

Military Resistance 10B1



American Reality

From: Dennis Serdel
To: Military Resistance Newsletter
Sent: January 31, 2012
Subject: American Reality by Dennis

Written by Dennis Serdel, Vietnam 1967-68 (one tour) Light Infantry, Americal Div. 11th Brigade; United Auto Workers GM Retiree

American Reality

Wounded bird can't fly anymore

he lays in the snow

with one wing by his side
and the other reaching out

Jimmy knows he can't smile anymore
because of the war
he sits in the corner of the room detached
while all his big family are talking, drinking

laughing and flying around over and under
and sideways from babies to old uncles
smiling taking pictures of each other

at their family reunion

Then one takes a picture of Jimmy and
say, ah come on, can't you smile

just a little bit for me

But then she flies away leaving the wounded
bird alone again as he takes some
of the pills that they said would help
washing them down with beer
but even the beer doesn't taste
as good as it did before the war
and he thinks and mumbles
to himself why can't you be normal
like everyone else
but then the flash of the aftermath
of a suicide bomber leaps to his face
blown up dead and wounded Iraqis
blood bricks the arms still attached
only by clothing for the 33rd time
then there is the flash of
his Aunt's camera as he wakes up
and she says Jimmy can't you
smile just a little bit for me
but Jimmy knows he can't smile
anymore after the war

Sometimes it is like he is sitting
in a cave, he can't
see the top of his head or his ears
or his mouth, he sees just what
is projected like a fire in his brain

behind his eyes.

Then another flash and he is back
where life is cheap
and death is normal.

[Shock Poetry written by Dennis Serdel for Military Resistance]

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN MILITARY SERVICE?

Forward Military Resistance along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly.

Whether in Afghanistan or at a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the wars and economic injustice, inside the armed services and at home.

Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Resistance, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657. Phone: 888.711.2550

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Foreign Occupation “Servicemember” Killed By Afghan Government Soldier Somewhere Or Other In Southern Afghanistan: Nationality Not Announced

February 1, 2012 Reuters

KABUL, Afghanistan — An individual wearing an Afghan National Army uniform turned his weapon against a foreign service member in southern Afghanistan yesterday, killing one service member.

Another Foreign Occupation “Servicemember” Killed Somewhere Or Other In Afghanistan: Nationality Not Announced

January 31, 2012 Reuters

A foreign servicemember died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan today.

Temecula: Marine Corporal, A Former Chaparral High Grad, Killed In Action



January 23, 2012 By AARON CLAVERIE, North County Times

U.S. Marine Cpl. Christopher G. Singer, 23, a Chaparral High School graduate, died Saturday after he was shot while serving in Afghanistan, a family member said Monday.

Singer, a member of the 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force based in Twentynine Palms, was shot while on patrol in Helmand, a dangerous province in southern Afghanistan, said Singer's uncle, Steve Welty.

Singer, a member of Chaparral High's class of 2007, joined the Marines shortly after graduation.

Welty said Singer had long sought to be a member of the Corps. He could frequently be found wearing camouflage gear when he was growing up, and he used to play "Marine" with his friends. He also participated in Chaparral's Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps program.

"From the time he was the littlest guy, he always wanted to be a Marine," Welty said.

Singer, a Christian who loved working on antique engines with his grandfather, spent his military career at Camp Pendleton and the base at Twentynine Palms, serving as a member of the military police for part of that time.

After his recovery from a knee injury and his re-enlistment in December 2010, he was deployed to Afghanistan in September.

Before leaving, Welty said, Singer left a message with his wife, Brooke Singer, the mother of their 2-year-old daughter, Briyana.

"He said, 'If I die, I don't want people to mourn me. I want people to know I did everything I wanted to do in life and died doing what I loved,'" Welty said.

Christopher Singer, the son of Marlene Shaw and Greg Singer, married Brooke on Jan. 29, 2009.

Singer was a football fan who listed allegiances to both the Super Bowl-bound New England Patriots and San Diego Chargers on his Facebook page.

Welty, a Chargers fan, said that when the Patriots beat the Chargers, however, Singer would let him hear about it.

Like many members of his generation, Singer played video games such as "Halo" and "Call of Duty."

Welty said the skills he picked up playing Call of Duty, in particular, came in handy when Singer was going through basic training in San Diego.

He was one of the best in his group at shooting targets while on the move, Welty said.

U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Nathaniel Kiser, a former roommate and one of Singer's best friends, said he lived with Brooke and Christopher Singer at Camp Pendleton after returning from a deployment to Afghanistan in 2010.

Like Singer, Kiser is a combat engineer, a role with the Corps that includes sweeping for mines, demolition, construction and a host of other jobs.

Kiser said he got a chance to talk to Singer on the phone a couple of times during his deployment and he said it seemed his friend was really taking to field work, even though much of it is extremely dangerous. "I love this. I love doing this stuff," he recalled Singer saying.

During their time together on base, Kiser said he spent a lot of time with the Singers, playing Halo with Brooke and Christopher, and rocking out to whatever was cranking on the radio.

There also were quieter moments, he said.

Sometimes, if one the friends had had a bad day, they would just go for a walk.

"We'd cheer each other up and stuff," he said.

Although it felt good to share stories of the good times, Kiser said he was struck by the finality of those memories.

"We're not going to have him anymore," he said.

Funeral arrangements have not been completed, but Welty said Singer will be buried at Riverside National Cemetery.

The family, which includes sister Jessica Shaw and brother Jordan Singer, also is working on setting up a trust for Briyana.

U.S. Marine Corps First Lt. Sin Carrano said Monday that Singer's personal service awards include the Purple Heart, the Combat Action Ribbon, the Marine Corps Good Conduct medal, Afghanistan Campaign medal, Global War on Terrorism Service medal and the National Defense Service medal.

CORRECTION: Marine Cpl. Christopher G. Singer of Temecula died Saturday when he was shot while on patrol in Helmand province, Afghanistan. He was assigned to 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force in Twentynine Palms and had re-enlisted in December 2010. An article that appeared on the front page of Tuesday's edition of The Californian said he was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Regiment, that he re-enlisted in August and that he died in a firefight. We apologize.

**POLITICIANS CAN'T BE COUNTED ON TO HALT
THE BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE
WARS**

**A Classified NATO Report "Paints
A Picture Of The Taliban's**

**“Growing Influence” “Gaining In Popularity Among The Population”
Foreign-Trained Afghani Security Forces Do Not Interfere With The Taliban’s Business In The Areas From Which Foreign Troops Have Withdrawn:
“This Allows The Movement To Recruit New Fighters, And Also To Openly Collect Donations”**

February, 2012 TV-Novosti [Excerpts]

It has emerged that a classified NATO report accused Pakistan’s intelligence of controlling the Afghani Taliban. The revelation, which came at a critical moment for US-Pakistani relations, has been dismissed by Islamabad as “ridiculous.”

Apart from alleged close ties with Pakistan, the secret report paints a picture of the Taliban’s growing influence.

It says the movement, which controlled Afghanistan prior to the US-led invasion in 2001, is gaining in popularity among the population.

"Afghan civilians frequently prefer Taliban governance over the Afghan government, usually as a result of government corruption," the report says.

"Many Afghans are already bracing themselves for an eventual return of the Taliban," the report says. "Once ISAF is no longer a factor, Taliban consider their victory inevitable."

The ISAF-trained Afghani security forces do not interfere with the Taliban’s business in the areas from which NATO troops have withdrawn.

This not only allows the movement to recruit new fighters, but also to openly collect donations, which constitute Taliban’s largest source of income, the report says.

It adds that the trade in arms and drugs also plays a big role in funding the Taliban.

SOMALIA WAR REPORTS

Fighting Erupts In Mogadishu

Jan 31, 2012 Garowe Online

MOGADISHU, Somalia – There are ongoing clashes in the district of Jazira in Mogadishu that erupted early Tuesday morning, Radio Garowe reports.

The fighting between Al Shabaab insurgents and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) alongside AMISOM troops began early Tuesday after Al Shabaab agents infiltrated the district of Jazira late last night.

Local sources say that AMISOM technical vehicles are engaged in the battle while both sides are using heavy artillery against each other.

There have been no confirmed reports on the casualties of this ongoing battle but unconfirmed reports say that there have were TFG vehicles carrying the injured to hospitals.

Although Al Shabaab retreated from Mogadishu and many strongholds in southern Somalia their presence in Mogadishu is still felt. Sources say Al Shabaab insurgents have permeated through Kahda district near the Dharkenley district in Mogadishu.

**NEED SOME TRUTH?
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<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

Traveling Soldier is the publication of the Military Resistance Organization.

Telling the truth - about the occupations or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance to Imperial wars and all other forms of injustice inside the armed forces.

Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties enlisted troops inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help organize resistance within the armed forces.

We hope that you'll build a network of active duty organizers.

MILITARY NEWS

HOW MANY MORE FOR OBAMA'S WARS?



The remains of Army Pfc. Dustin P. Napier Jan. 10, 2012 at Dover Air Force Base, Del. Napier, 20, of London, Ky., died Jan. 8, 2012 in Zabul province, Afghanistan of injuries sustained from enemy small-arms fire. (AP Photo/Steve Ruark)...

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

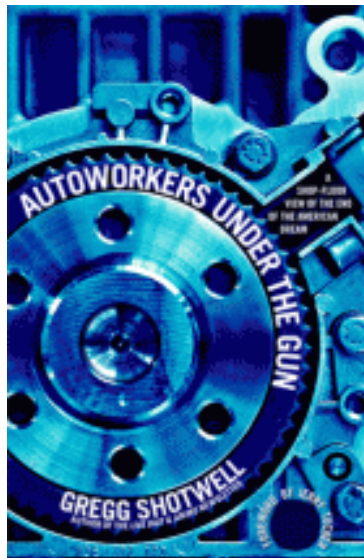
“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms.
-- Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 1787

AUTOWORKERS UNDER THE GUN: “This Collection Spans A Decade Of Autoworker Resistance—And It’s A Call To Action For A New Generation Of Workers Coming Of Age In Recession-Wracked America”



Autoworkers Under the Gun

By Gregg Shotwell

Price: \$17.00

ISBN: 9781608461424

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Publisher: Haymarket Books

Buy at: <http://www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Autoworkers-Under-the-Gun>

Workers' rights are not defined by law or contract.

Workers' rights are defined by struggle.

Gregg Shotwell's Live Bait & Ammo newsletter chronicled the outrages and absurdities of corporate managers, exposed union leaders who acted in "partnership" with employers, and sounded the alarm about the devastating effects of auto industry job losses and union concessions.

LB&A fliers grew legs of their own, distributed by rank-and-file workers in auto plants across the United States and cited by industry analysts.

This collection spans a decade of autoworker resistance—and it's a call to action for a new generation of workers coming of age in recession-wracked America

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Gregg Shotwell, a machine operator turned rebel writer, worked thirty years at General Motors. His shopfloor fliers grew legs of their own, distributed by Rank-and-File and cited by auto industry analysts.

REVIEWS

"No one has cut through the hypocrisy of what capitalism has done to American workers with more passion, wit, and insight than Gregg Shotwell."

—Sam Gindin, former research director, Canadian Auto Workers

"We factory folks are so very lucky to have our own poet laureate and writer preeminent—Gregg Shotwell."

—Elly Leary, labor educator and former autoworker, chief negotiator, and union officer

"Like a barking junkyard dog, Shotwell is there to defend the workers that the corporations and the unions have forgotten."

—Justin Z. West, past president and bargaining chairman, UAW Local 2488, autoworker at Volvo Cars, Gothenburg, Sweden

"He speaks for a large unappreciated reservoir of intelligence, insight, and guts in the working ranks. Almost invisible, watching the situation closely, preparing for our day."

—Larry Christensen, chassis assembler, UAW, retired

"I read your e-mails pretty regular. I know you very well. . . .You're done, brother. Shut off the mic."

—Stephen P. Yokich, UAW president, 1994–2002

LETTER FROM A FREEDMAN TO HIS OLD MASTER.

[Thanks to Scot Peden for posting.]

From: THE FREEDMEN'S BOOK, By L. MARIA CHILD; BOSTON: TICKNOR AND
FIELDS; 1865.

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865.

To my old Master, Colonel P. H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee.

Sir: I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can.

I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this, for harboring Rebs they found at your house.

I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable.

Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living.

It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again, and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville Hospital, but one of the neighbors told me that Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me.

I am doing tolerably well here. I get twenty-five dollars a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy,—the folks call her Mrs. Anderson,—and the children—Milly, Jane, and Grundy—go to school and are learning well.

The teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master.

Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshal-General of the Department of Nashville.

Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you.

This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future.

I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years.

At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars.

Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to.

Please send the money by Adams's Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio.

If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future.

We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense.

Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the negroes any more than for the horses and cows.

Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good-looking girls.

You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine.

I would rather stay here and starve — and die, if it come to that — than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters.

You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood.

The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

From your old servant,
Jourdon Anderson.

“It Was Brilliant: A Bank Where You Can Only Deposit”

28 January 12 By Delia Ephron, The New York Times

Banks are eating up all the real estate in my neighborhood.

I live on a basically residential street, and within three and a half short blocks of my house are eight banks: two Chase, one Wells Fargo, one Citi, one HSBC, one Bank of America, one Sovereign and one Capital One. Go two more blocks and there are 10 banks (one more Chase and one more Citi).

Why are the banks paying only 0.4 percent interest on a savings account if they can afford to open offices on every other block in Greenwich Village?

The other day I was catching up on balancing my account and realized that, for the last six months, I had earned about \$4 in interest but had been charged \$35 a month for service.

I went to the bank at the corner (the southwest corner). "This is insane," I said.

The banker explained that I had a service charge because I didn't maintain a high enough balance.

"At this rate I will have no balance. Besides, what about my C.D.? I have a C.D. here."

"Oh," he said, looking it up on the computer. "Someone forgot to bundle that in."

"Reverse the charges," I said, and he said that they would reverse three months but not six. To get all six reversed I had to go to my originating branch.

"This is my originating branch," I said.

"No, it isn't."

"Yes, it is. I opened my account here. I live down the block."

"Sorry. You have to go to your originating branch at 79th and Broadway."

"Just call them and tell them to reverse it."

"You have to do it in person."

Now, I had shut down an account on the Upper West Side about a decade ago and, after a six-year break, opened a new one when I moved downtown. But even if there was some justification for their confusion, that wasn't the point.

"There are three branches within walking distance, but I have to take two subways to reverse my charges? That is insane."

Insane is what I said, but actually it was fishy.

At that point I threatened to withdraw my meager savings from the bank. The bank manager appeared and reversed the charges for all six months, and gave me his card. "Let us invest for you," he said.

"Why would I let you do that?"

"Because you're not earning anything on your money."

Not the next day, but practically, my husband went to his bank's A.T.M. at the corner (the southeast corner) to withdraw money from his business account, and his card, which he hadn't used for a while, was rejected. He went into his bank.

"You're not on the account," he was told.

"Who is?"

"No one," said the banker. "But how is that possible?" said my husband. "I've had this account for 30 years. You won't even open an account without a signatory."

"The computer must have lost your name."

"How?"

After pressing a few buttons on her keyboard and scrolling around, she gave up and speculated that this must have happened when Wells Fargo ate Wachovia.

"You have to prove that the company is yours," she said. "Until then, you can deposit money but you can't withdraw."

Proving it involved a call to his lawyer, who had to locate my husband's articles of incorporation in storage, and a bill for \$145, which - after my husband threatened to withdraw his money - the bank agreed to pay.

"This is insane," he told them, but later pointed out that actually, from the bank's point of view, it was brilliant: a bank where you can only deposit.

Which perhaps explains what all these new branches are for.

Since no one actually needs to go into a bank to withdraw money, simply to the A.T.M., the banks must be in the business of taking our money but not in the business of giving it back.

I don't have credit card debt because Suze Orman advises against it, but I was having lunch with a friend the other day, who was a wreck because her bank charges 18 percent interest.

There was no way she could ever pay down her credit card debt.

So I was thinking that all of us earning 0.4 percent could instead loan money to our friends at 0.5 percent.

It was a bit odd thinking of myself as a benevolent loan shark, but, hey, my friend would get out of debt, I would earn \$5 a month instead of \$4, and the banks would make so much less money that they would have to close half their branches and give us our city back.

I mentioned the idea to my accountant, who told me it was insane.

"You can't trust your friends," he said.

ANNIVERSARIES

Honorable Anniversary: February 1, 1960 Sit-Ins Against Segregation Begin



Peace History: Carl Bunin

Four black college students sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and were refused service because of their race. To protest the segregation of the eating facilities, they remained and sat-in at the lunch counter until the store closed.

Four students returned the next day, and the same thing happened. Similar protests subsequently took place all over the South and in some northern communities. By September 1961, more than 70,000 students, both white and black, had participated, with many arrested, during sit-ins.

February 1, 1961:

On the first anniversary of the Greensboro sit-in, there were demonstrations all across the south, including a Nashville movie theater desegregation campaign (which sparked similar tactics in 10 other cities). Nine students were arrested at a lunch counter in Rock Hill, South Carolina, and chose to take 30 days hard labor on a road gang. The next week, four other students repeated the sit-in, also chose jail.

Dishonorable Anniversary: February 1, 1968



General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes Nguyen Van Lem, turning more Americans against the war in Vietnam

Peace History: Carl Bunin

General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes Nguyen Van Lem a NLF officer.

Saigon police chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan summarily executed Nguyen Van Lem, suspected leader of a Viet Cong assassination platoon, with a pistol shot to the head on the street.

AP photojournalist Eddie Adams's Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of the incident became one of the most famous, ubiquitous and lasting images of the war in Vietnam, affecting international and American public opinion regarding the war.

Happy Anniversary: February 2, 1989 Russia Withdraws From Afghanistan In Defeat



Peace History: Carl Bunin

Russian participation in the war in Afghanistan ended as Red Army troops withdrew from the capital city of Kabul. They left behind many of their arms.

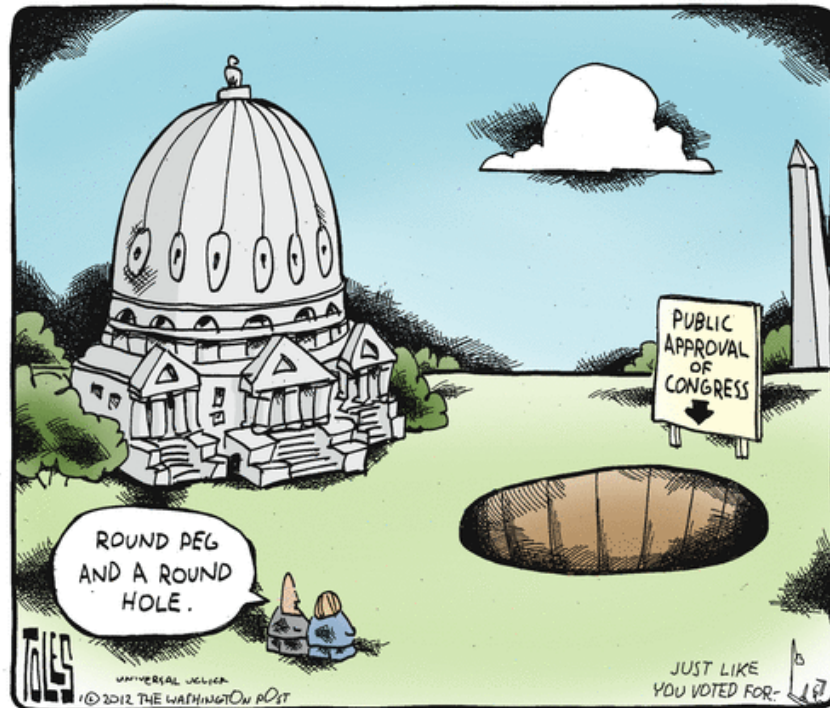
Troops Invited:

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or email contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe.

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If you prefer PDF to Word format, email: contact@militaryproject.org

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



Iraq Civil War Report

Jan 30 (Reuters) & Jan 31 (Reuters)

BAGHDAD - A sticky bomb attached to a car carrying an off-duty army colonel went off, wounding him in northern Baghdad, police said.

SHIRQAT - A sticky bomb attached to a vehicle carrying a police lieutenant-colonel exploded, wounding him in the town of Shirqat, 300 km (190 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

WAJIHIYA - A bomb planted in front of a police official's house exploded, wounding a member of his family, in the town of Wajhiya, about 30 km (20 miles) east of Baghdad, a source in the Baquba security operations centre said.

BAQUBA - A bomb blast damaged the house of a court official in central Baquba, 65 km (40 miles) northeast of Baghdad, but no one was hurt, a source in the Baquba security operations centre said.

BAQUBA - A roadside bomb went off near a police patrol in central Baquba, killing one policeman and wounding three others, a source in the Baquba security operations centre said.

BAQUBA - A bomber detonated a car bomb at a police checkpoint, killing three policemen and wounding three other people, including a civilian, in central Baquba, a source in the Baquba security operations centre said.

MOSUL - Insurgents killed a policeman and his father in a drive-by shooting in western Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

MOSUL - Insurgents shot dead a government worker near his house in western Mosul, police said.

MOSUL - A militant was killed and a soldier was wounded when the army clashed with insurgents in western Mosul, police said.

BAQUBA - A roadside bomb went off near an army convoy and wounded one soldier in southern Baquba, a source in the Baquba security operations centre said.

BASRA - A police officer was killed and another wounded when a suspected militant threw a hand grenade during a raid on his house in central Basra, 420 km (260 miles) southeast of Baghdad, said Ali Ghanim al-Maliki, the head of the Basra provincial council security committee. The suspect was killed.

MUQDADIYA - Insurgents in a car opened fire at a police checkpoint, wounding a policeman in a village near the town of Muqyadiya, 80 km (50 miles) northeast of Baghdad, police said.

BAGHDAD - A roadside bomb went off near a checkpoint and wounded two members of the government-backed Sahwa militia in southern Baghdad, police said.

MOSUL - Two roadside bombs exploded and wounded an off-duty policeman and his son in a village near the city of Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

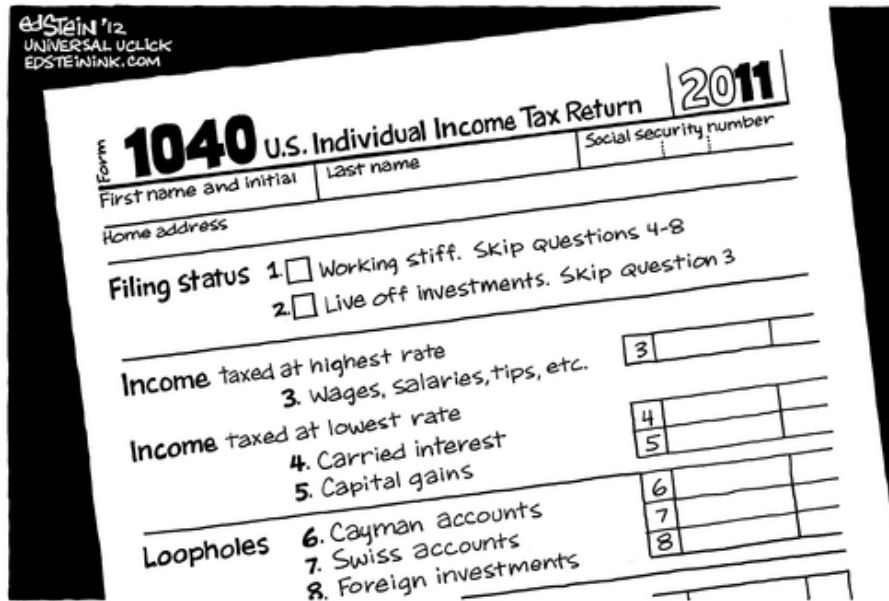
MOSUL - A sticky bomb attached to his car wounded an off-duty policeman in eastern Mosul, police said.

GET MILITARY RESISTANCE NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL

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**“The single largest failure of the anti-war movement at this point is the lack of outreach to the troops.”
Tim Goodrich, Iraq Veterans Against The War**

CLASS WAR REPORTS



A Super Bowl Of Struggle? The NFLPA's Demaurice Smith On Opposing Indiana's 'Right To Work' Agenda

January 18, 2012 By Dave Zirin, The Nation

The Super Bowl is supposed to bring attention and even glory to its host city.

But thanks to an anti-worker, anti-union assault by Indiana's Governor Mitch Daniels and the Republican-controlled legislature, the big game, to be held this year in Indianapolis, is bringing a different kind of attention altogether.

The NFL Players Association joined the ranks of unions across the state last week in opposing efforts to make Indiana join the ranks of so-called "Right to Work" states.

"Right to Work" laws have also been called "Right to Beg" or "Right to Starve" since they undercut wages, benefits and the most basic workplace protections.

Coming off their own labor battle, the NFLPA released a statement where they promised that they would not be silent on these laws during the buildup to the Super Bowl.

I interviewed NFLPA executive director DeMaurice Smith about why they felt it was important to take a stand against this legislation.

Dave Zirin: Why did the NFLPA feel compelled to release that statement against Indiana's proposed Right to Work laws?

DeMaurice Smith: First and foremost, it's important that our young men understand that they are just like every man and woman in America who works for a living.

The minute that any sports player believes for whatever reason that they are outside the management-labor paradigm, I guarantee you that the minute you start thinking that way is the day you will start to lose ground.

Our guys get their fingers broken, their backs broken, their heads concussed and their knees torn up because they actually put their hands into the ground and work for a living, and I would much rather have them understand and appreciate and frankly embrace the beauty of what it is to work and provide for their family.

(On this issue) we are in lock-step with organized labor. I'm proud to sit on the executive council of the AFL-CIO. Why? Because we share all the same issues that the American people share. We want decent wages. We want a fair pension.

We want to be taken care of when we get hurt. We want a decent and safe working environment.

So when you look at proposed legislation in a place like Indiana that wants to call it something like "Right to Work," I mean, let's just put the hammer on the nail. It's untrue. This bill has nothing to do with a "right to work." If folks in Indiana and that great legislature want to pass a bill that really is something called "Right to Work," have a constitutional amendment that guarantees every citizen a job, that's a "right to work."

What this is instead is a right to ensure that ordinary working citizens can't get together as a team, can't organize, can't stand together and can't fight management on an even playing field.

From a sports union, our union, our men and their families understand the power of management and understand how much power management can wield over an individual person. So don't call it a "right to work."

If you want to have an intelligent discussion about what the bill is, call it what it is. Call it an anti-organizing bill. Fine. If that's what the people want to do in order to put a bill out there, let's cast a vote on whether or not ordinary workers can get together and represent themselves, and let's have a real referendum.

DZ: What would you say to someone who says, 'Well, people who support this type of right to work legislation, they are just doing it to protect unions. They don't care about the majority of workers who aren't in unions'?

DS: Well take a look over the last 100 years. I used to say that we have forgotten a lot of the lessons from organized labor over the last 100 years, but I'm now convinced that we never learned them. Whether your talking about fire escapes outside of buildings or sprinkler systems inside of buildings, fair wages for a days work, laws that prevent child labor, things that led to the abolishing of sweatshops in America, let alone management contributing to healthcare plans or a decent pension... all those things over the last 100 years were not gifts from management.

Someone in a corporate suite didn't decide one day that they would bestow that wonderful right upon a working person.

The way those rights were achieved was through the collective will of a group of workers who stood together and said, 'This is what we believe is fair, and we are all going to stand together and demand that those things be provided to us. We'll do it as a collective group. You may be able to pick off one of us or two of us or five of us, but you will not be able to pick off all of us.'

"When you look at legislation that is designed to tear apart that ability to work as a team... that is not just anti-union. That is anti-working man and woman, and that's why we weighed in on this one.

DZ: When you put out a statement like this, does it also goes out to every player so they're aware of this campaign?

DS: It goes out to the players, the board, and the executive committee, and here in this case, we actually reached out to former Indianapolis Colts, former players who went to college in Indiana, and those players who live in Indiana, and asked them if they'd want to sign on.

So we have a very impressive list of players.

Rex Grossman is a local player who signed on. Jeff George, former quarterback for (among other teams) the Indianapolis Colts, also signed on.

I'm proud of our guys who signed off on this because I do think that they appreciate and understand that in the same way that those things that we were talking about things that have been changes for good for ordinary workers in America, there isn't a player in the National Football League who shouldn't understand that every benefit that we have in the collective bargaining agreement is one that was negotiated by a collective of players standing together.

Coming out of this lockout, perhaps it was the first time some of our young men understood what the collective bargaining agreement is all about. (Author's note: De Smith said after the interview that Tim Tebow was behind the NFLPA 100 percent during the lockout. Given some of my own critiques of Tebow's politics, I felt obliged to include that nugget.)

DZ: The news this week was that this bill was rammed through committee, so it is advancing through the Indiana State House. Has there been any talk about what else the NFLPA might do? Any follow up to the statement that you put out?

DS: I wrote an op-ed that has been placed in the main Indianapolis newspaper. If the issue is still percolating by the time of Super Bowl, I can promise you that the players of the National Football League and their union will be up front about what we think about this and why. Look, we have players who played in Indianapolis obviously, but I made no secret coming in

to this fight that the lockout, organized and implemented by a group of owners, was not only designed to hurt players but all of the people who work in and around our stadium: the hospitality network, the network of restaurants, bars, all of those things that are connected and touch our business were affected by the lockout that we frankly did not want to happen. So there is never going to be a day where players are going to divorce themselves from the ordinary people who work around their sports, and we're sure as heck not going to divorce ourselves from the fans who dig our game.

DZ: If the legislation is still percolating, there will be people who will be doing legal, nonviolent protests around the Super Bowl game to try to leverage the spotlight of the Super Bowl to raise the issue for a national audience, and I know that they're getting various union endorsements to do so. Is that something the NFLPA would support, the idea of a demonstration, a legal, nonviolent demonstration outside the Super Bowl?

DS: Yeah, possibly. We've been on picket lines in Indianapolis already with hotel workers who were basically pushed to the point of breaking on the hotel rooms that they had to clean because they were not union workers. We've been on picket lines in Boston and San Antonio. So, the idea of participating in a legal protest is something that we've done before.

We'll have to see what is going to go on when we're there, but issues like this are incredibly important to us.

If we can be in a position just to make sure that we raise the level of the debate to the point where it is a fair and balanced discussion about the issues, I think that is something that our players can help do. Obviously, players have a very high profile, and I think its important for them to take on issues which are important to them and be in a position to talk about them, raise the level of consciousness about them. If we do one thing by making this statement, and it is raising the level of the debate, and to have real people ask real questions about it, we've served our purpose.

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