

jects the LaRouche approach, when he answers those who criticize the European Community for having responded ineffectually to the situation in eastern-central Europe following the collapse of communism in 1989-90, by saying that he does not believe in "miracle recipes."

Specters of Joan of Arc and Colbert

One indication that Minc has hit a raw nerve, is the agitated response that the book received in the London *Times*. Paris correspondent Charles Bremner, writing Nov. 8, fretted that *The New Middle Ages* was receiving "sensational promotion" among what he calls France's "chattering classes," who "fear a return to medieval chaos, with society dominated by local barons, the mafia, and cutthroat economic bureaucracy." The article was headlined "France Fends Off World's Medieval Ways: Paris Prepares to Rescue Humanity from Its Dark Destiny." It was accompanied by a drawing of a young woman in chains, looking to the heavens, and hovering over a cathedral: Joan of Arc, whom the English burned at the stake in 1431.

Bremner began his article: "While European ministers prepared over the weekend for their umpteenth attempt to speed the [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] world trade accord despite French intransigence, the chattering classes of Paris were worrying about the Middle Ages. More precisely, they were wondering if France, with its system of powerful central authority, might not be ideally placed to lead the world away from a return to medieval chaos. . . . What is noteworthy about M. Minc's pessimistic book, and the surrounding fuss, is its illustration of the gulf that divides the Gallic world view from the outside perspective. While many foreigners see France as a trouble-maker afflicted by demons from its darker past, opinion at home is convinced the country is a bastion of humanity whose ills are the work of barbarous foreign forces."

Earlier, on Oct. 27, Bremner had written a biting article about the fact that French President François Mitterrand and the government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur had reversed policy and given in to the demands of striking Air France workers, soon after the workers had received support from French farm organizations. Bremner fretted that Mitterrand and Balladur were correctly reading the mood of the French population, and that the French nation was reverting to its tradition of economic dirigism. "Dirigism," he noted, has its roots in the 17th-century policies and theories of King Louis XIV's adviser Jean-Baptiste Colbert. The same approach made France "so prosperous" when it was applied under President Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s. Bremner complained that "France still has the most state-dominated economy in the G-7 group of rich nations," and demanded that supporters of "free trade" act to "change the culture" of the country. The British correspondent characterized tentative steps toward a revival of dirigism as a "flight from economic reality."

The U.N. embargo is still killing Iraq's children

by Felicity Arbuthnot

The author is an Irish journalist.

I was last in Iraq in May 1992. It was hard to imagine that conditions could deteriorate. In a country where in 1990, U.N. figures estimated that 92% of the population had access to clean water and 93% to free and sophisticated health care, medicines were virtually unattainable, operations had been carried out without anesthetics for two years, and Unicef estimated that 100,000 civilians a year were dying as a direct result of the embargo—mainly children under five, the vulnerable, and the elderly.

Food prices had soared such that staples—pulses, beans, rice—were sold in tiny packages, by the gram. Traditionally, these are sold in 50 kilo (110 pound) bags.

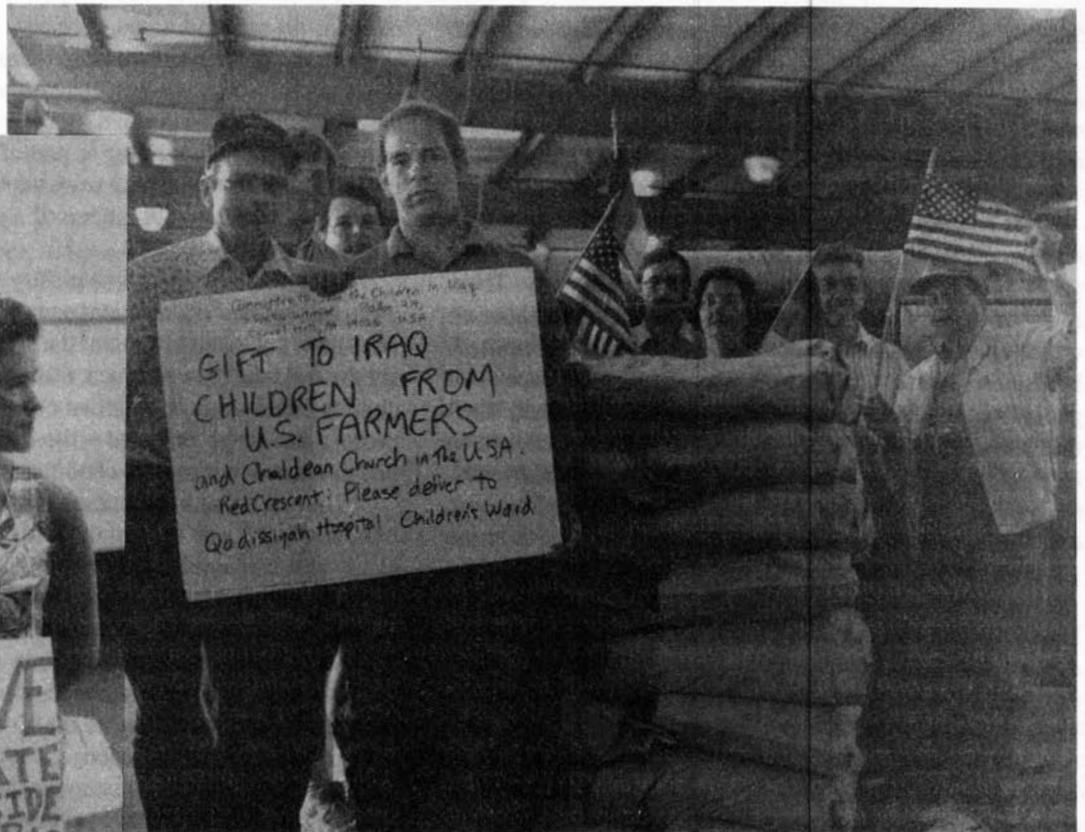
In July of this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. noted "with deep concern, all the commonly recognized signs of pre-famine conditions being in place." Further, that "large numbers of Iraqis now have food intakes lower than those of the populations in the disaster-stricken African countries."

That was four months ago, this is *Apocalypse Now*. Food has risen in price 1,000 times.

With U.S. dollars, one can buy black market dinars: 10,000 dinars to \$100. A ten-inch-high wad which fills one with shame and echoes chillingly the suitcases of notes needed to buy bread in Germany after 1945.

For the Iraqi people, with no dollars, the rate is 36 dinars to the dollar. In context, an average monthly salary is 200-300 dinars, approximately \$6-9. This is a "looking-glass" world. The cheapest fill-up on earth can be had in Iraq, just cents per tank. A bottle of water is \$35.

In the foyer of the Rashid Hotel, former home in Iraq to so many foreign visitors, is one of the most magnificent displays of beautiful artifacts ever to be seen: jewelry, paintings, crystal, porcelain, superb, rare antique boxes, chandeliers. They are the belongings of the middle classes, displayed in the hope that they might be sold for dollars to the few foreign visitors who now reach Iraq. Living for a few more weeks. The poor have no antiques. (There are less visible auctions all over town.)



A group of American farmers sent one ton of milk powder to the children of Iraq in August 1992. They are shown here in Philadelphia, after having driven the milk from South Dakota. An international mobilization on a much larger scale is now required to finally break the genocidal embargo against Iraq. Inset: A rally in Montreal in July 1991, conducted by the Committee to Save the Children in Iraq.

In the Showaka market, one of the poorest districts in town, oranges—in normal times so plentiful that they are just cents above free—are, at 40 dinars a kilo (approximately \$130 for 2.2 pounds), not even on display. The fresh, sweet, golden dates, traditionally offered with yogurt as a welcome in shops, homes, and to passing callers, are \$10. Yogurt is not seen, milk being unattainable. (There is a new medical diagnosis in Iraq: Babies are brought to the hospital chronically malnourished and unbelievably bloated. They have been dubbed the “sugar babies” by doctors. Milk being unbuyable, babies are frequently fed on sugar and water, and tea and water. They become starved, stunted, and all in this condition die.)

Grapes are 9 dinars a kilo (\$25), rice 12 dinars (\$33), and feta cheese, another staple, sold by the kilo in rounded, succulent blocks for a few cents in the past, is now nearly 60 dinars (approximately \$200.) Mutton, the base of a million national dishes, is barely a memory at 110 dinars a kilo. Fish from the great Tigris River, which divides Baghdad, are, like eggs, from another era. An era before the embargo and August 1990.

Prior to 1990, malnutrition had been virtually eradicated, due to a response undertaken to initiatives of the 1979 Year of the Child. Now, stick-thin children are everywhere. They beg, or sell the cigarettes which three months ago became included in the monthly government ration packages of rice, oil, tea, one bar of soap, and other basics.

A four-year-old begs to clean shoes outside my hotel. The box he carries is almost bigger than he. This is a new phenomenon, like crime, virtually unheard of, until the sanctions started to bite and the specter of starvation became reality.

In a small grocery store yesterday morning, a child of perhaps five came in, clearly proud to be doing an important errand, clutching a 5 dinar note (approximately \$15). A fortune—nearly three months’ salary. It bought one egg, which he carefully carried to the door—and then it dropped. He was literally traumatized. He fell to the floor and tried to gather it up in his small hands. As I searched in my pocket, the shopkeeper went over and tapped him on the shoulder and proffered another.

Novelist and translator Nasra Sadun, whose great-grand-

father's statue stands on Sadun Street in Baghdad, who speaks three languages and is at home in Paris, London, or New York as in Baghdad, boils rose petals for face cleansers, concocts a mixture of boracic and herbs for deodorant, and uses clay for hair conditioner. She keeps chickens on what was the patio. (Deodorant costs the equivalent of \$175.)

Her last novel is trapped in her computer for want of a few dollars' worth of spare parts. It has been there for three years. If it were released, it would be useless anyway. There is no paper on which to print it. Doctors have no paper on which to keep notes. The national newspaper is still printed, but is down from 16 pages to 8. No one has toilet paper. All paper is compulsively collected and recycled. Legend has it that when the United States dropped vast tons of leaflets on the Marsh Arabs, telling them that they were their friends, the illiterate but never stupid Marsh people collected up these tons of paper gold from the sky, and sold them back to the government for recycling.

Recently a burst car tire on the freeway nearly killed Nasra Sadun. The car was bought in 1986 for 8,000 Iraqi dinars. Now 8,000 dinars would not buy two car tires. Shoe repairers have a second job: resewing split tires. None have been imported since 1990, and the rubber factory was bombed in the war. Yet people have to drive the grueling, isolated, desert road to Jordan, or to conduct any business, or for medical help, if they are the rare ones lucky enough to be able to pay for it in hard currency.

They drive on the resewn tires in the searing heat (my journey took 17 hours this time). The deaths on the Jordan road and the visible testimony to them which litter the route are a bare decimal point in the reality of life in Iraq. The U.N., of course, flies in.

A wound on the soul of the nation

Here, the infant mortality rate is not a statistic; it is a gaping wound on the soul of the nation.

At the Saddam Children's Hospital, with its high-tech, western-supplied equipment and British- and American-trained, English-speaking staff, the incubators in the premature baby unit were working again—except for the most vital part: the light tube essential for the warmth needed to kindle fledgling life.

Tiny Ali Lazam ("the vital one") is four months old, with great black eyes set in the face of a waxen pixie. He weighs barely four pounds and will be dead this morning. He cannot tolerate breast milk or normal formula (even were it available, at 450 dinars per kilo). With the resultant diarrhea, for which there are no medicines or replacement fluids, he had starved and dehydrated to the point of death for want of a soya-based formula, available at any chemist, pharmacy, or supermarket, as near as neighboring Jordan—but as it has to be bought in hard currency, it is beyond reach and unavailable anywhere in Iraq.

Dr. Mohammad Hilal (30) is in despair. "There is no

oxygen, no antibiotics, no vaccines, no canulars for drips: We use and reuse what we have (disposable syringes sometimes ten times). It is a very dangerous practice. Sometimes we re-use the canulars from dead babies." The shame showed in his face. He was standing in part of the \$3 billion hospital complex, built without help from the International Monetary Fund or World Bank. A citizen of a proud nation, his heart too was breaking.

The pathology lab is still mostly unrepaired for want of western-supplied replacement equipment. Urgent investigations have to be sent to Jordan, the grueling 17 hours by road. By the time they are returned with a diagnosis, usually, the child is either dead or an allied condition has set in and the process has to be repeated—life-saving procedures taking just minutes under normal conditions.

"There is a rise in premature births due to napalm, radiation, and fear," said Dr. Hilal. "Also in spina bifida, Down's syndrome, congenital abnormalities, and mental retardation: a condition previously rarely seen here." Immaculate in pressed white coat, as we walked through sunlit corridors, the reality behind the facade became apparent.

"We have no sterile gloves and rising cholera, typhus, hepatitis B, and AIDS, due to the lack of syringes." There is even an embargo on knowledge. "We have not been able to import medical journals, textbooks, and manuals since 1990. Last year we bought one of each new publication from Jordan and photocopied them for all the doctors, nurses, and students. This was the cheapest way, due to the collapse of the dinar. This year, we cannot do that, the shortage of paper is too acute."

Every evening, Dr. Hilal goes home to his wife Anam, an electrical engineer, and his children Rusol (2) and Luma (5 months). "I wash my hands over and over in spirits," praying that he has not contracted some deadly disease, "which I might pass on to them." He earns 500 dinars a month, just 50 dinars more than the price of a box of milk powder. "Before the war, we lived well, spending just 70 dinars a month for food."

In an acute ward were two children with myeloid leukemia. One, not quite three, was lying, making little mewling noises with pain. His small body was covered in great, black bruises: arms, legs, groin. He was also bleeding invisibly, internally. There was no treatment for what is now relatively simple to maintain and stabilize. There were no pain killers. The other child was five, his eyes full of tears and, in addition to the bruising, his small body and face was bloated with edema. As I leaned over to stroke his face, a little hand instinctively came up and clutched at mine. At that moment, I knew it was possible to die of shame.

Dr. Hilal walked me out into the sun and put out his hand. Suddenly his control snapped, he ran his hand through his hair, then put his hands to his face. "What more does the U.N. want of us, what more can we do?" he asked.

I had no answer.