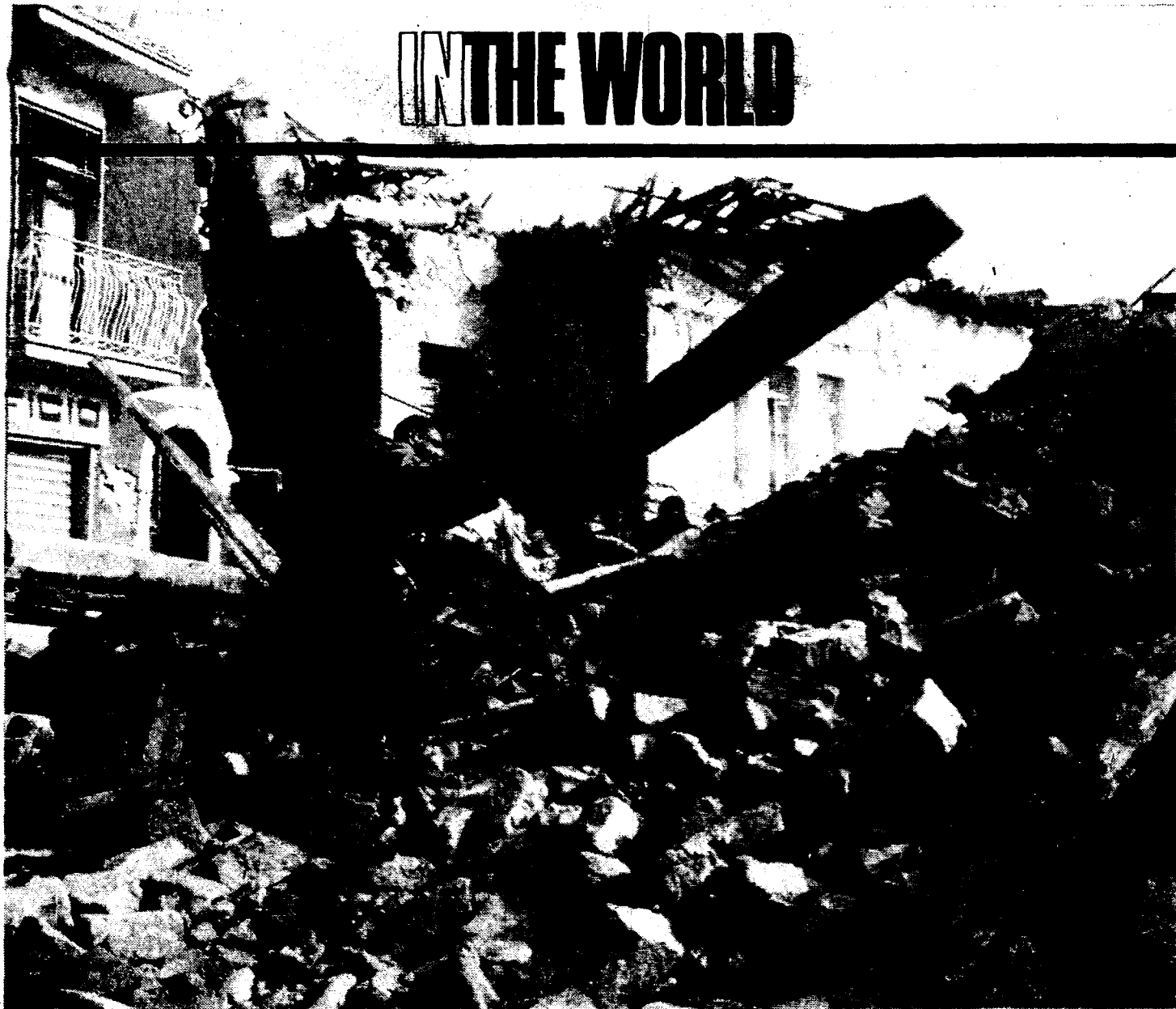


IN THE WORLD



ITALY

Disaster relief does not run on time in disinherited south

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

THE EARTHQUAKE THAT DEVASTATED a vast area of southern Italy last Nov. 23 has badly shaken the political landscape. Like the modern, barely reinforced concrete buildings that fell in quicker than centuries-old houses, the disaster laid bare the flimsy structure of the state in the Mezzogiorno, Italy's disinherited deep south.

Not that the structural flaws in the 35-year-old Italian government system based on Christian Democratic patronage were any secret before the disaster. In fact, the country was absorbed in unraveling a gigantic petroleum company embezzlement scandal involving much of the ruling political class when the tremors hit. The long-running Italian farce of *malgoverno* suddenly turned to tragedy.

The seismic shock struck Naples, but hit especially hard at the hinterland of remote ancient villages perched on the rugged hilltops of Campania and Basilicata provinces, the region beyond Eboli (described in Carlo Levi's book *Christ Stopped at Eboli* that was recently made into a film). In this region, able-bodied men mostly go off looking for work in Turin, Milan or Germany—even Buenos Aires and New York. Those left behind are mostly children, women and old people. When their houses tumbled down, the survivors, without excavating tools, were helpless to save their relatives who called out from the rubble, "Good Christians, come and help!"

Help did not come for days and days. The death toll, now at around 3,000, is still not complete, and there is no doubt that many could have been saved if rescue efforts had been faster and more efficient. Incredibly, regional government agencies seemed completely unprepared to deal with an earthquake disaster—even though that part of Italy is well known to be the center of seismic disturbances

caused by the African continental plate crunching against Europe, and, in fact, laws were passed 10 years ago to set up earthquake emergency aid centers. The first rescue workers to reach many villages were volunteers from the Communist Youth Federation or other private civic organizations, or even emigrant workers who rushed all the way home from Germany to look for their parents.

The army finally arrived, but much more slowly and less well equipped than for the less extensive earthquakes in the northeastern Friuli region four years ago. Government spokesmen blamed the delays on the bad roads and severe winter weather, but to southerners this was just another instance of being neglected and mistreated by a government they have mistrusted as an alien conqueror since the unification of modern Italy. To much of the rest of the country, it was the disgraceful sign of a corrupt and incompetent government that misuses the nation's resources and talents and makes it a laughing stock of the Western world. Why, for instance, when the Italian armed forces have 654 helicopters, were only 27 assigned to rescue operations during the critical 48 hours after the first seismic shocks?

One of the things that work very well in Italy is the news media. Television cameramen and reporters beat rescue teams to the scene and sent out heart-rending images of grief-stricken and increasingly enraged survivors without shelter, food or even shovels. Donations poured into relief funds, and, as usual, private citizens pitched in with that inventiveness that has given Italy its reputation as the only country that doesn't really need a government. But the lack of coordination meant efforts were wasted. Generously donated aid was hauled around aimlessly between traffic jams and road blocks.

The president breaks ranks.

Taken on a helicopter tour of ruined villages, Italy's righteous old president San-

dro Pertini was horrified. They don't make many like Pertini any more. Elected to the largely figurehead office a couple of years ago in an amazing burst of parliamentary purity to replace corrupt Christian Democratic president Giovanni Leone, the 86-year-old Socialist Pertini is one of the last active survivors of the civic-minded generation that fought



against Fascism and gave the post-war Italian republic a genuinely democratic constitution.

In the wrecked villages, people shouted to Pertini that they wanted help, not words. The old man had little to reply, but when he got back to Rome, he grimly prepared and broadcast a television speech to the nation without consulting prime minister Arnaldo Forlani or his cabinet.

Pertini took it upon himself to express the victims' complaints without defending the government. He reported that in a region where whole villages were leveled, "48 hours after the disaster, the necessary aid had not arrived.... From the rubble were still rising moans and cries of despair from people buried alive, and furious survivors told me, 'We don't have the tools to save our relatives, to dig them out of the rubble!'" Pertini

asked why the 1970 law on natural calamities had never been put into effect, why there was no sign of the emergency aid centers provided by that law, why no food provisions had reached the victims 48 hours after the disaster. Finally, he demanded punishment for whoever was responsible for "grave failings."

The speech had a strong impact. The press and public mostly applauded the president for speaking plainly. But Pertini's accusations threw Christian Democratic leaders into a frenzy. Interior minister Virginio Rognoni very nearly resigned in a huff and others hinted anonymously that Pertini should be impeached for senility. Socialists in the coalition government, especially defense minister Lelio Lagorio and Gianni De Michelis, in charge of state industries, also sharply reprimanded the president for lack of solidarity with the government.

But the rest of the left sided with Pertini. Socialist Party leader Bettino Craxi called Pertini's reaction "very sincere and human" and said that the confused handling of the earthquake had simply brought out once again the tremendous mess in southern Italy and the "fearful decadence" of Italian institutions. Craxi warned that Italy was suffering from a civic disintegration reminiscent of the Weimar Republic before the rise of Nazism. "When a state loses authority, when the forces representing a society no longer have clear goals, then everything gets out of control, irrational impulses can take over and let loose destructive tensions." The Socialist leader warned that "if we don't block this descent into hell, the republic risks collapse."

The legacy of corruption.

The indignant government ministers probably also felt they were doing the best they could. The confusion of the disaster aid was the product of a whole system of bad government based on favors and patronage. The government hastened to allocate billions of lire for disaster relief. In the next year and a half, an estimated \$20 billion in aid and reconstruction funds may pour into the Irpinia and Basilicata regions—an unprecedented sum that might, if properly managed, pull the region out of its centuries-old poverty. But if business goes as usual, it is likelier to enrich speculators, fraudulent contractors and corrupt politicians. Already rival leaders of the Camorra, the Neapolitan mafia, were bumping each other off in hopes of cornering lucrative new rackets. In his television speech, Pertini asked what had ever become of the funds appropriated nearly 13

The left parties charged that bungled rescue efforts exposed the "fearful decadence" of Italian institutions.

years ago to rebuild homes destroyed by an earthquake in the Sicilian village of Belice. Belice people are still camped in corrugated metal shacks while judicial investigators try periodically to pick up the trail of the vanished reconstruction funds. One local Christian Democrat commented that "we didn't need the earthquake to find out that real estate speculation is the economic motor of the Mezzogiorno."

Southern distrust of the government is so great that even when government teams finally arrived in the disaster area, people refused to do what they were told. Army evacuation plans were stalled because villagers stubbornly refused to budge from the ruins of their homes, even though they were freezing and destitute. In northern Friuli, people behaved differently. But in the South, villagers

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THE PERSIAN GULF

Problems of re-supply set limits on Mideast conflict



Ayatollah Khomeini

By Fred Halliday

L O N D O N

TWO MONTHS AFTER THE IRAQI invasion of Iran on Sept. 22, it appears that both sides may be digging in for a long war. Like the European power that started fighting in September 1914 and expected a victory before Christmas, the protagonists in this conflict must now face the uncertainty of months—even years—of fighting, wearing away at each other's positions in the hope that, finally, either the war front or the home front of their enemy will crack.

But there is one major difference between World War I and this conflict. Whereas both Iran and Iraq have used their oil revenues to equip comparatively large armies decked out with the most modern equipment, both remain basically weak economies, unable to draw additional military supplies from within their own productive systems. They cannot sustain the initial level of fighting without re-supply from abroad—and that appears, so far, to be lacking.

Iran and Iraq are seeking arms from allies and on the open market. But as long as the major powers keep out of the conflict, the two countries' own shortcomings in military production will act as a brake upon their offensive capacity.

Economic weakness also accounts for two other factors. The first is the relatively limited effect the war has had on life away from the front lines and the constraints operating on both sides' military deployment. By all reports, life in Tehran and Baghdad continues almost as normal, and neither side has committed more than a fraction of the weaponry and the troops technically at its disposal. It cannot be a total war—a war of full mobilization—because, as far as the economy is concerned, there is relatively

little that can be mobilized.

On the other hand—and this is the second factor—both sides must be aware that they can play on the economic vulnerability of the other to force a quicker solution. Since Iran and Iraq are both overwhelmingly dependent on oil revenues, even to pay for massive food imports, a protracted cutoff of oil production would not only limit domestic fuel supplies, but also undermine the entire economy, which has little productive capacity without assistance from oil revenues.

Here the Iraqis are at an advantage over the Iranians. With a population of around 13 million, they are believed to have \$35 billion—or nearly two years' revenues—in the bank. Moreover, they have been able to continue some oil exports, via the pipeline to Lebanon, because their production areas are dispers-

ed and away from the site of fighting. And even if they did face serious revenue and production problems, one could expect other friendly Arab states, and in particular Saudi Arabia, to help out.

Iran's cash reserves are believed to be made up of about \$6 billion in Europe, and up to \$13 billion in U.S. banks. But the latter assets, so far, remain frozen, and with a population of 38 million, Iran's foreign exchange needs are proportionately larger than Iraq's. Its oil fields, concentrated in the province of Khuzestan, have been badly hit by the Iraqi invasion. Iran is also relatively

friendless, and no one in the Middle East—apart from Libya, with which it has a lukewarm alliance—could provide the financial or fuel assistance needed to ride out a protracted interruption in oil production. If the Iraqi economy so far appears relatively immune from the war, that of Iran appears to have suffered less than might be expected. It seems that some domestic oil production and refining continues, enough at least for basic domestic needs. Private cars are rationed to 30 liters of gasoline a month, and there is a limit on the kerosene supplies that so many Iranians use for domestic energy. There has been a run on bank deposits and some food hoarding. But the urban economy has not ground to a halt, and small amounts of oil are still being exported via a supplementary loading platform away from the fighting area.

But in the longer run the destruction of the Abadan refinery and the disruption of oil exports will hit the state badly, depriving Iran of the \$13 billion it had hoped to earn in the current year. And the fighting has created a massive refugee problem with up to a million people fleeing Iraqi artillery. The fact that many of these refugees from such towns as Khorramshahr, Abadan and Ahvaz are ethnically Arab—the very people the Iraqis are supposed to be liberating—is an ironic comment on the war.

Indeed, whether by design or accident, the Iraqis have achieved one of the major prerequisites for any successful occupation of foreign territory, namely to empty it of its native inhabitants. As the Turks have discovered in Cyprus, this is the easiest way to secure an occupation.

It appears that the Iraqis have organized massive construction operations in the territory they have seized in order to build a new network of roads, bridges and barracks that would facilitate a long stay. In the weeks since the outbreak of the fighting they have also begun to drop hints about their right to alter the status of Khuzestan—or, as they call it, "Arabestan"—and their position on the ground there appears to be strong.

The wars at home.

The political impact of the war within the two countries is as yet uncertain. As in the European war of 1914-1918, prolonged conflict can produce big swings in public sentiment—from the extremes of patriotic unity to social upheavals of the kind that swept away the monarchies of Russia and Germany. While apparently secure at the moment, both regimes could see popular sentiment turn against them in a drawn-out war.

On the Iraqi side—where politics has

"Full mobilization" is impossible for the weak, lopsided economies of Iraq and Iran, which have relatively little to mobilize.

long been cloaked in a terroristic security—no overt signs of opposition have emerged. There have been unconfirmed reports of new arrests and executions in major cities, and of the killing of a prominent general who opposed the war. But other reports speak of sustained nationalistic identification with the regime.

The Communist Party of Iraq, along with Kurdish groups, democratic groups, the Democratic Party and the Unified Socialist Party, have gotten together in exile to form a Democratic Iraqi Front. Based in Syria, it has called for the overthrow of the Baathist regime and support

for the Iranian revolution. But it does not visibly command an active following inside Iraq, and it does not include the Shi'ite Muslim underground grouping, *Al-da'wah*, which is supported by Iran and whose guerrilla campaign inside Iraq was one of the factors precipitating this war.

Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein does not seem to have met serious political difficulties at home, and he appears to have insulated the population from the effects of the war. The longer-run impact, given the conspiratorial methods his opponents would have to use, remains unpredictable.

In Iran, the Iraqi attack at first produced an appearance of unity as many thousands of young men rushed to the front. Both the Islamic guards and the militias of the left-wing parties played an important role in the first weeks of fighting. It looked, for a time, as though the Iraqis had replayed the U.S. blunder at the Bay of Pigs. But the divisions of the pre-war period have now re-opened in an even sharper form.

The basic dividing line is between the followers of Premier Rajai and the Islamic Republican Party of Ayatollah Beheshti on one side, and the followers of President Bani-Sadr on the other. The Islamic hardliners seem to have the upper hand in the streets and easier access to the ear of Khomeini: they have fought off attempts by Bani-Sadr to nominate members to the new cabinet. After eight weeks of wrangling, Iran still does not have a foreign minister, and the previous occupant of the post, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, was even arrested by right-wing vigilantes after he criticized the clerics' control of the media.

The right-wing forces have also received support from much of the secular left—in particular the Tudeh (Communist) Party, the majority faction of the Fedayin guerrillas, and the Mojahidin guerrillas. These groups argue that Bani-Sadr is supported by the "liberal bourgeoisie," a

Saddam Hussein



special group still linked to the West that wants to block the continuation of the revolution. The minority of the Fedayin and the Paikay group, which broke from the Mojahidin in 1975, take an even more militant position that the whole regime—Rajai as much as Bani-Sadr—is tied to bourgeois and imperialist interests and should be remorselessly opposed. Both views expose a facile class reductionism.

The fragmentation of the left, like that of the Islamic camp, has been accelerated by the war. In one sense, the fate of the Fedayin is like that of many other unaffiliated and politically utopian left youth movements that emerged from dictatorships in southern Europe in the 1970s—for example, in Greece, Spain and Portugal. Lacking an experienced political leadership, they were in the end broken up by the competing attractions of other, older-style but tougher-minded, political formations. The Fedayin majority are now in many respects aligned with the Tudeh party, while the minority, led by the followers of the guerrilla theorist Jazani, continue to believe in the possibility of an independent revolutionary line that they cannot translate into a coherent program.

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