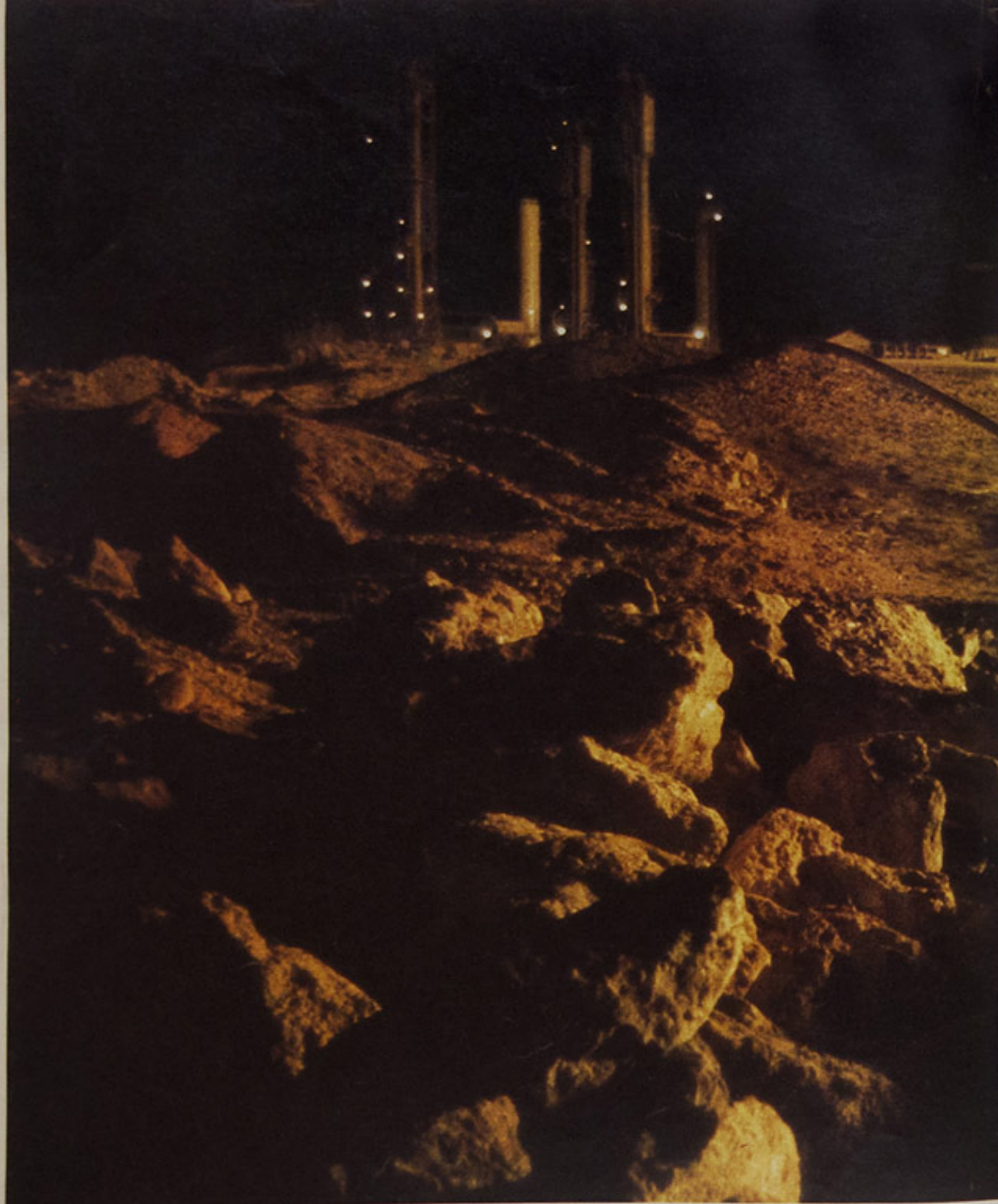




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OUR FUTURE IN THEIR HANDS



POWER TO ALL OUR FRIENDS This land was once a bird sanctuary. Now oil flows to the tune of £200 million a year, and the island of Das has become a symbol of Arab wealth. Like this awesome landscape, the rest of the Gulf is basking in the glow of the gas flares – as the world knows to its cost. *David Caute*, who has made an extensive tour of the oil-rich states, reports on page 36; photographs by *Marc Riboud*

Opposite the field manager's gleaming desk, with its six coloured telephones, a flamboyant cartoon, richly framed, dominates the wall. It depicts a young Iraqi worker, eyes ablaze, triumphantly spearing an obese and prostrate John Bull - with an oil rig. Somewhat nervously, we ask the field manager whether he would consent to pose beside the cartoon. He rises from beneath the standard photograph of Iraq's poker-faced President, Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr, straightens his tie, and proudly poses. The camera clicks.

"No hard feelings," says the field manager.

Outside the Kirkuk headquarters of the Iraqi Company for Oil Operations, soldiers armed with sub-machine guns listlessly survey our departure. A small, alert man in a Harris tweed jacket is waiting to transport us to the oil field. "J. A. Searty," he announces brusquely, "Assistant Head of Production, Northern Area." As we leave the town behind, gas flares appear against the horizon and a pungent black smoke reeking of rotten eggs (sulphur) infiltrates the car. Near the road gas is seeping up through the earth's skin and whole patches of ground blaze like a barbecue.

But our perennial guide from the Ministry of Information, whose (hopeless) task it is never to let us out of his sight, is more preoccupied by the damage done to his immaculate trouser creases by the three-hour journey from Baghdad to Kirkuk. His poise, moreover, has been disturbed by a small incident. Having encouraged our chauffeur to drive the wrong way down several of Kirkuk's streets in utter disregard of police whistles, he has been reprimanded by a provincial police sergeant whose stubborn refusal to be cowed by the magic words "Ministry of Information" commanded our admiration.

J. A. Searty is pointing out an old Turkish fort on a hill. "First we had the Turks, then the British, I wish they'd knock the damned thing down." Pulling to a halt outside a perimeter fence, he instructs us to leave our matches with the guard, then strides off at a rapid pace towards the snaking pipes and cylinders of the de-gassing plant. He indicates a defunct wellhead: "That's the famous Baba Gurgur, the first oil strike in Kirkuk. It gushed uncontrollably for 10 days in 1927. Now



Sheikh Zaid (centre) and Takeo Miki during the Japanese Vice-Premier's visit. "We never allow a new well to gush."

Searty leads us to a knot of interlocking pipes, opens a valve, and allows a warm, bubbling brown fluid to fill the kind of glass container into which one passes urine. "This is crude, from two miles down," he says, holding the glass under my nose. The fluid level sinks rapidly. "Now you understand why one can't possibly transport crude in this unstable condition. Did the gases get to your stomach? Good."

Over lunch, Searty talks with an impressive mastery of detail about the technical problems facing the world oil industry. (Our chauffeur, as usual, is not allowed to intrude upon our socialist feast; he squats outside, grateful for whatever morsels might be sent out to him.) "Your people are doing their best in the North Sea," Searty remarks, "and the Americans are now making desperate efforts with shale, but it will be 10 years before you can afford to tell us Arabs what you really think of us." After

lunch we inspect the cylindrical furnaces of the separation plant, then visit the control room to meet the technicians who maintain a round-the-clock vigil on the dials. I ask him about nationalisation. "All these men once worked for the Iraq Petroleum Company and they all feel as I do: happy, at last, to be working for Iraq rather than against it. We can really expand production now; in the old days, IPC was constantly cutting back to protect the international interests of the parent companies."

The gas flares are now dancing more luminously against the darkening winter sky. Hands in pockets, Searty rattles off technical data and production statistics as I scribble frantically in my notebook. "Of course you realise this is the one Arab country which can not only staff its entire oil industry with nationals but even send some abroad."

"IPC perhaps deserves some credit for that?"

Searty shrugs. "It was the price

they were made to pay." As we head back to the car, an Iraqi welder drops his tools, turns towards Mecca, kneels, and begins to sway through his evening prayers. "We're not Marxists, you see," says Searty. "I don't believe Arab culture is compatible with materialism. But science is something we all have faith in. By the way, if you meet King Faisal, tell him to nationalise Aramco. Those American engineers are squandering his oil resources." Searty's eyes twinkle. "Perhaps Faisal's desire to pray in Jerusalem before he dies will convert him to socialism, eh?"

In the car we are silent for a while, but our host's amiable inclination to provoke is inexhaustible. "So it's going to be a cold winter for you in Britain this year?"

"Unless you people relent."

"But why should we? I worked in Germany for six months, you know, and I was shocked by the way their television is completely dominated by Zionists."

"I suppose the Germans feel a special debt to the Jews."

"Jews? We have nothing against Jews; they always lived very happily in the Arab world and they can do so again. Some of my best friends were Jews. Why do you laugh?"

"That phrase is somewhat discredited."

"Discredited by whom? By us? No, by you, the Europeans. So you pay off your debt to the Jews by giving them our land, our Palestine. When the British housewife goes cold this winter she may begin to think about this for the first time." At the gateway of the K1 pumping station he makes his apologies and drops us off. "It's up to people like you. Now please excuse me: I've six hours' work to do."

Maintenance Engineer Qays Al-Doory, a graduate of Birmingham University, greets us warmly and then, shouting over the roar of the English Electric turbines, describes how K1 propels half a million barrels of crude a day on the first stage of their 900 kilometre (560 miles) journey across the deserts of Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean terminals of Baniyas and Tripoli. When the Israelis bombed Baniyas all the pressure valves at Kirkuk had to be adjusted, but now, he explains proudly, production is back to normal. He beckons me to advance to within a few yards of the pumping station. ➡ 47



Top: the Sheikh of Dubai with his private helicopter. Above: British technicians play golf on Das, where the 'greens' are mixed crude oil and sand. Right: the Kuwait National Assembly discussing the emancipation of women. On the wall is the national emblem. Far right: the modern Kuwait rises in the background. Overleaf: a worker at the North Rumeila refinery, which is now in operation near Basrah, Iraq. The young Iraqis working at North Rumeila have a strong physique, high morale – and a pioneering spirit





The Sheikh of Dubai's Cadillac keeps a VIP date - with its U.S. export label still on. Below left: a Kuwaiti car buyer. Above and below: Japanese advertising in the Gulf -



the Hitachi poster, flouting the tradition of the veil, has been defaced. Below right: a contrast in Abu Dhabi lifestyles... shanty homes and the Sheikh's new palace





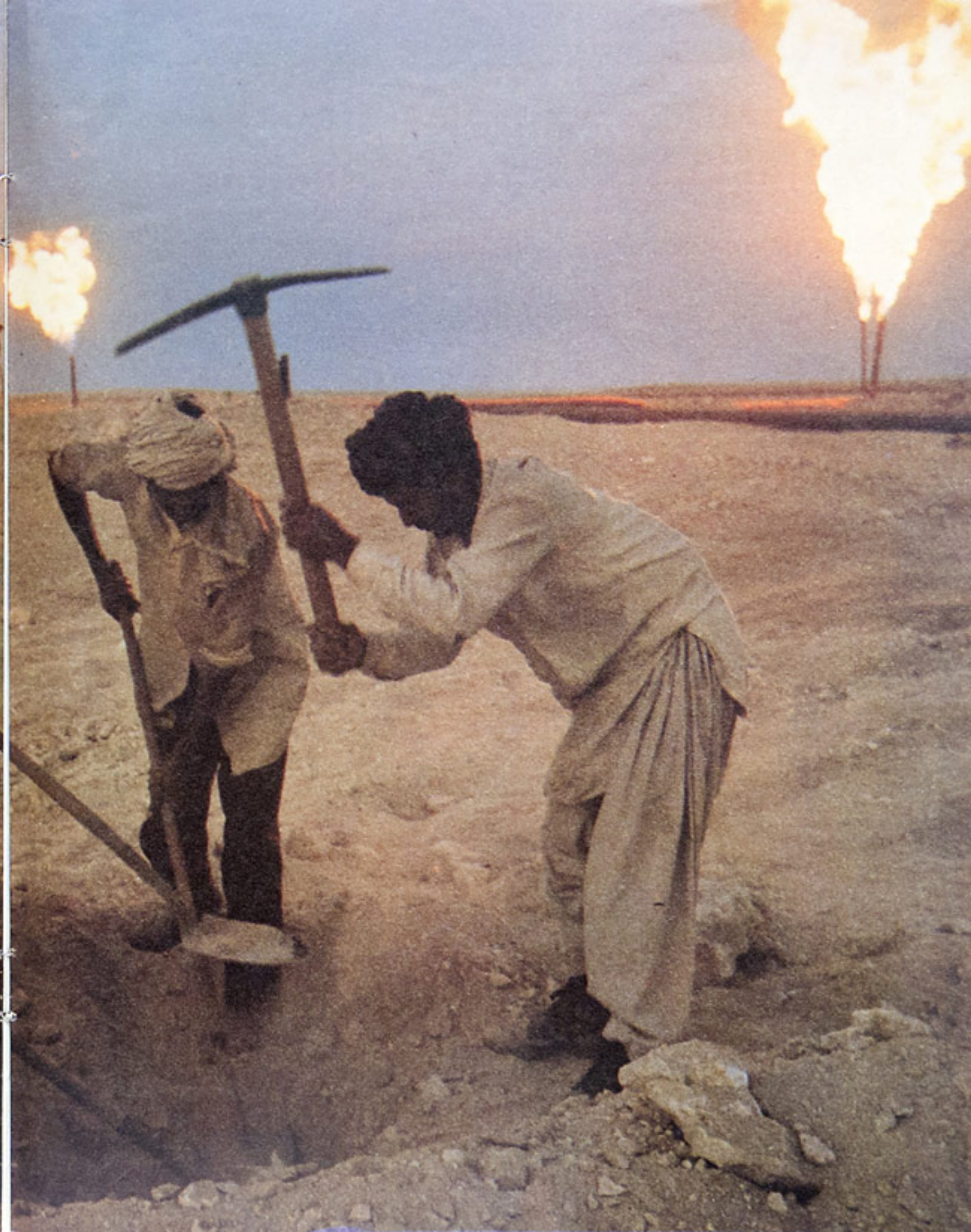
Two officials in the palace of Sheikh Zaid of Abu Dhabi, the wealthiest and most influential emirate in the Gulf



Kuwait's riches are reflected in the splendour of its new buildings. This is the marble-stepped entrance to a bank



Everything stops for prayers. A worker's ritual at Kirkuk: "We're not Marxists, you see," explained an official. Right: digging the foundations for an oil installation at Qatar



The ground beneath my feet vibrates as if hammered by a pulsing heart. "The crude now passing one metre below you," Qays Al-Doory shouts, "is sufficient to service the whole of Great Britain." Opening a valve tap, he lovingly allows the brown treacle – by this time rid of its gases – to cover his hands. It trickles towards his starched white shirt cuffs, but never gets there. He is master of the act.

"Oil is our blood," he says.

So we take to the road south over the interminably flat mud plain of central Iraq, once known as Mesopotamia, land endowed with the relics and ruins of the Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Hellenic civilisations, the land of Ur, Babylon, Ctesiphon, Hatra, Nineveh, Nimrod and Samara. But the barriers erected round Iraq are high, so only 18,000 foreigners annually visit the dazzling Iraqi Museum in Baghdad, with its magnificent collection of stone gods, ceramics, bas-reliefs, bulls with men's heads, golden Sumerian harps, gifts from kings to priestesses, and old Korans. In 1972, only 3500 British and 2500 Americans visited Iraq, which has severed diplomatic relations with both countries.

Baghdad is now a sprawling city of 1,800,000 people. It is also noisy; car drivers sustain a cacophony of horn-blowing until all hours of the night. Socialism notwithstanding, the classical divisions of rich and poor, old and new, are still very much in evidence.

In the centre of Baghdad whole new complexes of lavish government buildings are rising, their carpeted corridors and expensively furnished offices reflecting a tradition of hierarchy and deference which 'socialism' has done little to assuage. In the hideous and gigantic new Ministry of Planning (a vast, informal garbage dump festers beneath the supporting pillars) sleek young graduates of the London School of Economics – the Minister himself is one – in Village Gate suits play with their costly computers, magnetic tapes and punch cards, with barely a thought about what all this coding and de-coding might mean for the depressed mass of building labourers, tea-brewers and illiterate peasants, who still comprise the majority of Iraq's 10 million people.

Happily, the present Ba'athist regime has done and is doing a very great deal for the masses in the way of labour laws, minimum wages, educa-



The cartoonist's view: John Bull impaled on an oil rig. Below: Iraqi schoolboys' handiwork – quotes from the Koran incorporated into the drawing of a tank



tional expansion, free medical care, irrigation schemes and co-operative farms. Per caput income has risen from £90 a year in 1967 to £135 in 1972. And with an enormously expanded oil revenue now in prospect, the economic future is bright.

Nevertheless, the ruling Ba'athist bureaucracy, which, despite a new coalition with the Communists, toler-

ates no opposition, is very largely composed of self-satisfied Bosscats and Fatcats only too inclined to equate their own prosperity with Iraq's. And the passion for authority remains paramount. The president of Baghdad University, for example, conducts his business from the 18th floor of a skyscraper splendidly erected in the middle of nowhere –

not a student in sight. Apparently an aspect of 'phased planning' became temporarily unphased, but the student mountain, the president assures me, will soon come to Mohammed and then, one imagines, gaze up with deference towards the 18th floor.

Ba'ath ideology, the president of the university explains, "is neither capitalism nor Marxism. The party has discovered the social laws governing Arab society."

But not every member of the university faculty is quite so sure. Strolling with a professor across one of the campuses, and surrounded by large banners announcing 'Duty First, Rights Later', I ask him what impression such slogans make on the students. "Part of the landscape," he murmurs sadly. "The spirit of conformity is absolute. We all have to watch our step." The spirit of political commitment, and of dissent, is strong in Iraq, and malcontents will frequently unburden themselves to a foreigner.

Late one night, while buying a kilo of oranges, I am buttonholed by an aggressive, middle-aged Communist who, apparently, once studied engineering at St Helens. "This gang," he says, "they're all bourgeois. The Arab people are constantly betrayed. Traitors are everywhere." But the mental condition of the British people, he can testify from direct experience, is no better.

"You remember when the British Government lowered all flags to half-mast to celebrate – no, I don't mean celebrate – the death of Hemingway?"

"Can't say I do."

"Well they did. And not one English person knew why the flags were at half-mast."

Pumping my hand and hurrying to catch the last, red, double-decker British bus, he throws me one more pearl: "You want to know why the Zionist soldiers fight as they do? For the money. They are paid £100 for every Arab they kill. That's why they pretend they've killed so many Arabs – for the money."

Although oil accounts for 90 per cent. of Iraq's national income, the oil industry employs only 19,000 workers. A job at any level in the industry is, by local standards, highly paid and highly coveted. Whereas industrial trainees in Kuwait yawn and idle through the morning before escaping to their cars and stereos, young working-class apprentices at the Vocational Training ➡

Centre in Baghdad bend over their set squares and welding irons with furious concentration, under the exacting but friendly scrutiny of 20 Soviet instructors. On graduating to the minimal status of 'worker' in the oil industry, these apprentices will earn £800 a year plus free accommodation and special allowances. At Kirkuk the nationalised oil industry has inherited from the Iraq Petroleum Company the whole privileged complex of company houses, hospitals, schools, clubs, cinemas, golf courses and tennis courts.

Two major states boycotted the Arab Summit Conference in November, socialist Iraq and Islamic Libya. Both are widely regarded as the mad dogs of the Arab world. Both are intransigently opposed to recognising Israel in any shape or form, and both ceaselessly accuse other Arab states – notably Egypt and Saudi Arabia – of conspiring to sell out the Palestinians. Yet, King Faisal's crippling oil boycott has in a short time done more to change the balance of power than the rhetorical posturings and gun-runings of the Libyans and Iraqis who, devoted to every penny of oil revenue, affect to despise the oil embargo which they decline to implement.

Tariq Aziz, editor of the influential party newspaper, *Al Thawra*, likes to write his editorials in a quiet and spacious office overlooking the Tigris. His English is perfect and his expression inflexibly deadpan. He, apparently, has no intention of expelling any Jews from Israel (although there are others in the party leadership who talk of sending "home" all post-1948 Israeli immigrants). "Israel," explains Tariq Aziz in a precise monotone, "is simply a foreign state imposed on the Arab people by foreign powers. That is why we in Iraq have now eliminated all imperialist oil interests."

"Yet Iraq has refused to join in the general Arab oil cut-back?"

"Why did Faisal cut his oil production? Because our nationalisation measures confronted him with the will of the entire Arab people. In our opinion, the cut-back is a mistake for two reasons: it will hurt our friends as much as our enemies, and it will alienate public opinion."

I ask Tariq Aziz about the spectacular era of violence, coups, assassinations, faction-fighting and executions which has so distinguished Iraqi public life since Kassem's revolution.

"The revolution of 1958," he says, "was betrayed. Kassem became



The man in the middle is a Soviet technician at the North Rumaila oil field

a dictator. Army officers displayed an unhealthy arrogance. Under Kassem and Aref an officer could walk into a ministry and demand this or that for his relatives – or go to a night club and get a dancing girl free. The Zionist and imperialist agents were everywhere, but the people no longer believed that any Iraqi government was capable of cleaning house. Our party was determined to prove the contrary."

"So you publicly hanged 14 people, nine of them Jews? And executed many others?"

"The trials were televised. All the accused confessed. The bodies were left to hang for one day only."

But the ubiquitous Ba'ath slogan, 'Freedom, Unity, Socialism' has brought, in practice, none of these things. The regime led by Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr and his Revolutionary Command Council, in whom the most powerful figure is the handsome young party secretary Saddam Hussein, has reacted to a succession of attempted coups with waves of violent repression. Last June, the chief of police, Nazim Kazzar, himself a senior Ba'athist, shot dead the Minister of Defence and wounded the Minister of the Interior during another unsuccessful coup. Kazzar was later executed.

Hemmed in by six foreign states, stretched by a decade of indecisive war with the Kurdish minority, Iraq has generated a xenophobia to match her claustrophobia. All down the Gulf she is feared. "Iraq's border disputes are never settled – on principle," an official in the Emir of Kuwait's private office tells me. Twelve years ago Kassem laid claim to Kuwait. Now the plum has grown sweeter and riper for the picking. Last summer Iraq launched an attack at Sameta and Umm Qasr,

killing several Kuwaiti policemen and seizing 10 square miles of territory. Kuwait once more reached into its pocket and handed over further protection money – Kuwait's 'loans' to Iraq now exceed £100 million.

"We have to put Baghdad back on the Arab and world map," comments Tariq Aziz, responding to my criticism of the top-heavy bureaucracy concentrated in Baghdad. "I will not criticise Arab sister nations," he warns, "but I will tell you this. We were consulted neither about the outbreak of the October war, nor about the ceasefire. Iraq has a civilisation 6000 years old which entitles us to a leading role in the Arab world, whereas the Arabian peninsula is just sand and oil. As for Egypt, Nasser was a man obsessed by power; his successor, Sadat, longs only to do a deal with the Americans. The same goes for King Faisal. I do not believe the Egyptian and Syrian regimes can long survive the anger of the Arab masses. As for Gaddafi, he is a young man still, and his military opinions are without value. His regime is hanging in the air and has no real contact with the Libyan intelligentsia, small and underdeveloped as it is. When we sent our troops to the Golan Heights, the Syrians had lost the bulk of their tanks and the road to Damascus was open. We halted the Israeli advance by following our own tactics and avoiding a decisive battle."

The office is quiet. A servant brings two more glasses of sweet tea, but Tariq Aziz declines. He sits, waiting for the next question. I think he likes being interviewed.

"Obviously Iraq is ready to fight to the last Egyptian," I say.

Next day, Mr Al-Hilli, director of the Ministry of Information, entertains us to lunch in an exclusive club on the outskirts of Baghdad – soft

lights, piped music, deferential waiters, and a packet of Rothmans placed on every plate.

The poet among the guests (I don't catch his name), a man with refined features and blazing eyes, has one message to convey: "Homeland. Orchards. Homeland." Zuker Berkador, of the Ba'ath Foreign Affairs Bureau, insists: "The Palestinians have been living in Palestine for thousands of years. Any claimed Jewish connection with the area is purely fictitious." The genial Mr Al-Hilli pops a black olive into my mouth. I suggest that although the responsibility for the refugees undoubtedly lies with Israel, the Arab states could do more to resettle the miserable camp population and their children. "They would never leave the camps!" cries the poet. "Homeland." But surely the middle-class Palestinians, who have useful lives to lead in Beirut, Kuwait or Cairo, are no less dedicated to the Cause than the unfortunate peasants who fester in the camps?

"Ah," says Berkador. "If those refugees were re-settled in the Arab world, they would become assimilated. Then the Cause would die."

Outside Basrah's main theatre a poster has been erected: 'We will take Palestine from the Jews'.

Why, I ask, has Iraq nationalised all but a tiny fraction of its oil industry (the exception being the rump of the Basrah Petroleum Company)? In one sense, Iraq merely jumped a gun which was due to fire all down the Arabian Gulf and across North Africa; it is safe to predict that within a few years all the Arab governments will have demanded a majority shareholding in foreign oil companies or expropriated them.

The age when the 'majors' could work in solidarity to frustrate the marketing of expropriated oil has passed, but this is precisely what the British-led Iraq Petroleum Company managed with some success to do in the 1960s. When Kassem took back thousands of square miles of unexploited concession area, IPC and its twin BPC decided to make an example of Iraq by threatening legal action against anyone buying oil from the nationalised North Rumaila field. Consequently the field remained undeveloped and Iraq's finances suffered. IPC's parent companies, moreover, had other fish to fry, the result being that Iraq's oil production increased by only 4 per cent. at a time when general Middle

East production rose by 13 per cent. Later in 1972, during bitter bargaining, IPC cut production by 45 per cent., using the argument that a temporary reduction in freight rates was pricing the more expensively taxed 'short-haul' Mediterranean crude out of the market.

In this way the whole economy of a country could be manipulated and crippled at the whim of a foreign company. In June 1972, IPC finally paid the price, losing virtually everything in return for a minimal compensation of only £40 million.

The British oil men who once worked in Iraq and are now scattered throughout the Middle East hold a strong view. "Iraq has become a Soviet satellite," says one. "Of course," remarks another, "the Egyptians stirred the pot." An oil man working in Qatar describes the savagery and cruelty which are periodically rampant in Iraq, the mobs, street-draggings and murderous faction fights. He speaks with nostalgia of the relative "freedom" and "prosperity" of those pre-1958 days when General Nuri Al-Said's ultra-conservative regime marched in step with British interests. "Of course it was less brutal under Nuri," says a Shell man in Bahrain. But was it? And for whom?

South of Baghdad, set in that vast flat plain, lie the ruins of Babylon. By the waters of Babylon... but the Euphrates absconded and the great city died. Flying south to Basrah, one watches the convergence of the two great rivers into a sandy swampland where scattered water-people perch their huts on tiny islands of wet sand. The Governor of Basrah, a Sony television set perched on his desk and a bas-relief of President Al-Bakr nationalising the oil companies suspended threateningly above his head, tells me that his government is gradually reaching the waterpeople. "It takes time."

Until recently an empty desert, the North Rumeila oil field is now triumphantly disgorging its precious cargo. The rigs are up, the three-pronged drills are 'spudding in', the shafts are biting deeper into the beds of sedimentary rock, the geologists are testing core samples in their caravans, and the oil is cascading through the pipelines to the sea terminals at the head of the Gulf. (Never say the Persian Gulf; one Kuwaiti pilot turned for home when an Iranian control tower told him he was clear across the Persian Gulf.)

The young Iraqis now working in North Rumeila enjoy the spirit – and the environment – of pioneers. Their physique is strong, their morale high, and their technical qualifications impressive; they work 60 hours a week (including 12 hours overtime), day shift and night shift, summer and winter, their philosophy being that work must continue at full stretch in any climatic condition except high wind. Every 21 days they receive a week's leave. "I like it that way," says Aprim Mishail Toma, an Assyrian 'tool-pusher' who earns over £3000 a year and keeps his family in Basrah. Bumping across the desert in a Toyota, Toma speaks of seismic and gravitational survey techniques, of oil's ultimate derivation from fatty organic matter masticated on sea beds by bacteria, and then buried and trapped by upheavals of earth and rock. Above oil there is always gas; below, water. Drillers seal their shafts with concrete (which means constantly narrowing the shaft as it descends), and simultaneously pump down a hydrostatic head of chemical compound 'mud' to stabilise pressures and prevent the oil squirting from its limestone casing ahead of time.

A former IPC employee and fluent in five languages, Toma summons up one of them to introduce me to Valentin Treinev, a 36-year-old 'tool-pusher' from Grozny who, believe it or not, has never been outside the USSR before, likes the local food, accepts the climate and misses his family. And would I please excuse him, he has a well to drill. In a cloud of sand a group of senior Soviet technicians wearing leather jackets come bounding across the desert. I corner them; they submit to the interview purely to please Toma. Why did they come to Iraq? To help the Arab people and to see foreign parts. Did they volunteer? "Correct," answers their spokesman, and would I please excuse them.

At five in the evening, covered in sand and weary euphoria, we stagger into the canteen and share with our hosts a three-hour feast of humous, fried eggs and rice, kebab, Russian salad, and kubba (mince meat with nuts, raisins and spices). And we talk. Loyal though these technicians are to the Iraqi revolution and its social achievements, they do not rape the world with glib, made-to-measure phrases, but rather drill into the explosive gas pockets of nationalist emotion patiently, tentatively. Toma,

for example, listens regularly to BBC short-wave radio, is remarkably well-informed, and totally immune to mythology. "The pages of foreign magazines which interest me," someone remarks, "are those our censors have removed."

Asks them about the womanless life of a pioneer settlement. Yet the settlement is merely a metaphor for the limitless sexual desert of Arab life. Expecting our hosts to bridle, I am surprised by the frankness and the passion of their response. "It's hell, I tell you," says Nashat Yacoub, a mechanical engineer recently returned from a three-week technical visit to France. "You say you saw 500 young men leaving the Nasir Cinema in Saadoun Street, hand in hand, and not a girl in sight. Can you imagine how we suffer? I'm 29 and I've never had a woman."

In socialist Iraq, where Islam is the state religion, neither civil marriage nor civil divorce is permitted. I ask about contraception. "That's not the point," says Toma. "If I slept with a girl before marriage, I could never respect her, never marry her." Yacoub nods. "It's not possible."

"In that case you are all the victims of your own prejudices!"

"Of course," says Toma. "We're Arabs, that's the problem." They laugh and we must depart, saluted by a vast ring of gas flares which set the night sky on fire. Our parting is a warm one. "If these men were to lead the Arab armies," Marc Riboud remarks as we head for Basrah, "the result would be different."

The question of sexual relations is one which will loom large throughout our journey down the Gulf. Whereas Iraqi boys and girls often share the same primary schools, such an integration is out of the question in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. The Kuwaiti Government, indeed, has gone so far as to demand the dissolution of 14 foreign private schools on the ground that, being co-educational, they corrupt the Kuwaiti children who attend them. On the other hand, all the Gulf emirates are now sparing no expense on female education. A primary school for 600 girls in Kuwait displays walls and floors of pure marble, a language laboratory costing £8000 ("Good morning, Mr Smith, how is your cold today?" chant the eight-year-olds in their cubicles), a modern gymnasium, free-style painting and a plaster

bust of Mozart in the music room.

Although the *évolués* of Kuwait and Bahrain have discarded not only the veil but also the universal black *abba*, or silk cloak, in favour of Western clothes and Joy perfume, their ability to pursue careers remains restricted. In Kuwait we observe the 50 elected deputies of the National Assembly convening to debate polygamy and the female franchise in belated response to a two-year-old petition from the Women's Day Committee.

Abdul Aziz Al-Massaeed, newspaper tycoon and deputy, declares: "How can we fight Israel, which is led by a woman, if we don't emancipate our own?" But the Bedouin representatives are having none of it: it's the polygamy issue, rather than the vote, which scorches their navels. Roars deputy Yusuf Hashim Al-Rifai: "I prefer that a woman lives as a second wife, than as a concubine, or a mistress, or in illegal relations with a man. I am not against Women's Rights," (his culture scarcely permits him to claim that some of his best friends are women) "but only wish to keep her from the filth of modern civilisation and far from political exploitation." Now radical deputy Ahmed Al-Khatib is on his feet (actually, so is virtually everyone). "Whatever the charlatans who use Islam as a pretext may say, equal rights are a pillar of democracy." Unfortunately, the reformers can't muster the 33 votes they need to amend the constitution, though nobody seems to contemplate taking a vote. The proceedings have reached such a pitch that the Speaker calls for a half-hour suspension, thereby giving the rival factions a chance to slug each other in the hallway.

Later that day I call on the *petroleuses* at their suburban headquarters. The walls are bare: not a poster or pamphlet in sight. A man-servant brings cups of Nescafé to half a dozen young women who remain absorbed in the work of filling bags with some edible substance. The intellectual temperature is zero. Miss Nuriya Saleh Al-Sadani, the chairwoman, explains that they do not demand the abolition of polygamy, merely the scrupulousness of a second marriage by a court of law. "Islam is our code," she says. "Allah is our God. One must interpret the Koran, but one cannot discard any of it as outdated. Seventy per cent. of our members have jobs or careers." ➔

In Qatar and Abu Dhabi there are probably no more than a dozen native women with jobs which involve shoulder-rubbing with men. In these emirates girls commonly marry at 13 or 14 and invariably accept their parents' choice of a husband—normally a first cousin. In Saudi Arabia, no woman can drive a car or accept public employment (Saudia Airlines recruits its hostesses in Lebanon) or appear on the streets without a veil. Churches are not permitted in Saudi Arabia or Qatar; a Christian wedding requires the short hop to Bahrain.

In the Gulf, the Palestine question looms large. Estimates of Palestinians currently living in Kuwait vary from 100-200,000. Palestinian children attend Kuwaiti schools during the afternoon. Rashid A. Al-Rashid, Under-Secretary at the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry, tells me: "Naturally we give astronomical sums to the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation] and the refugees. But we decline to humiliate our Palestinian brothers by boasting about how much. I do not tell the world what I give my wife." During the October war, his government donated a further £100 million to sustain the Egyptian and Syrian war efforts, and officials gave up a month's salary. Fear reinforces sentiment; more than once Kuwait's vital installations, like the gigantic water de-salination plant, have been under threat from militant Palestinians; all the Gulf emirates pay a heavy ransom for their continued independence and a quiet life. Although the Gulf governments officially support the moderate Egyptian position, they cannot ignore the danger of a furious Palestinian backlash in the event of a sell-out. Abdin Beiso, a native of Gaza and head of the Palestinian Writers' and Journalists' Union in Kuwait, tells me: "No peace is possible because Israel is determined to fulfill the injunctions of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Rashid A. Al-Rashid says: "Israel is an artificial country—it cannot exist indefinitely."

Have the oleaginous Arabs become arrogant about their new-found power to make the industrialised nations dance, bend and bow? In fact, intelligent Arabs are conscious that they could over-play their hand, and only occasionally does a note of triumph penetrate the politeness which is a universal feature of Arab manners. The director of Iraqi Television, watching on his own

screen the daily fiesta of dejected Israeli prisoners of war and of Israel planes disintegrating in the sky, says: "I believe it was Clemenceau who said Britain has no permanent friends, only permanent interests." According to Rashid A. Al-Rashid, "The embargo is not designed to hurt your people, only to make them think—to be rational, yes?" The Ruler of Abu Dhabi says the same. In Qatar a Jordanian radio producer comments: "Europe will learn its lesson by oil therapy." The *Kuwait Times* does not mince matters: "For a nation of its size, Holland's temerity simply cannot be tolerated, and it must be taught a severe lesson." News stories of Americans riding bicycles are popular; "Put a Camel in your Tank", advises one cartoonist.

In search of the official philosophy of the embargo, we call on the secretary-general of the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, which maintains its headquarters in Kuwait.

"People in Europe are going to be cold this winter, short of fuel, and probably unemployed. How do you think this will affect their attitude to the Palestinian question?"

"Now, why do you begin by saying that?" complains Dr Ali Ahmed Attika, a Libyan. "Is a little discomfort all you care about? Why not start with the history of Israeli aggression? Why do your media insist that the Arabs have provoked a fuel crisis, when really it is the Israelis?"

"Could you please explain precisely what kind of action countries like Britain are expected to take in order to secure a full resumption of oil supplies?"

"Take a rational stand. Be even-handed. That's all we ask."

"Could you be more specific? For example, are general statements about Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories enough?"

"We welcome recent statements by the EEC. But, of course, words are not enough."

"What, then?"

"Kindly understand we are not asking others to fight our battles for us. Tell me, why does your Press depict King Faisal as a rich lord sitting on a barrel of oil while poor people freeze? Who is blackmailing Russia to uproot Jews and send them to Israel? But, of course, I know that you are not free to discuss such things in your newspaper."

This distrust of the British Press is endemic in the Arab world: the Zionists are pulling the strings. (Many Israelis, incidentally, insist with equal indignation that the British Press is controlled by magnates sinisterly linked to oil interests.) Almost all Arabs believe that BBC television is pro-Israeli; almost all Israelis claim that it is pro-Arab. The fanciful claim that an editor might dispatch a correspondent to the Middle East without an elaborate briefing is greeted on both sides with derisive laughter.

Hatim Abdul Ghani, a Palestinian who works in the Kuwait Ministry of Information, waves a copy of *The Daily Telegraph* under my nose: "I read here that the Arab boycott threatens civilisation itself. How interesting. And why do I keep reading the word 'blackmail'? Do you call it blackmail when the United States Congress exerts economic pressure on Russia to send out the Jews?"

Abdul Aziz Al-Masaeed, a leading Kuwaiti parliamentarian and the owner of four newspapers, tells me during a notably abrasive interview: "We will nationalise all the foreign oil companies. They have cheated us for too long. As for compensation, that will depend on your Israeli friends." The next day I drive to Ahmadi, to meet Basil Butler, general manager of the Kuwait Oil Company, a subsidiary of BP and Gulf. Does he expect the Government to bow to nationalist pressure? "The state of play is unclear," he says. "I don't think I can help you."

British oil men working in the Gulf have recently become tight-lipped, terrified of being misquoted, or just quoted. No longer can they take for granted the comfortable, neo-colonial existence they have fashioned for themselves and their families in company towns like Aramco's Dhahran in Saudi Arabia, Bapco's Awali in Bahrain, and the KOC's Ahmadi in Kuwait—towns endowed with cinemas, supermarkets, cricket and baseball pitches, football and Rugby fields, good hospitals and libraries, cheap domestic service and devoted Indian cooks. And even in the 'dry' states the liquor problem can be overcome by resort to home-made 'Flash', provided one chooses one's guests sensibly.

A surface urbanity masks the shock of change. Even so, these men can never quite forgive ➡

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The Spirit of Mexico

the opportunism and ingratitude of yesterday's company employee who is tomorrow's Minister of Oil, the upstart politician demanding his seat on the board. Yet the pain of it is not acute; the British oil men know they will fall on their feet, often with a pension in one pocket and a new salary in another. But for the Indian, Pakistani and Palestinian employees who are being systematically replaced in the oil companies of the Gulf by nationals, the future is a source of acute anxiety. At the Umm Said terminal of the Qatar Petroleum Company, a senior Indian administrator declares passionately: "I have served this company for 20 years. And could I bring my family from India? Of course not. Where would I send my children to school? And who will want to re-employ me at the age of 50?" His British supervisor is more sanguine. "I think he's exaggerating a bit. The pay-offs are pretty generous. I mean, £7000 goes a long way in India."

The native Kuwaitis have nothing to worry about, apart from gout, nervous breakdowns, and, in the case of the Governor of Ahmadi, Sheikh Jabir Al-Abdullah Al-Jabir Al-Sabah, the effects of a cold November on his roses at Esher. "We spend every summer there - conveniently close to Ascot, and my wife can get to Harrods." Thirty years ago, Kuwait was a trading and pearl-fishing port with only a few Bedouin and a per caput income of only £30 a year; today a Kuwaiti citizen need simply extend a hand for a £30,000 grant from the Government. With petrol costing 10p a gallon (Kuwaitis don't put up with the inconvenience of taxes), it's not surprising that new cars are driven an average of 30,000 miles a year which, in a country only 80 miles long, may indicate a certain restlessness. Even so, as a salesman at Ali Abdul Muwal & Sons, the biggest General Motors dealer outside the USA, points out to me, getting back into your Oldsmobile or Cadillac when the temperature reaches 120° in the shade can be a tricky business. And so, as women in black *abbas* and veils crawl knowingly in and out of the new 1974 models on display, our salesman produces a small remote control unit the size of a transistor and brings to life and air conditioning an empty car 100 yards away. "Very popular with police chiefs and guerrilla leaders throughout the Middle East," he adds.

Of course it all depends - the free phone calls, £3000 drawing-room suites and free medical attention in London - on that one thing, oil, which accounts for 93 per cent. of Kuwait's national income. But how long will the oil reserves last? Jeremiahs say 20 years and optimists say 60, but in any case the Kuwaiti Government, like all the others in the Arabian peninsula, is determined not to allow the gold-plated dream to sink back into the sand. One message is emerging: help us to industrialise and you'll get your oil.

This 'us' by no means applies to the whole population of the Gulf emirates. The Arabs, Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians and Baluchis who have flocked to the Arabian peninsula in search of high wages, and who form patient, early-morning queues outside the Ministries of Labour, can expect neither security nor gratitude. Yet where would Kuwait be without its despised foreigners? In the Technical College, only 30 out of 208 instructors are Kuwaitis; in the Ministry of Health, only 75 out of 758 doctors, and only 99 out of 3000 nurses. Who would service all those cars, erect all those buildings, edit the newspapers and sweep the streets? Certainly no Kuwaiti or native of Qatar and Abu Dhabi would now accept the £30 a month paid to coolies and dockers from Syria and Iran, and the amazing situation has developed in Qatar and Abu Dhabi that only one national out of 10 trained by the foreign oil companies finally opts for a career in oil, well-paid though it is.

Why? Because these two tiny, oil-rich emirates can muster between them scarcely 20,000 employable male nationals. "They all want to be ambassadors," says a British oil man in Qatar, and it's scarcely a joke when senior Government salaries range from £9000 to £18,000, plus a free house and furniture, a free car, and an allowance for married men equal to 45 per cent. of their salary.

Meanwhile, with foreigners debarred from owning land, and with rents hiked so high that a two-bedroom flat in Abu Dhabi costs £3000 a year, the immigrant labourers will continue to sleep on the building site or to huddle in shanty towns of a squalor equalled only by their European counterparts. The key tactic in maintaining political control is to keep the immigrant a migrant, to shut out his family, close most educational doors ➡

to his children (in Kuwait's University College for Women, only 15 per cent. of the students are non-Kuwaitis), and make citizenship almost impossible to obtain. A 12-year-old boy, born in Kuwait of foreign parents, who has never left the country, writes a bewildered letter to a newspaper, asking how he can become a citizen. The answer comes back in bold type: no general advice can be offered, since each case is dealt with on its merits. When I ask the chief nurse of Al-Sabah Hospital, a Lebanese woman who has worked in Kuwait for 22 years and who supervises the work of 700 nurses,

whether she has become a citizen, she shrugs politely: "If I were a citizen, I'd be eligible for a pension."

Nowhere in the Gulf has the oil-boom had a more spectacular impact than in Abu Dhabi, wealthiest and most influential of the United Arab Emirates. Here the population has expanded from 20,000 to 120,000 within seven years. Half an hour's flight from the mainland lies Das island, a ragged rectangle of sand less than one square mile in size, belching black smoke from the gas burners on its northern shore, and courted by 300,000 ton tankers patiently await-

ing their rich feast off the southern shore. Once a bird sanctuary visited only by ornithologists and a token force of the Ruler's Bedouin, Das symbolises not only man's obsessional rape of his natural environment, but also his satanic ingenuity.

On to Das flows the crude oil, worth £200 million a year, piped from the offshore fields of Zakum and Oom Sharif; from Das the same oil, now de-gassed, passes to the waiting tankers. Through an artificial port and an airstrip the island sucks in not only industrial *matériel* but also the means to house, feed, doctor and amuse 1000 men. And if you send

British oil men to an island the size of a handkerchief, they'll still find space for a golf course. If you hook your drive, it heads for the sea; if you slice your drive, it's liable to cost you £1,000,000.

The manager of this island of Dr Moreau is a jovial, bearded Scot called John MacNab, who hails from Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. He grins cheerfully when I put it to him that he must be fond of islands: after a 70-day stint on the hot one he has 30 days' leave on the cold one, where he indulges the passion for ornithology no longer feasible on Das. (He agrees, sadly, then immediately points to a flight of osprey.) Pottering about in his gleaming white Mercedes at a top speed of 15mph, he takes everything, including separation from his family and green grass, in his phlegmatic stride. "What you miss, you'll enjoy all the more when you get it." Besides, there's always a job to do, a crisis to cool, or a book to read. Khrushchev's memoirs, for example: "Are they genuine, do you think?"

"Next year they'll each have a room of their own," says MacNab, breaking in on six faintly astounded Iranian labourers who are munching their lunch on the floor. For all classes on Das the food is good and free. The clubhouse of the Indian and Pakistani artisans, reeking of curry and spice, is endowed with billiards, table tennis, and a library of books and newspapers in English and Hindustani.

Climbing thence to the apex of the social pyramid, we arrive for a draught beer in a mock-up English pub decorated with brass horse-shoes and the shields of all the British counties. "Of course," explains MacNab, "only the non-Muslims have a permit to drink; the Government insists on that." (And indeed a contingent of Abu Dhabi policemen reside on the island, to emphasise where ultimate sovereignty lies.) Over lunch (roast beef and Yorkshire pudding) talk turns to money (keep an eye on the exchange rate and pick the right moment to send your big salary home), then to claustrophobia. "Better than commuting in and out of London every day," comments a supervisor with years of service in Iran and Libya behind him. Finally we come to the absence of women.

MacNab chuckles. "After 10 weeks' service here, a man is awarded a tie which looks like this." He draws on a napkin: a roman 10 ➡➡➡

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surmounts a no-entry sign and the symbol for female. But this lapse from Knoxian rectitude is only momentary. As we leave to catch the last plane out, MacNab remarks that he encourages people to wear a more sober kind of tie for dinner in the evening. "One must keep up standards, don't you agree?"

But it is the Japanese, not the British or French, who are the most avid consumers of Gulf oil, and today they are desperate men who writhe in agony at the sight of a journalist. "Quite probably," moans Mr Yamamoto of the (Japanese) Arabian Oil Company, "conceivably yes . . . unknowable . . . very delicate . . . please don't ask." From the beginning the Japanese oil companies were screwed by the Arabs; whatever payouts in the form of schools, hospitals, houses and educational donations the other foreign oil companies were obliged to offer, the Japanese surpassed—in return for concession agreements about as secure as squatters' rights.

Then came the embargo. The shock to the Japanese was twofold. The threat of imminent industrial catastrophe is too obvious to stress; the challenge to their deliberate post-war policy of "facelessness" is more rarely perceived. The Arabs flushed them out and forced them to take sides. The Japanese groaned and took sides. Still the oil did not arrive.

In the Abu Dhabi Hilton, 60 beds have been commandeered for the Japanese invasion. No sooner has their plane touched down, watched by a few sceptical British officers dressed like T. E. Lawrence, than the rear door bursts open and 30 journalists hurl themselves down, scurrying to photograph the more dignified descent of Vice-Premier Takeo Miki from the forward door. The next day the 60 set out from the Hilton to pay their respects to the Ruler, Sheikh Zaid, who, handsome Bedouin and astute real-estate operator that he is, dispassionately receives them under a portrait of himself, and seated behind a little table supporting only a box of pink Kleenex. Bowing and bobbing, the petitioners unpack from a crate a gift of hideous aspect, but the horns won't fit, panic, face is lost and the oil is receding. The Ruler's prize falcon looks distinctly offended. Finally Sheikh Zaid nods, mutters 'shukran', and vanishes. Only the casual Bedouin bodyguards remain.

North-west of Abu Dhabi lies a

small dot of dust in the Gulf. It is called Mubarras and is the despair of the 20-odd young Japanese oil men who live there. One of them, whom I shall call McGregor in honour of the name on his baseball hat, obviously regards anyone voluntarily visiting the island as a lunatic. Bored by mah-jongg, hitting plastic golf balls into a net, and attempting to shoot arrows 300 yards from one end of the island to the other, McGregor complains that 12,000 dollars a year is not price enough for 'two years of my young life and no girls'. Home leave in Japan is confined to one month a year. What does he do with

himself when off duty? "Sleep." Did he volunteer for this work? McGregor laughs cynically: "Boss say: 'volunteer'." Well, then, what does he think about Israel and the Arabs? "Very far from Japan."

So I make for the exquisite miniature mosque built on the island for the benefit of the Ministry of Petroleum's four watchdogs and a scattering of Muslim workers. A slender figure in a dishdasha steps forward hesitantly from behind an American car of vast proportions.

"You have come to visit me, to ask questions?"

"Well . . . not really."

He looks disappointed. Life here must be rather quiet. So we stand in shadow and silence, for the blue-green sea laps noiselessly on the shallow shore. Beyond the sea lie the dunes of the Arabian desert, with their new, bright-white Bedouin settlements and schools, stretching away to Al Ain and the mountains of Oman. Just the sort of terrain, considering what lies beneath it, for yet another Hilton ●

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