

# Civil liberties are latest war casualty

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Iraq is not the only victim of the Strangelovian nightmare which George Bush has unleashed in the Middle East. Accompanying the war in the Middle East has been an ominous clampdown on civil liberties in many of the anti-Iraq coalition countries, including the United States itself. Since Bush gave the order to attack, wholesale violations of democratic rights have been committed in the United States, Britain, France, and elsewhere, and there is every indication that this pattern will increase as the war proceeds, and domestic opposition to it rises. Bush's war to defend democracy in non-democratic Kuwait is fast turning into a war against democracy on the home front. Just how far the "pro-democracy" coalition is prepared to go was demonstrated by Her Majesty's government. Authorities have rounded up a group of Iraqis studying in Britain and interned them in a prisoner-of-war camp set up for that purpose in Salisbury Plain. So far, 33 Iraqi visitors have been summarily declared POWs and placed in the camp, without recourse to any judicial proceeding.

Along with France and Italy, Britain has expelled as many as 200 Iraqi diplomats, and numbers of others, primarily Arabs, have been booted out on the grounds that they support the Iraqi cause. France has kicked out more than 15 pro-Iraqi activists, claiming they *potentially* represent a support network for terrorist activities.

Britain has arrested a number of Palestinians, and, in true British "democratic" fashion, refused to give them access to the courts to defend themselves. One, Abbas Cheblak, a top official with the Arab League who has lived in England for more than a decade, has been incarcerated, despite having signed a letter attacking Iraq for invading Kuwait. British judges have refused to review Cheblak's case, on the grounds of "national security."

"National security" has also been invoked in the U.S. to cover for such grossly unconstitutional actions as the FBI's two-month-long campaign to question Arab-Americans, with the purported aim of developing intelligence on possible Iraqi terrorist actions. The questioning has brought charges of intimidation and harassment from civil libertarians, congressmen, and even some Jewish organizations. Rep. Norman Mineta (D-Calif.), who was interned because of his Japanese ancestry during World War II, has already warned on the floor of Congress that Arab-Americans could face widespread internment due to "government overreaction" to the Gulf crisis. He noted

that plans are already on the books, dating to 1987, for the roundup of Americans of Arab descent.

Despite the protests, the FBI has no qualms about its unconstitutional actions. The agency's head, William Sessions, told a congressional committee Jan. 28 that the FBI had decided to halt the questioning, not because it was an unwarranted violation of civil liberties, but because it had obtained all the information it needed. The administration's harassment of Arab-Americans is backfiring, causing many who previously supported Bush to have serious second thoughts. At an emergency meeting in Washington Jan. 27, Arab-American leaders representing various organizations and areas discussed how to counter the harassment, and decided to secure resolutions from city councils and other groups calling for a ceasefire in the war and an international peace conference.

It's not just the FBI which thinks it can use the war to discriminate against specific ethnic groups. Private institutions are following suit. Pan Am Airways announced in late January that it would refuse boarding rights to anyone with an Iraqi passport, period.

## Hiding behind terrorism

Much of the crackdown is being justified on the grounds that Iraq has a vast terrorist capability. State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler declared Jan. 24, "We have clear evidence that Iraq is supporting terrorists around the world who are planning to mount attacks against coalition member countries." Yet relatively few actual terrorist incidents have taken place since hostilities erupted. And, despite efforts by the U.S. government to claim that they can be traced to Saddam Hussein, little hard evidence has been proffered. How much of the terrorist activity is conducted by *agents provocateurs*, or by groups activated by either Western or Soviet intelligence organizations, remains an open question.

That has not stopped Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) from introducing a new bill which will plug up supposed loopholes in existing legislation, but which extends the definition of terrorism to include such things as counterfeiting U.S. currency, and then mandates the death penalty for a wide range of "terrorist" actions.

The real target of the assault on civil liberties is not terrorism, but the potential for mass-based resistance to the war policy. That is why France, Britain, etc. are either imprisoning or expelling any foreigner who might harbor sympathy for Iraq. It is also why the various coalition governments are attempting to wreck the burgeoning anti-war movement. In France, for example, the government has actually prohibited anti-war demonstrations from taking place—although that has not deterred thousands from turning out to protest. And in the U.S., the FBI and other institutions are working closely with the Anti-Defamation League to monitor and infiltrate anti-war groups (see p. 66).