

1997, March

The women and children of Iraq

by Rania Masri

"I am against war, since war means destruction, hurt and ruin. Nobody should like war especially when all the great powers of the world gang up against one country in an unequal war and try to destroy all signs of progress and make the country go back to the middle ages. People are starving to death and inflation is murder. Missiles and bombs do not think, they hit and explode—whether you are military or civilian, sick or well, old or young, men or women, you die. Where do you go to hide?"

—Iraqi woman over 50 years old

The war against the Iraqi people did not end in 1991 with George Bush's cease-fire declaration; instead, the war against the Iraqi people—against the Iraqi men, women, and children—is continuing with savage intensity to this very day. It has only changed in form from the thunder of bombs to the eerie silence of a militarily-enforced blockade.

More than 300,000 Iraqis were killed in the 43-day military war in 1991. Since then, more than one million people—mainly young children—have died as a direct result of the US-led blockade on this small country. The lack of food and medicine, along with the deteriorating sanitary conditions in Iraq, have caused far more harm and suffering than the military war itself—

despite the use of more than 142,000 tons of bombs and 350 tons of depleted uranium shells during the bombing campaigns. From a legal perspective, the maritime blockade, coupled with the air blockade, amounts to an act of war, thereby making the economic sanctions a continuation of the war that supposedly ended in March 1991.

What have been the effects of this continuing war, euphemistically referred to as sanctions, on the people of Iraq? Four million people, one-fifth of the population, are currently starving to death in Iraq (UN FAO report, 1995). The general human situation is deteriorating everyday, while

the situation for women in Iraq is even more precarious. Up to 95% of all pregnant women in Iraq suffer from anemia, and thus will give birth to weak, malnourished infants. Most of these infants will either die before reaching the age of five due to the lack of food and basic medicines or will be permanently scarred, either physically or mentally. Furthermore, many mothers, due to their own weak bodies, are unable to breast-feed their children. Due to the runaway inflation caused by the blockade, these families lack the means to feed their children. The mothers often bring their children to the hospital to die.



Photo by Stewart-Horst Günther

Hunger and disease inflicted on Iraqi civilians: terrorism.

1997, October

NRC Lets Shearon Harris Slide—Again

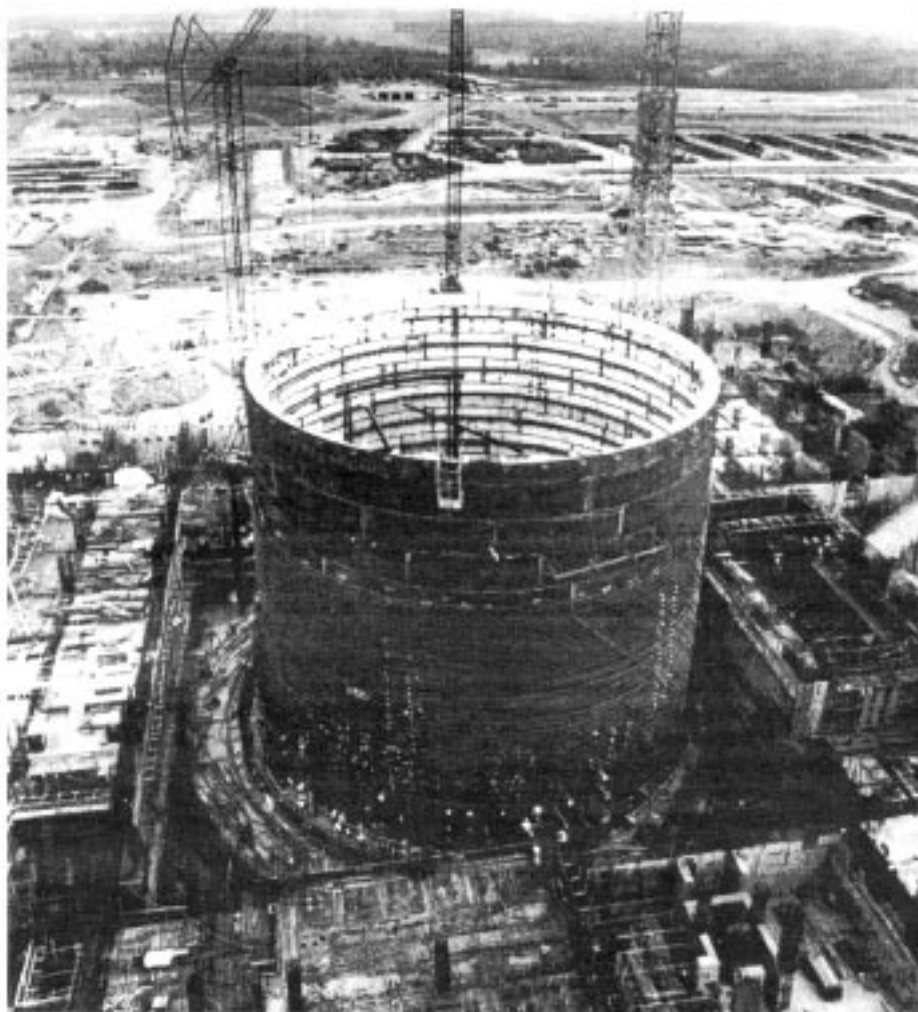
by Michael Steinberg

A US General Accounting Office report earlier this year lambasted the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for letting safety problems proliferate and fester at the nation's nuclear power plants. A recent review of the situation at the Shearon Harris nuclear power plant by this reporter confirmed the GAO analysis at that facility. And belt-tightening measures by the plant's owner and operator, Carolina Power & Light, are threatening to make safety there deteriorate even further.

The Untouchables

The GAO report, entitled "Nuclear Regulation: Preventing Problem Plants Requires More Effective NRC Action," was released on June 17. It was undertaken after public pressure mounted by communities near nuclear plants led to a request for an investigation of the NRC by Senators Joseph Biden of Delaware and Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut.

The report found that the NRC is not effectively overseeing the plants that have problems, that it "is not getting licensees to fix deficiencies in a timely manner," and that "NRC enforcement actions are too late to be effective." After the report's release Senator Biden called for a Congressional investigation of the NRC, which itself replaced the Atomic Energy Commission in the 1970s after it became all too obvious that the latter was too cozy with the industry it was supposed to regulate.



Shearon Harris reactor containment vessel #1 under construction

Let Them Drink Tritium

CP&L's 1996 Radiological Report for Shearon Harris indicated that "the only plant-detected activity detected... has been tritium activity in Harris Lake at an average concentration of 4750 picocuries per liter [pCi/l]. Tritium activity (455 pCi/l) was observed only 1 out of 12 times at Lillington, NC, located 17 miles downstream on the Cape Fear River." Tritium from Shearon Harris was also found in fish from Harris Lake.

The problem of tritium—radioactive hydrogen—from Shearon Harris was first exposed by this reporter in the April, 1996, *Prism*. In 1994 tritium levels in Harris Lake water—used as drinking water for plant employees—at one time exceeded the federal limit of 20,000 pCi/l.

But even the nearly 5000 pCi/l level found in the lake last year is hundred of times higher than naturally occurring levels of tritium. According to nuclear expert John Gofman, "Fresh water... is estimated to have had a natural level of 6-24 pCi/l" before the Nuclear Age. Which makes the level found in Lillington water 19 to 74 times higher than that.

Community activists in western Massachusetts have found elevated levels of Down's Syndrome and five kinds of cancer there, which they attribute to tritium releases into the Deerfield River by the now shutdown Yankee Rowe reactor. Exposure to levels of tritium such as those released by Shearon Harris have only been going on for decades, while, according to Gofman, the much lower naturally occurring levels had remained constant for millions of years. While conclusive evidence of the effects of nuclear-produced levels of tritium may yet be lacking, neither CP&L or the NRC seem to have any problem with putting people at risk.