this country.

No day went by without the regime arresting hundreds and thousands of workers, exploited and revolutionary people who then disappeared. Also it attacked and destroyed most of the proud and revolutionary areas that opposed the regime. Under the regime in this critical and desperate era, constant starvation, unemployment and high prices had pushed most people into this forlornly unhappy situation.

The capitalist orientated parasitical minority have got all the methods, most of the institutions and everything else in their hands while we, the majority have been denied every human right.

This decadent capitalistic regime with its naked brutal dictatorship, has made us the workers and exploited, into cannon fodder for two big destructive wars (Iran v Iraq and the US/Alliance in Kuwait). Up to now we and our sons have been eaten by the desert vultures in both wars. Many of us disappeared or we live very precariously. The hatred of this always disadvantaged people everywhere exploited in the cities and small towns has destroyed the regime's institutions though their own force alone. So much so that they nearly sounded the death knell for the regime which even until now has not been able to put itself back together again. It was the realisation of the oppressed's own power; independent, relying only on themselves, and in no way dependent on the might of Imperialism and the bourgeois nationalists of the Kurdistan Front. In Kurdistan, the KF were trying to control the power of the people and nowhere, not just in Iraq, are the interests of World Imperialism, particularly America, served by revolutionary people. Today it's always trying to crush the uprising of the workers and exploited people in any part of the world and replace it with rulers and/or capitalist states which serve their interests. Just look at how we saw the shame of the beaten Iraqi army and how, with its power broken, it was then encouraged by the Imperialists to crush the uprising. They gave up on the destruction of the regime because they needed this defeated army for another time.

It was due to both the philosophical attitude of the bourgeois nationalists which didn't enjoy the backing of Imperialism as well as the lack of a workers' Communist Party representing the vanguard of different sectors of the workers' movement that the uprising couldn't continue and

which stopped us in our tracks (This was the weakest point of the revolutionary workers' movement at the time of the uprising (*That's what they think* — Translator's note). The Kurdish people became the victims, migrating and starving in their thousands in the cold where they contacted diseases and many died. But even despite these adversities, in this period of bourgeois nationalist negotiations with the regime, the workers and exploited have continued with their uprising and are ever ready to confront the forces of fear and trickery.

The bourgeois nationalists after justifying the migration of revolutionary Kurdish people because of the Imperialists' betrayal are now themselves in negotiations with the regime seeking a solution to the Kurdish problem in this way. But the workers and exploited revolutionary people continuing with their uprising in Sulliamania are proving that they will never accept the negotiating conditions. And in Hawlir, on the Tuesday before AED (a Muslim religious festival) the workers and exploited through their sympathy actions proved their solidarity with the people of the south and the rest of Iraq. It won't let the colours of their own struggle fade!

The workers and exploited assent to negotiations for one reason only — that the reuniting power of the people obliged the regime to come to the negotiating table clearing the way towards the destruction of the regime and the Kurdish people should have all the power in their hands.

The people of Kurdistan only assent to the negotiations in order to stipulate that there must be democracy and political freedom now in Kurdistan and all Iraq. That no one should be tortured and one should be free to choose any politics or beliefs.

Moreover, the workers and exploited only condone the negotiations so that, on the one hand, a framework can be recognised so that there shouldn't be anybody above them speaking on their behalf. On the other hand, we, the millions of workers standing in line do not sanction the negotiations as a means of consolidating authority (everyday the regime strengthens the institutions and the army, — barricades, soldiers patrolling the streets, armoured vehicles etc have increased and there is no corner in Kurdistan without their presence).

We also cannot sanction these negotiations while democracy and free expression is forbidden and the workers' and exploited cannot be free in their homes to discuss their demands and needs. What's the ground for negotiations and what do they mean if the regime continues with the same policy?

And what do negotiations mean if or when the Kurdistan Front starts openly attacking the voice of freedom and democracy setting about the shora workers' councils and their committees or anyone outside the Kurdistan Front? We, the workers and exploited, have as an immediate task to organise our general meetings and assemblies, to discuss our differences and to put forward our demands asking for an explanation for the on-going negotiations and to put pressure on both sides not to keep us waiting. In short, to rise up for our demands. Firstly, all the invader's army and powers should be ousted completely from Kurdistan. Secondly, complete freedom for all political prisoners and freedom for the Anfal and Barzani area prisoners. Thirdly, unconditional political freedom. Fourthly, a vote on whether to agree/ disagree with the negotiations. All this is to be established by the workers and people themselves.

Victory to the Popular Worker's Uprising.

Down with Capitalism. Long live socialism.

Committee for Workers in Small Factories in Sulliamania

June 23rd, 1991

A Letter From Kurdistan

(From a pamphlet written in Kurdish and distributed throughout Germany, Britain and elsewhere in Europe.)

This letter is for you and those friends who are meant to know about the events and how the situation came about. What I'm recalling here is what I've seen and been aware of.

1. The general situation before the uprising

After the Anfal happened in Kurdistan, thousands of people were arrested and then disappeared. Thousands were killed in the acts of resistance and many more thousands migrated to Iran and Turkey. Isolated, people gave into the State and government..a difficult and depressing situation emerged in Kurdistan. All this proved to the people that armed struggle was not the way to confront the government because of the poor quality of the technology and the armaments under their control. The technology and sophisticated weaponry were powerful and lethal. All the Kurdish opposition were forced into Iran. This made people more demoralized because they knew they couldn't do anything and daily the Peshmarga were handing themselves over to the government. There were a lot of deserters who at the same time didn't want to partake in the Iran-Iraq war. The government was exploiting that psychologically depressing situation in which people were completely demoralized after the Anfal and where the Kurdish opposition had been defeated, living out their existences unemployed and deserters at one and the same time. Thus people were awaiting the outcome of the war that could perhaps result in the fall of the Iraqi regime. The war ceased in August without this happening. People were afraid because, they were saying, that with Saddam staying on no-one could rest. Before he had been too occupied with the war, but now with the ceasefire he could turn on people again. This time however no political movement or activities existed. There was only talk about it on an individual level. So after the war stopped, the government having given itself time to lick its wounds, around September decreed a general amnesty for the Kurds called decision 736-737, according to which all Kurds could leave the army. The people believed it because, it was said, what did the government want an army for after the war?

People submitted to decision 736-737, legally registered with the government, and left the army. But it was only for a short time and then there was an army call up all over again. However the army became disorganized because there were large numbers who wouldn't accept its discipline and were only waiting to be demobbed. A month after demobbing took place the government transferred them south. At this time the general standard of living was low because all Kurds born between 1954 and 72 were in the army. Anyone without money couldn't afford army service because there were no wages and bribery was widespread in the army. This situation continued until Iraq invaded Kuwait. Then there began a transformation of the Iraqi army in Kuwait whereby most soldiers there were of Kurdish origin. After the coalition's threats, the scenario grew in scope, and Kurds daily started deserting from the army. In fact most deserted and only a

handful remained because no-one agreed with the scenario. It was like as though every home in Kurdistan housed one deserter. The government couldn't control the situation as the deserters were too many and the standard of living so low that people were unable to do military service. Deserters arrested in the cities were released by forking out five dinars to Army Security and three dinars to the police.

This situation continued until the struggles between the coalition and the government really heated up, People then started building up hopes that the coalition would overthrow Saddam. It was said mostly in Sullimania, that there was going to be a war but the people in the middle and south of Iraq ever imagined such a possibility until the night allied forces bombed Baghdad. For the people of Kurdistan that was the most beautiful night. The next morning people were joyfully hugging and kissing each other. This seemed to have happened only in Kurdistan. People felt revived and fear left their hearts. The government with its brutal security control mechanisms which had bound and gagged us for twenty years seemed to be falling apart. Peoples faces looked open and relaxed and they began to have conversations with each other. What's happening? What can we do? How do we oppose the government?

After the Iraqi army was broken in Kuwait, thousands of deserting soldiers on foot returned to their home-towns where hour after hour they spoke of the tragedies they had witnessed in Kuwait. How thousands starved to death or were killed and how the Iraqi authorities lied to them saying that there wasn't going to be a war. However most Iraqi cities are full of deserters and people have seen many tragedies and critical moments. But governmental control over the people wasn't the same as before and because of that people were preparing themselves bit by bit. Daily, people predicted that something was going to happen but noone knew how or in what way. This was when the news was received from people returning from the south about how the retreating army leaving Kuwait had joined with the people in attacking the government and that opposition in Basra had built up to the level where the people of the city had completely taken control.

2. The situation during the uprising

Just a few days before the uprising people had had enough. That meant that something had to be done. But the problem was that they weren't prepared or at any rate weren't organized although they were just on the point of organizing themselves against the government. At that time we were aware of a group called Committee for the Uprising. But we didn't contact them because we didn't trust some of their undesirable personalities. But they wanted to set up some armed teams and wanted to get together with a communist group, RAWT¹, to carry out their activities. But RAWT was so isolated because some of its members had recently been arrested and we didn't want to be the fore of the army as an organization.

Then we (Y.K., A.H., S.H.I.W. and his brothers, S.A.I.I.K. and his team) had a few meetings to discuss the situation and how to initiate attacks and confrontations which would detonate the situation. But the main problem was lack of arms. We contacted the PUK and KDP for this purpose but they cheated us by not giving us weapons.

Then the Kurdish Opposition (Kurdistan Front) started contacting former participants from their ranks asking them to set up armed units giving them codename structures to be ready

¹RAWT: The March of Communism Group, which calls for such things as a 35 hour week which is pretty meaningless

when necessary. The radio station continually called on people to be prepared and organized and they broadcast an amnesty for the Mstashars.² They also called for the Iraqi army based in the North not to shoot on the public but to give into the people as they were backing the uprising in the south. The radio also called on people in Sulliemania to celebrate on the 7th, until they arrived to take part.

That's how people prepared themselves everywhere for the spark to light the uprising and the government was worried, prepared and wary but things were so serious that they didn't know how to cope with the situation. They even tried locally to initiate the explosion on the 6th in order to kill and threaten the people. But there was little they could do.

It was on the eve of the 7th of March 1991 that a group of about 15 met at my place to decide what to do in the morning and what positions we should take. But the problem was still a lack of arms. We all stayed at K's house overnight. We managed to get hold of one rifle and one USSI. At 7 am on the 7th we positioned ourselves throughout some popular quarters (Tooy Malik, Hawaranarza, Hagg-Khan, Malkandy, Azady, Darooga, Khanwa-Koraken and Baranan). Prior to that we knew of F-D, O.O. Ma-M and we heard that F had control over Majid-Bug and that they were ready.

I am going to talk a little about my own participation. We started with the popular quarters of Tooy Malik and Hawara just after 7 am. There were about seven of us and we went through the streets asking people to come out and join the uprising and coming confrontation. This is the historical chance Kurds had been waiting for. Hundreds of youths, women and children followed us but we only had two guns. The people requested to go to the homes of Jash Kurdish army units who'd got guns asking them either to participate in the uprising as Kurds or to hand over their weapons to the people. We were actually quite successful in this. We went to their homes clapping and shouting solidarity slogans. They came over to us with their guns and joined the people. Now we had a lot of guns gathered together. After we went to the homes of two Mstashars in Tooy Malik and we got hold of a few more guns by putting pressure on them. But they weren't attacked because they said they belonged to the Kurdistan Front and they were waiting for the call via the radio station.

The demonstration grew larger and larger and we decided to attack a building housing the Osman Organization³ on Tooy Malik concourse. It was an attack from all directions and within ten minutes it was burnt down and destroyed. Some Osmans were killed and some were arrested inside their building. The people – men, women, girls and even small children were enthusiastically active in helping out and giving first aid to anybody who'd received injuries.

At the same time people were swarming in from Mazid Bag and they controlled the university's police centre and the rest of the university. At that time there was shooting all over the place in Sulliemania. Smoke was rising. Then we went down Tooy Malik's main street to take over the prison. After an attack lasting a few minutes – together with a rocket attack – the prison guards surrendered and the prison was smashed up and all the prisoners set free. The actual walls were demolished with shovels belonging to the city council.

We continued onward and the demonstration kept growing as the people of Hagy Khan and Maikandy came into the street. Elsewhere the people of Azady and Khanwo-Koraom were com-

in Kurdistan where jobs are disappearing by the minute.

²Mstashars: Official government term for Kurdish armed units in the Iraqi Army. The previous name Jash had to be replaced because it was too discredited.

³Osman: A Baathist Party building. Osman was a martyr to the Baathist cause.

ing down through Ondebak after the Azady police station handed over all their guns to them without firing a shot. In return people forgave them and didn't kill them. There was an attack from all sides on Sara – the main police station. The bravest person in that district was a young girl wearing black; she was continually to the fore of the people and wasn't afraid of anything, constantly raising maral. I spoke to her and she told me she was a niece of M.R. Anyway, attack after attack continued on Sara. Some people were injured The Sara police station finally fell to both the shouting and shooting of the psople. Some police were killed and those that were injured gave themselves up. Sergeant Shannall, the most infamous and hated person in the land who had been responsible for killing many people was captured. His head was smashed open with a club, his hands and legs cut off and his mutilated body hung on a traffic light outside Sara.

There was a big demonstration in front of Sara. The numbers were huge. Arms and cars had been commandeered by the people and groups were getting into cars and heading towards those places not yet liberated. We wanted to go down the Mawlawy⁴ road towards Hasib Salh but we couldn't do it because there were Kanas⁵ in the area and you would have soon been finished off if you were out on the streets. There was also shooting over in the Hamia, the main army base of Sulliemania. The assistance of the people was needed there. With their help most of the base could be taken over and thousands af arms distributed among the people.

Anyway scenes like these were taking place all over Sulliemenia. The news came through that all the security headquarters in the south had been taken. This time we were by the S'a Takochy garage when Hamia was taken. Fighting continued over at the Hasib Salh building until its resistance was broken. Then people stormed the place and two of its doors were burnt out. Fighting then broke out around the old security headquarters. Its four walls were demolished. People invaded the buildings which housed Party Headquarters. The gates of the cigarette factory were broken down and people looted thousands of cigarette cartons. Then we went back to Tooy Malik with our friends, going back through the city by car. Many places had by now been captured or burnt down. The only important security headquarters left was Akary, located in a rich suburb of Sulliemania. It was surrounded by the crowds of people who continued to arrive but there was still resistance. It was now about 11 am. We visited the hospital, the wards were packed with the injured. Most had received their injuries at security headquarters and the Hamia base. But the hospital was disorganised and in a mess because most hospital workers were afraid to come to work. Pillagers had been looting it and hospital beds had been pulled out onto the street. We asked some people to look after the hospital but it didn't work Then I went back through the city in out Krona car calling on all hospital workers to return to work because hundreds of people had been injured as well as asking the armed people to protect the hospital so that health care could be carried out properly. Then our Krona crashed into another car. But it was OK, we were safe.

Rocket attacks coming from security headquarters were landing all over Sulliemania killing and injuring lots of people. A group of us went back to Tooy Malik but the hullabaloo was so great that we couldn't be heard for more than five meters.

We met AM. and he told us what he had been doing. After talking to him we decided to set up a barricaded base-centre to call on people and direct them. Then we went to Awat school where there was a loud hailer. We immediately started to call on the revolutionary and exploited

⁴Named after respected Kurdish poet whose love poems and philosophy were an inspiration.

⁵Kanas: elite troops with high velocity rifles.

people to come together in order to organize ourselves and protect our city from any attacks, acknowledging how great and revolutionary the people are and how the regime's structures had been smashed 'Let's carry the revolutionary spirit onto the end and not let government offices and factories be misused because now they are our own, our own revolutionary property.' Then a lot of people gathered around the school and our friends also gradually got back together. There were a lot of government cars around and the school was in a strategic place leading to many parts of Sullimania. Things were getting bigger and bigger and lots of armed people joined us and were asking what they should do now. The slogan 'Bread, Jobs, Freedom and the Democratic Republic' was the only slogan in people's mouths. The school had become a focal point. The soldiers that surrounded the city had surrendered to groups of people one after another, offering no resistance.

People were bringing them into the school. It was quite a sight; they were protected and no one was going to harm them. We, ourselves, looked after them and asked people to feed them because they are the sons of the people and they had protected the people by disobeying government orders. But not only soldiers but also police and security guards were brought in and these acts compelled us to set up a prison at the school. Then people were complaining about the looting. So we went through the city using our car's megaphone saying that these acts weren't revolutionary and that confiscated property now belonged to the people. We asked responsible people to get together and request that seized government property not be smashed up or burnt since it now belonged to the people. Some people brought everything they'd requisitioned into the school, from cars, to hospital equipment to heavy artillery that they'd lifted from army bases and guard posts (where guards had handed out rifles in a disciplined fashion and these rifles had been brought into the city). These acts enlarged the scope of what was taking place. People liked to have responsible persons carrying out their affairs, so it was urgent to arrange a meeting to explain who we were and what we wanted from the people and what our actions meant. After long discussions it was decided that our actions were to be carried out within the framework of the shoras and so we agreed to work under the name of the Tooy Malik Shora. We worked out duties and demands raising the slogan; 'Bread and Work and the Democratic Republic'. Our demands could be condensed into eight points — demands which were also been raised by the UN Council of Human Rights. I don't quite remember them concisely but there were demands for unconditional political freedom, freedom for all organisations, strikes and womens' rights. Demands dealing with equal wages, with unemployment and social security support, with the separation of religion and state, freedom of religious pursuits and some other things like that.

These were the demands and our duty was to get people together to discuss them and to elect their own representatives. The 7th of March was now drawing to a close. During the night we stayed up constantly discussing things. We had about 70 prisoners. There were also a lot of armed people walking about. On the morning of the 8th, around 8 am. someone said the peshmergas were coming down from Goiza. We had about 7 cars, and went to meet them, rendezvousing with them in the Baroo⁶ woods. After welcoming them, we passed on the news that the whole city was occupied plus part of the security buildings. They hadn't been aware that the city had been taken and they were the first group of peshmergas who officially came down to the city. They were the 7th PUK battalion and their commander was A.H. We went back to the school and the megaphone was announcing the good news that our patriotic sons were now backing the

⁶The Baroo woods: woods that are used for fuel and the sap from the trees are used for flavouring.

public's uprising. It seemed that most of the city's population was gathered around that school. When we had a meeting with the peshmergas we explained that only the security building had not been taken and we sent S and X together with some peshmergas over there. Fighting recommenced until S was injured and some peshmergas killed. The peshmergas had thought we were the city organisation of the Kurdistan Front, but we explained to them that we were part of the "shoras of the revolutionary and exploited people" and didn't belong to any party, group or organization explaining to them what our actions had been and that our demands were the public's demands. They were glad and thanked us a lot for what we'd done and immediately asked for some coordination to help each other and act together. We agreed and asked them to go to the other school after lunch always insisting however that we wanted to remain independent. Then we took them there. All in all there were about 200 peshmergas.

Continuous fighting around security headquarters lasted until late afternoon but it ended on the same day it began (the 8th of March). All occupanls were killed, about 800 were inside. They were cut to pieces and the prisoners set free. A lot of people were martyred participating in this act; people such as Awat Abdrazak, a close comrade of D. Inside security headquarters there were a lot of rooms, cells, gallows and places of execution. And a big cabin with bedrooms inside, with naked photos of women and women's clothes lying around. This was their place of entertainment with women prisoners. A photo of a woman serving their needs hung in a niche. She was undergoing multiple rape. Forgive me, I couldn't remove photos from these places. The inside walls of the prison are memorable, full of poetry and patriotic slogans.

During the fighting over the security headquarters those infamous ones injured or arrested were brought to the school. The people demanded a legalized peoples' court to be set up. With the aid of the loud hailer we chose eight criminals from the 160 prisoners and handed them over to the people. They helped themselves, cutting off their hands, feet and heads and then they were hung up. Even at that time J.H came over and said that M. Nowsherrawan⁷ had requested that nobody be killed. But neither the people nor us were obeying their order because the people's hatred was so great that they would have smashed up the school too.

After that news came through that Mulazm-Omer and his forces were coming into the city. He went to the other school, joining J. After a short while he asked to see us and we had a meeting with him, (myself, H.A. and J.) and he thanked us a lot and asked for solidarity and help. We helped them a lot that night giving them a few cars and assisting them with the deployment of their forces around the city. On the 9th the Kurdistan Front came down to the city and a lot of other friends joined us. After that discussions were about decisions to set up Shora workers' councils in different areas and we helped as much as we could. Shoras were increasing in Sulliamania and in the end there were about 50 of them. All this required a central headquarters, together with a rubber stamp to carry out the work in an organized and authorized way. K and his friends were very active in Majeed Bag. The whole thing was getting bigger. There was a base centre in Sarkares⁸ which we weren't aware of and didn't know personally and they started functioning after the 9th as a workers' shora. Then one of their representatives came over to see us. After a discussion we decided to help them. They wanted to have a meeting in nearby Sarkares and

⁷Newssherawan is the big boss of Komoli marxist-leninist entryists into the PUK and ironically responsible for killing many people opposed to PUK.

⁸Area to the west of Sulliamania city. I've often had a good drink there (TN).

they asked us to go round and cail on people with the aid of the loud hailer to get a lot of people together to participate.

When it did happen, we saw their two meter wide red hammer and sickle flags. They distributed 'The March of Communism' manifesto in the name of the shoras. They only talked about the 35 hour week and nothing else. So we gradually withdrew from their company, telling them we weren't committed to any organization that they should only act in their own name and therefore, shouldn't impose that flag or their demands over the shoras' heads.

The work and the size of the shora was increasing daily and control was getting ever more difficult, especially the administration and division of tasks. Our relations with the KF was very good and our stamped authorisation was accountable and even recognized as theirs. We exchanged letters to carry out our tasks. Then we started administering some tasks by ourselves such as, firstly, setting up mobile medical teams and collecting blood donations for those injured in hospital. We managed to collect 1,400 bottles of blood. The same thing happened with other services such as getting water and electricity workers together with the result that water and electricity supplies, which had been cut off for some time due to the war, were reconnected throughout Sulliamania. And finally we managed to get the hospital functioning properly again. L.S.H.A. played a big part in all that and the hospital administration was in the hands of a shora workers' council.

Hospital staff were working round the clock and we reclaimed ambulances and medicines looted at the time of the uprising. The city council's central services set up their own shora, electing their own representatives. The engineers W. and the sister of a martyr, A. carried out this work effectively, collecting all the corpses lying in the streets and cleaning things up. The reason why we took responsibility for these services was to aid humanity and to introduce and publicise the shoras. In that we were practically successful. At the same time lefties were infiltrating the shoras. A., O., and S. and others played a part in all that. Also the Kurdistan Front often came to the school. They discussed things but without any sensitivity, except towards those friends mentioned above who in their turn didn't respond to them, not even recognising their existence, as they only recognised the shoras as the sole centre of all things. The KF complained that there was a political tendency in the shoras and that the workers' programme was that belonging to the 'March of Communism' group. Anyway these were the disputes going on within the shoras where different opinions and tendencies engaged with each other. This took place around the 12th and 13th of March.

It was then decided that I should be delegated to Hawlir so that what was happening in Sulliamania wouldn't be isolated. We went with S and some other friends. I went to the N.P.O. in Hawlir. We talked about what was happening, the shoras and the like and they agreed with what we said. We then went to M.T., the person in charge of the Kurdistan Front. I'd known him before, so we talked and he was in agreement and willing to help. S started campaigning among people in Hawlir, (the loyal ones, revolutionaries, patriots, democrats and the left), organizing seminars and reading leaflets written by the Sulliamania shoras and talking about them and how they were set up, their big achievements and what their demands were. We called on the revolutionaries for backing and solidarity and to begin setting up shoras in every district and factory. After some conversations, people showed themselves ready and a shoras centre was created near the Governor's offices. From there, some other shora centres were set up by the locals. A shora's authority stamp and headed note paper was produced. We stayed in Hawlir for three days doing all this. Whilst I was there about 35 shoras were created and we had 5 meetings with the locals. All the

democratic demands of the people were discussed and it was made clear that people should insist on elections and work out demands.

When I got back to the Awat school in Sulliemania, a lot of changes had taken place. The schools' radio was mostly talking about the workers and workers' shoras, demanding all power to the workers. They'd been publishing leaflets and a facsimile of the 'March of Communism' programme in the name of the shora. They complicated everything so much that there should have been a vote as to whether the shoras should be workers' shoras with workers' resolutions and positions or whether the shoras should be opened up to include the bourgeoisie. RAWT kept this up until they were intervening in most things. For example, in the hospital they were saying that workers and ancillary staff should only work 7 hour shifts. The hospital was working 24 hours in 3 shifts and their proposals would have meant a 9 hour gap in the day with no cover. But the ancillary staff wouldn't listen to the doctors and the whole functioning structure of the hospital was shaken. They also organised Sulliemania's electricity office in such a way as to make manual workers clash with office workers, as if pen pushers were the bourgeoisie whereas manual workers were earning more money than office staff or skilled engineers. At the bottom of all this was their opposition to the Kurdistan Front, portraying it as bourgeois and reactionary. The KF counteracted via their radio station and started characterizing the shoras as illegal organizations, unauthorized and composed of trouble makers and anarchists obstructing their tasks. We called on people not to listen to the KF but nothing was resolved. We visited all the different tendencies within the KF, explaining our achievements until they couldn't refuse a meeting between the KF and shoras' representatives. The shoras had a meeting and elected 5 representatives. But RAWT, by means of trickery, got more people to vote for their own men and they became the majority. Only one of the 5, M.A.M.I. was middle-of-the-road, the rest were hardliners who'd previously had a lot of rucs with the KF. O.O. was one of them.

Anyway the meeting took place. As well as the five representatives, 6 or 7 others came to the public cultural centre. Right away there was a dispute about these representatives. At the same time, leftist groups had also been having another meeting in the shora centres to drum up aid claiming the apparent arrest of shora representatives. They organized a demonstration in front of the public centre where they shouted and screamed out insulting slogans such as 'Disarm yourselves, bourgeois capitalists, you're incapable, only workers can build a new world'. This continued until 0.0. went outside to publicly disagree with what was going on inside the building. He said the people having a meeting inside were not workers' representatives as they kept capitulating to the KF. Then 0.0. and his supporters started chanting anti-KF slogans with the result that the outcome of the meeting was unclear because two different tendencies existed. One tendency was rooted in a Marxist-Leninist perspective and wanted workers' shoras, recognizing only the workers as the heroes of the street. We represented the other tendency and we wanted the shoras to be public shoras, where everybody could work together until elections could be held when the real representatives of the shoras would be selected. We talked about democracy insisting on human rights and we believed in cooperation with the KF. And that's how it remained until the anniversary of the chemical gas attack on Halabja on March the 17th.

The shoras held a meeting to organize the biggest event so far. With this memory and the recent great victory the megaphones were placed in front of the old Sara cop station. More than a thousand people participated. It opened with readings from shora leaflets and then all the parties and organisations were allowed to read out their own tracts. There and then Budarky Sara was changed to Freedom Square. Things were going well but then, bit by bit, the Marxists started car-

rying on. It was as though they thought everybody present in the crowd were workers exhausted through hard work. Speeches were made and texts read out haranguing the bourgeoisie. Individuals such as A.W.O. indirectly attacked the KF saying they were reactionaries pitted against the workers' shoras and that's just how the bourgeoisie behave and that we, the workers, weren't afraid of anything and would fight to the finish. Things continued in this vein. It was futile trying to argue with them and people got whipped up to the point where they started condemning us. At the end of the meeting the KF organised a big demonstration against the shoras which headed towards Awat school in Tooy Malik shouting: 'the KF is the head wearing the crown, only shoras are troublemakers'. Anyway we managed with the aid of a megaphone, to calm people down, explaining that the shoras were there to serve the people and peshmergas and we started shouting out slogans praising the KF until they calmed down too and left us alone. From that day on I was really fed up because the KF had been given an excuse to oppose us. Also we no longer got on with the lefties to the point where we completely disagreed with them. and there was bad feeling all round. We accused them of messing up tasks and creating problems. They finally admitted they were wrong but by then things had been stirred up. A meeting followed and as a result there was a split. About 8 of them had been thrown out but we couldn't carry on with our work after that because the shoras had lost all credibility with the people who saw them as made up of troublemakers.

But RAWT carried on with their work and even now they're saying they'll continue though only as a voice which has no impact other than antagonizing the KF. That's all they talk about. The situation developed like that with the two tendencies only complaining about the other. We've been accused of theft and cowardice and being KF's men. At the same time there was the issue of Kirkuk. The government had been re-taking it and Kurdish forces were attempting to recapture it. Our position was to independently take a part in the fighting over Kirkuk. The other tendency still using the shoras' name got together a fighting force with Alay Shorsh — Banner of Revolution — to take part in the action. Mala Bakhtyar was there and there were about 200 of them. Nothing was resolved. Government forces advanced to the point where on the night of the 3rd of April they were approaching Sulliamania. Government rockets fell on the city. That night there was the biggest demonstration of all in Sulliamania to raise the peoples' morale calling on them not to evacuate the city but to assist. The slogan: 'rockets, tanks and aircraft cannot make us leave this city' was shouted. That night we went to see the KF leadership in Tooy Malik. They said they were going to resist and weren't leaving the city because the peshmergas were about to defeat the government forces. This continued until just after midnight, the KF radio station did an about turn declaring that nobody had to get in anybody's way and to let people collect their belongings and families and flee the city. People were demoralised and everybody was on their way. All morning people left the city and some 80% were gone. Some friends stopped over at my place thinking about how to resist. It was about 11 am on the 3rd of April, planes and artillery continually bombarded Sulliamania. My family couldn't agree as to whether to leave Sulliamania so I sent W.K. W.A. with a few other friends to Krgais Way while myself, H.A.J. and my brother K. with three other friends were in Tooy Malik near 60 street. With no resistance being offered we crossed the street. Just before we got to the Baroo Woods, tanks took up positions on 60 street. Planes continued with their bombardment but there was anti-aircraft fire from some districts. There were thousands of people passing through Azmre Avenue when the planes were carrying out their bombardment. Many were killed. The soldiers then left 60 street and headed for the

mountains. They haphazardly shot at us and then we went to the other side of Gorza and from there to Charta.

3. The situation after the uprising until now

On the 3rd of April, when the government occupied Sulliemania, the city was deserted. By then 90% had left. The army looted most of it and anything that had been left behind in the beautifully designed houses were flung onto the streets. Those people who stayed in the city were untouched whilst the others, spread throughout surrounding apartment buildings were running for the border. It was so crowded without bread or food, that half the people left their cars and escaped on foot. It rained continually for a few nights. The scene gradually calmed down and people were resettled in various shelters in old villages in the surrounding countryside after it was learnt that the government had failed to capture Azmer and two of their tanks had been burnt out. The government was actually defeated at Arbat's Way and the Brigadier arrested. Then came the government's amnesty but few people returned especially those who'd left behind big interests. The government eventually got round to deal with the city. After a short period they sent a delegation asking for negotiations and in between there was talking. The people felt more secure, less afraid and they started coming and going to the cities as they liked. Finally they returned to Sulliemania and the situation has remained like that. People were awaiting the results of the negotiations which in general they've agreed with because they've reached the conclusion that Kurds by themselves cannot destroy the Iraqi authorities and, moreover, cannot ask for independence as it's rejected internationally. Because of all this they consider negotiations as the best solution for saving Kurdish lives and also could make real gains out of this historical opportunity since central authority is weak and under international pressure. People hang around the cities waiting for the results of the negotiations. Food has been distributed by the Red Cross and all the talk is about the apparent intent of the KF to form one party under the name of RZGARY PARTY uniting under one force named Duzgay Surbazy (meaning army institution). People are happy about this because they're saying Kurds are directly affected by what's happening and as a nation were threatened with starvation death and exile. Therefore one united party is necessary to answer all this. Leftist groups like the 'March of Communism' do not agree with this take on things saying only the workers can solve all problems and the struggle in Iraq is between labour and capital, consequently the workers' struggle is the focal point. I'll say no more about this; they are the mouthpiece of the Iranian Communist Party and there's no difference between them.

Another group has been set up recently after the shoras split called Workers' Association (Hastay Krekaren). They believe in the shoras' struggle and all their programmes are those of the workers. In their thinking they are strictly hardline Marxist-Leninist and put up graffiti. They are the same characters as before and don't get involved in any thing which makes their position clear apart from taking the piss out of everything. But it's useful enough for them just to sit around a table. Apart from that they do nothing.

Dear (.....)

I am now in the old Penjwen with K and some other friends and now frankly any satisfaction I had with Marxist-Leninism is now completely shaky. I don't believe in parties or party business and I don't think there'll ever come a day when I'd work with any political group, organisation or party. I only look at things as a human being. I am prepared to participate in any event that

serves humanity and the general interest. As such I'll participate. Onward but no organizational commitment.

And now I support the points raised by the negotiations because people themselves have reached the conclusion that they cannot rise up in the face of Imperialism and a lot of things that are happening have come out of the will and wishes of the Kurdish people. The peoples' ability is limited and therefore finding an agreement is much better. They need to have a bit of a rest having lived through three wars in 10 years with all the difficulties and human tragedies that have occurred. They only want to live like human beings, secure and a bit settled. All that made us — prefer intervention by the US army as we felt safer. If the negotiations succeed it will be a settlement of sorts as western interests also need it to save themselves... and we'll be grateful too. Then I can relax and carry on with my own personal life. My friend I ask your pardon if you're upset about these talks.

(Y)

from the old Penjwen (an old town destroyed by the Baathists)

(14th June 1991)

Another Letter from Kurdistan

The situation in Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait

Notes

1. Unemployment is everywhere in Iraq. Excepting food, all imported goods are very expensive. All Kurdish people born between 1945 and 72 are in the army.
2. Political discontent and the construction of the left. Grouped along the Iranian border the nationalist opposition is caught up in internal disputes ignoring the everyday life of the people.
3. Police brutality is at its height. No one could mention the opposition. To do so meant death and annihilation. In other words peoples' perspectives were restricted. They had no hope that the regime would be overthrown.

The situation in Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait

1. At the outset people liked it. They thought Saddam's regime would be overthrown this way. Now prices started to rise gradually to astonishing levels – for example, a 80 kg sack of flour rose to 1000 dinars in Basra, 800 dinars in Baghdad, 600 dinars in Mosel.¹ A sack of rice in the south rose 375–400 dinars while a bag of sugar cost somewhere between 350–400 dinars. Unemployment rose dramatically. Most cafes and factories were closed due to a shortage of the basic necessities.
2. The government kept stepping up the pressure on people. Militarisation became increasingly predominant, tightening its grip on urban centres. At the same time the number of army deserters rose. But the government was still powerful and crushed any opposition.
3. During this period the KF stood to one side. They even put a stop to peshmerga activity. One example – the best: the head of a unit and two peshmergas were arrested on a visit to Sullemania. PUK stated that they had averted a shoot-out but that the government had arrested a member of one of their units.

The general situation in Iraq during the allied attack on Iraq

The armed forces were moving towards the Iraqi border. There was a massive desertion of entire army divisions. The security forces were less active and confused. In Mosul army bases and

¹The average wage was 150–220 dinars per month, so a sack of rice would have cost roughly twice the average

security services were moved into the houses of local people. But as soon as they joined radio contact they were bombarded. That is why civilians disappeared. Most factories and places of importance were destroyed. The retreating army took their rifles back home with them and many people were predicting that the government would be overthrown. But when a ceasefire was declared on 26th of February, 1991, people were unhappy about it – preparations for the uprisings hadn't progressed far enough. The regime was weary and frightened and began to intimidate the people, wanting to prove to them that they had won the war because they had defiantly confronted some 30 countries – despite the incredible economic collapse, the destruction of Iraq and the killing of its people.

The situation in Iraq during the uprising

When the army retreated from Kuwait on the 29/2/91, a tank entering Basra shoots at any surviving photos of Saddam destroying them. This was the first spark of the uprising in the south and it begins to get underway and gradually extends to other towns like Koot, Omura, Nasria, Samawa, Najaf, Kurbala and Hilla – until finally it reaches Mosaib. But it was chaotic, religion being the dominating factor with everyone tying a green heart around their forehead pretending to be a Sayid.² The government infiltrates it in order to find out who the activists are. Their slogan was “Neither the East nor the West, but the Islamic Republic”. All government buildings and institutions were looted with the majority of the army joining in. But they couldn't organise it. When the south was retaken by government troops the most horrendous massacre took place and all public meeting places were destroyed. Even now as people return they are being detained in groups. When the government resumed its attacks on Southern Iraq it was easy to recapture it – showing how religion is incapable of seizing the rhythm of uprising and revolution.

The situation in Kurdistan during the uprising

When the south exploded on the 29.2.91 it had a big effect on Kurdistan. In Kurdistan, armed units had been set up to initiate the uprisings. Every tendency wanted to set up their own armed unit. However, the armed units were independent. So it turned out Rania was liberated by the people on 5.3.91 and the Chwar-Korna division, the “secondary internal security force”, surrendered to the people on 6/3/91 and therefore the Kawar Korna and Hasiawa receiving camps³ were liberated. We belonged to the insurrectionary units in Sullemania having four armed units in Karachawa, Azady (Khanwak Korakan), Majid Bug, and Sarachnar, each unit composed of about 30 people. But we were independent and we had several meetings with the “March of Communism”, RAWT, with a view towards joint participation. They hesitated for three days. Finally they said they were not prepared to sacrifice the organisation for the sake of the people. The KF were set to hold a demo at 1 pm on 7.3.91. However, at 8 am that morning, we started moving. The

monthly wage (TN)

²Sayid: A kind of religious title like Mullahs. They could be Sunni's but more likely Shia. Persecuted during the time of Harun-al-Rashid. In fact he killed all of them. (TN)

³Receiving camps: made up of easily constructed concrete buildings and used for those people transferred from villages and small towns destroyed by the Baathists.

entire city was liberated, except for the Akary security force that held out for a day. All Sulliamania was liberated by the 20.3.91. Hawlir was liberated in 3 hours on 10.3.91. and Kirkuk on the 20.3.91. The army, encamped nearby, came down and surrendered to the people. Then townspeople began to loot shops and government buildings. It didn't just stop there: they also looted the contents of offices and factories. Anyone mobile enough to have a car could see that all the cities and towns of Kurdistan had been taken over with little or no resistance, with the exception of Sulliamania where there had been much resistance though unsuccessful.

The pattern of the uprising

In Sulliamania, days before the uprising, internal security forces had warned the government institutions and departments that anyone caught agitating would be executed and their homes destroyed. Also on 6.3.91 prior to the uprising the governor of Sulliamania had convened a meeting with the Mshtashars (formerly the Jash) warning them to have their troops on standby. So on the same evening at 5 pm the armed forces started carrying out the following manouevres:

Doshkas (anti-aircraft guns) were placed at vantage positions. Mobile units and Modara (similar to tanks) were there in strategic places and some trucks, loaded with Doshkas and covered with sheets, prepared to move in on crowds and shoot. But to no avail because of the following reasons.

1. No-one had any faith left in the regime and that meant that the regime had no-where to run to. And people were not prepared to sacrifice themselves for the regime.
2. The KF had previously notified the Mstashars through letters.
3. The internal security force was in an unbelievable mess.
4. The uprising in the south had raised the morale of the Kurdish people.
5. A general willingness to overthrow the regime was at its height. But a readiness to begin was lacking.
6. The liberation of Rania had a pronounced effect on people's morale and also events in Sulliamania affected other places. That meant the liberation of one place after another, affecting everywhere else.

Our role in the uprising

After having set up armed units we commenced the uprising at 8 am. on 7.3.91. The Majid Bug unit was out on duty, so for a few hours there were 10 people with two hand grenades and a borrowed rifle. In the first three hours we occupied the Iscan police station, the crime prevention and traffic wardens building, the Inland Revenue, the martyr Osman intelligence wing, the law courts, the prison and the old Sara cop station. The university stores were destroyed and looted by the people. Sarchnar Party headquarters and those in Aboosana were taken as well as the police station and public militia in Khansa Khorakan from Karachawa towards Hasib Salh and Sara. 8.3.91. Security headquarters have still not been occupied. We organise a march covering the entire city with eleven banners proclaiming the following.

1. Select for your representatives conscious and upright people.
2. Make the shora your base for the long term struggle.
3. Revolutionary people! the achievements of the revolution has been at the cost of your own blood. Don't waste it.
4. Class consciousness is the arm of liberation.
5. Revolutionary people set up your own shoras.
6. Long live the Shoras' Authority.
7. Women are the arm of the revolution. They have a clear role to play (No obstructions must be put in the way of their participation).
8. Unconditional and unfettered political freedom.
9. Forward to the right of self-determination for the Kurdish people. We also hung two banners from the hospital calling for blood donors and asking people not to loot.
10. Brothers and sisters: Your sons in the hospital are in need of blood. Who will volunteer to go to the hospital.
11. The hospital's medical store is a safe guard to revolutionaries and the injured. Anyone touching it would be considered a thief.

We also managed to get many people to give blood which we took to the hospital. On the 8th there were nearly 1000 wounded and in Sulliamania 300 had been massacred. Until the 8th there was no PUK base. The Shoras's movement swiftly proclaimed itself, seizing the initiative. The number of shoras increased rapidly until there were 54 district shoras altogether. There were workers' shoras also. (The City Council workers's shora, the textile workers' shora, the cigarette workers' shora, the chicken factory shora, the Hamoraby Company's shora, the power industry shora, Semini Company shora and the shora at the hospital).

The activity of the Shoras

1. Every Shora had its own radio station which broadcast its own programme, its publications, poetry and activity and the wants of the local people.
2. Every shora set up medical posts where blood could be donated to the hospital and be used to treat local people.
3. Each shora had a number of committees dealing with the media, the militia, medical matters, administration, finance and general assistance and the law, as well as a committee for relations between the shoras and a foreign relations committee.
4. The method of struggle is to be had in the shora's authority.

5. The shoras organised meetings in localities and factories. But not all of them were able to hold a general meeting. More on this later.
6. The building up of a militia for resistance purposes.
7. The shoras elected to work on some public matters.
8. On the 16th of March, 1991, the anniversary of the massacre of Halabja, the shoras incited the entire city even threatening the KF.
9. On the 17th, a general meeting of all the shoras took place at the Majid Bug shora to elect a supreme shora covering the city.
10. On the 18th, the KF called for the disbanding of the shoras.
11. On the 18th, at 2 pm, there was a general meeting of shora delegates. At 9 in the evening it was decided to condemn the KF declaration.
12. On the morning of 19th, a meeting of shora delegates and the KF was held. At the same time a rumour spread around that shora delegates had been arrested and their activities curtailed. The shoras organised a demonstration in front of the KFs base. (the former Baathist "Peoples' Culture House".
13. On the 20th a march was organised against the KFs position which had called for the disbanding of the shoras.

How the crisis emerged between the KF and the Shoras

There are lots of opinions about the crisis; each coming from a particular perspective or angle. Some blame RAWT, the March of Communism group, and some, a hard-line extremist group. Others say that they all thrived on the rivalries between themselves. The KF blames a political faction amongst them composed of anarchists and a group of teenagers. It says that their language is utopian, that Kurdistan still hasn't been liberated and that if what they're saying is true then let them go and liberate Kirkuk and not occupy ourselves with all this big talk. Such views attempted to justify things to the KFs rank and file and some of the shoras.

However the crisis started as follows. In the beginning the shoras were a massive social movement gathering a huge force around themselves. All political tendencies, left and right, were directly trying to either control or manipulate this social movement for themselves or to liquidate it or take over. But once it was acknowledged that this was an independent social force not belonging to any political organisation, the latter, feeling their interests threatened started directly opposing the shoras here and there. From the start the KF wanted to take over all the City's institutions and rebuild them. In that period the crisis was over political power which is why the shoras became the centre for class struggle which meant: womens' struggle, unemployment, free elections for representatives and the overall authority for the city's affairs etc...

At the time, the shoras struggle was against the bosses (the big directors, administrators) and the old administration which the workers had terribly bitter memories of. The KF, however, wanted to give the bosses back their jobs. For example, in these places, (factories, offices), the

bosses were insulted by the workers; sacked people such as Karim Osman, the boss of the City Council and bosses such as Aziz Khoshnow of the cigarette factory, Khalid of the clothes factory, Khasm (electricity) and Mustapha Hagy of the Mamoraby company. Later on these people brought along with them KF peshmerga squads, proceeding to obstruct and prevent the general assemblies of the factory workers. Here and there, Jamal Hawramy and (Kakimr) Haloy Aha Smell⁴ even attacked some shoras and wanted to close them down. What they were doing in part was to spread poisonous propaganda against the shoras creating a threatening atmosphere of terror. This meant that the crisis was not an invention of any particular group or tendency but in itself had a realistic basis that would have come out sooner or later and which is a problem for us.

Some political tendencies (hard-line and extremist) wanted to confront the KF. For instance, the March of Communism group, RAWT, wanted to oppose the KF in order to sharpen the crisis within the shoras stating they would cut off any heavy hand daring to oppose the shoras. Extremist influence was equally on the move within the shoras. But there was another group active at the base at Awat calling themselves “The Forward Movement of the Shoras Group”. More collaborationist, they wanted to minimise and nuance the shoras colours to a degree that the KF would find satisfactory, so that later they could dissolve the movement within the KF. Two days after the KFs declaration calling the shoras unauthorized, this tendency disbanded and closed the doors of the shora. They are still confused and don’t know what to do. But the shoras’ movement ignored the threats of the KF until the day the cities were retaken by the forces of the regime.

Some inappropriate methods within the KF and from those opposing them

1. A large part of the shora’s movement didn’t acknowledge the KFs social authority and thought everything should be carried out through the general assembly.
2. Some of the slogans were provocative causing the peshmergas to re-entrench themselves instead of getting them to support things. They were saying “disarm yourselves, bourgeois capitalists, from head to toe you are incapable of carrying things through. Whenever have bourgeois capitalists carried arms?”
3. When the KF broadcast their declaration to attack the city of Kirkuk, on the same day the left were ironically organizing a march against the KF. The outcome of this was not in the interest of the shoras.

The number of Shoras

- 52 shoras in Sulliamania City
- 6 shoras in Kirkuk⁵

⁴Nickname: the moustache. Haloy, meaning eagle, is a common name like Victor. Aha – the fathers’ name. Smell moustache. (TN)

⁵Nothing was ever settled here. There was continuous fighting between insurgents and Baathist forces. (TN)

- 42 shoras in Hawlir
- Some shoras in Rania and Nasro Bareeka.

The achievements of the uprising

1. The institutions of terror that the Baathist Party had strengthened and continually regenerated for 23 years broke down in a short space of time and there's no way they can be rebuilt again.
2. It has made Kurdistan and Iraq into a political society. Everyone has become political, men, women and even young children of all classes. Class struggle is put on the agenda.
3. The shoras's movement was the bright star of the uprising because it acknowledged itself as the bearer of the interests of the workers and exploited in the cities and villages. It didn't bargain away the achievements of the revolution; it was against any form of inequality, against nationalism, religion and social backwardness. It didn't want to cool down the uprising's heat-wave in the public heart despite all the inefficacy and lack of clarity.

The weak points of the uprising

1. The weakness of nationalism in holding back the tempo of the uprising.
2. The energy and enthusiasm in the people's heart was gradually cooled down bit by bit and the KF made poisonous propaganda proclaiming peshmerga forces are everything and the public could do nothing. And that's how they got the market going again with traders and street vendors. At the same time the KF went through houses taking back what the people had looted and selling it for themselves.
3. People started complaining about these unwanted individuals who were the force which tried to crush the uprising before it happened and now today were in charge under the KFs leadership.
4. The practical and serious activists of the uprising were not organised but were working from within the movement's heart. The leftists who've carried on looked at the movement from outside — they weren't at the heart. But the activists weren't organised in another sense; lack of a communist political organisation.⁶
5. Absence of a connection between the workers' socialism and the key-points of economical, social and political changes.

Building up the militia's resistance

When the forces of the regime resumed attacks on Kurdistan, the committee of shoras' delegates published a leaflet declaring resistance within Kurdistan; setting up training centres in

⁶Is this an ultra-leftist reflex? (TN)

every shora base, sending shora peshmerga⁷ forces into battle even if the KF didn't officially recognise them. We sent two units into battle in Kalar for 10 days. We also sent a force to Kirkuk, a mainly symbolic act since the number of peshmerga was only about 80. We also gave a lift to 25 peshmerga of Kirkuk's October Shora unit. On that trip we spoke and agreed with the KFs leadership of military operations although practical relations remained the same. Via telex they contacted Masine Jalal and Masood Burzany for us and after two days we got a reply. As shoras we were about to have a meeting with the KFs political leadership but on the day we were to have the meeting the city was evacuated during the night and we missed out.

Tendencies in the Shoras' movement

The Shoras' Movement and the form it took emerged from historical necessity in the uprising. It was forever expanding its influence in all different ways and increasingly publicised itself. The Shoras Movement was the ground on which to stiffen and sharpen social struggles and the political and ideological crisis. This ground let all social possibilities develop. Some people on the left wanted to take a softer line but that didn't work out. Another tendency which was so passive that they were reformist and never active on the ground. When the KF declared the shoras to be illegitimate they retreated saying "because the KF has reached the conclusion that the shoras have to be disbanded it's best not to leave them a faded shadow, passive to the point where the KF would be satisfied with them". There was another tendency which was nationalistic. It said they didn't oppose the KF and they withdrew. There were also extreme leftists. They were prepared to confront the KF – even with arms whilst the majority were thinking about the future fate of the shoras and wanted in every conceivable way to protect the revolution's achievements and to gather as many people around their class interests as possible. But the Shoras Movement was unfortunately short-lived.

Slogans that were raised by the Shoras movement

- Unconditional political freedom
- Long live self-determination for the Kurdish nation.
- Revolutionary Public! Set up your own Shoras.
- Long live the 35 hour working week.
- Freedom, equality, workers' government- (RAWT)
- People should freely control their social economic and political destiny.
- Long live the Shoras' Authority.
- All power to the shoras.
- Long live the equal rights between men and women.

⁷Peshmerga is also a general term meaning those who are prepared to fight to the last drop of blood.

- Revolutionary women; organise your own independent unity.
- All administrative organs should be by way of (shora) elections.
- We, the workers and exploited, request a shoras' government and not parliamentary democracy.
- The invaders force must get out of Kurdistan.
- No rebuilding the oppressive security forces, neither police, intelligence services, Jash nor public militias.
- The criminals must be punished.
- Aid Kirkuk's and Toose's refugees. Help them.⁸
- Bread, work freedom, shoras' government.
- The only alternative to the Baathist penal dictatorship is the shoras.
- Halabja, Budenan, = the Hiroshimas of Kurdistan.⁹
- The shoras will heal the wounds of Kurdistan's exploited.
- Rise up, stand up and fight. Break the institutions of fear.
- The right of villagers to return.
- The people should be armed to ensure the shoras' authority.
- Freedom to strike and demonstrate.
- Freedom of speech, thought, opinion and organisation.
- For all democratic demands (political, economic and social).

The level of public consciousness

The public aren't conscious of its own interests to a sufficient degree for the following reasons:

1. Starvation, poverty, high prices is an objective situation and the people cannot gather themselves together around their own interests. An everyday dog's life prevents them.
2. The black dictatorship now without cover hasn't permitted the public to find their own self-practice.
3. It's true the oppressive institutions were broken but the oppressive institutions built up in people's heads didn't dissolve within those few days and more time was needed.

⁸Toose: a small town near Kirkuk where a terrible atrocity took place during the uprising.

⁹Budenan: a town on the Turkish border where 8,000 people were kidnapped in 1985

4. Nationalistic, religious and social backwardness were obstructing people's vision and prevented them from actively coming onto the (shoras) terrain.
5. The social authority of the KF had its role to play on the public.
6. The organised left was very weak and nearly dead. It didn't participate. Even though the shoras movement was immature and deficient, day by day it was taking great steps forward, distancing itself from all the forces which didn't express its interests.

* * *

I will write to you giving details of these issues in following letters.

Greetings... To all friends and mates – greetings from all supporters and fans of the shoras movement.

Help us, support us. Introduce us to Europe. Whatever way you can, one by one, in groups, help us, it doesn't matter about some differences of opinions amongst us.

You can alter some things on condition that it won't affect the core content.¹⁰

Shoras' Movement activist (14.6.91)

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¹⁰No alterations have been made in the translation of this text.

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