

Military Resistance 10C16

Our Afghan Fighting Position



**Karzai Refuse To Prosecute
Warlord Who Ordered Death Of
Two U.S. Armed Forces
Personnel:
He Was Trying To Kill Investigators
Who Cut Off His U.S. Funding
Because He Was Supplying Weapons
To Taliban;
His “Targeted Murder” Killed The Wrong
U.S. Personnel By Mistake**

Mr. Abu Bakr has met regularly with senior Hezb-i-Islami insurgent commanders in Kapisa, providing them with weapons, police vehicles and lists of people cooperating with coalition troops, according to investigators.

March 29, 2012 By MARIA ABI-HABIB, Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

KABUL—American officials are pressing the Afghan government to prosecute a former governor for what U.S. investigators say is involvement in the killings of an American lieutenant colonel and a U.S. servicewoman, as well as other alleged crimes.

President Hamid Karzai's administration has rejected requests to prosecute Ghulam Qawis Abu Bakr for the killings and for alleged corruption, saying evidence is lacking.

Mr. Abu Bakr, who remains a power broker in his province of Kapisa just north of Kabul, has denied the U.S. allegations.

Mr. Karzai, who appointed Mr. Abu Bakr as governor in 2007 and removed him three years later, has declared the Abu Bakr case to be closed.

The U.S. still considers pursuing the former governor a priority for Afghan law enforcement, U.S. officials say. "As far as we are concerned, the case is still open," a senior U.S. official says.

Relations between Mr. Karzai's administration and its U.S. backers have been increasingly acrimonious after a spate of shooting attacks by Afghan troops on their U.S. allies and the March massacre of civilians allegedly perpetrated by a U.S. soldier in Kandahar province.

Details of U.S. findings about Mr. Abu Bakr haven't been previously disclosed.

U.S. investigators allege Mr. Abu Bakr ordered the May 2009 bombing that killed Air Force Lt. Col. Mark Stratton, 39 years old, and Senior Airman Ashton Goodman, a 21-year-old servicewoman working with him, according to a summary of the investigation, shown to The Wall Street Journal by the investigators.

The report also alleges that Mr. Abu Bakr plotted to kill U.S., French and British ambassadors that November, and that he was involved in acts of extortion and corruption.

Appointed as governor by Mr. Karzai in 2007, Mr. Abu Bakr is a former mujahedeen commander affiliated with the Hezb-i-Islami movement founded by warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Mr. Abu Bakr has met regularly with senior Hezb-i-Islami insurgent commanders in Kapisa, providing them with weapons, police vehicles and lists of people cooperating with coalition troops, according to investigators.

"Abu Bakr is being protected because he is connected with the political parties that represent power—in this case, Hezb-i-Islami," says Jean d'Amécourt, the former ambassador of France, which oversees security in Kapisa.

U.S. investigators allege that witness statements, other documents and wiretaps show Mr. Abu Bakr has been routinely extorting from contractors a share of the funds they received from the U.S. military.

In early 2009, as corruption allegations against Mr. Abu Bakr mounted, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, a U.S. military unit overseeing the development projects, broke off almost all contact with him, a decision that would direct aid money to rivals.

Mr. Abu Bakr subsequently invited the American PRT commander for Kapisa to an unscheduled security meeting on May 26, U.S. officials say.

By coincidence, the convoy of Col. Stratton, commander of the PRT in neighboring Panjshir province, was traveling that morning on the same road.

Col. Stratton and Airman Goodman were weeks away from the end of their deployments. Their families say they were both passionate about development work — which included helping to build a road through the Panjshir valley.

"This road is probably the single greatest thing I have accomplished in my career," Col. Stratton wrote home in an email 11 days before his death.

As the convoy was traveling through an intersection, a bomber slammed his explosives-laden Toyota Corolla into the Humvee that carried Col. Stratton and Airman Goodman.

Col. Stratton, a native of Alabama, left behind his wife and three small children. Airman Goodman, from Indianapolis, was unmarried.

Shortly after the blast, according to the report, Hezb-i-Islami issued a statement taking responsibility for killing the PRT commander for Kapisa, who wasn't in the vicinity of the attack.

The statement gave "every impression it was a targeted murder" that claimed the wrong victim, U.S. findings say.

Sources told the investigators that the bombing was planned by senior police commanders in Kapisa and carried out by Hezb-i-Islami insurgents on Mr. Abu Bakr's orders, according to the findings.

Police supervisors told a Kapisa police officer probing the attack to drop his inquiry, the findings said.

A few months after the strike on the PRT convoy, another attack was in the works.

The U.S., French and U.K. ambassadors to Kabul were supposed to visit Kapisa, accompanied by government ministers, in November 2009.

According to U.S. investigation findings, Mr. Abu Bakr's associates armed local insurgents with rocket-propelled grenades and informed them about the time and location of the meeting. This time, the coalition got wind of the plot in time.

At about 11 p.m. the night before the planned visit, Mr. d'Amecourt, the former French ambassador, says he received calls from U.S. and British intelligence representatives warning him that an ambush was being prepared.

U.S. officials say they have wiretaps and statements by over a dozen well-placed sources in the Afghan government and law enforcement agencies that prove their allegations against Mr. Abu Bakr.

In February 2010, the Major Crimes Task Force, which includes carefully vetted Afghan investigators and coalition advisers, began a formal investigation into allegations against Mr. Abu Bakr. The then commander of coalition forces, U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus, handed the file outlining these allegations to Mr. Karzai during a meeting in Kabul that summer, U.S. officials said.

In August 2010, following that meeting, Mr. Karzai suspended Mr. Abu Bakr from his governor's job.

But the Afghan government has repeatedly rejected American calls to prosecute the former governor. Last year, Afghan prosecutors were removed from the case and sent to outlying provinces, U.S. officials said.

Witnesses, meanwhile, were pressured by Mr. Abu Bakr's associates to change their statements, U.S. investigators say, according to the summary of findings.

Mr. Karzai, asked about Mr. Abu Bakr in a recent interview with The Wall Street Journal, said the matter was closed.

"The issue has been going on for almost two years now," he explained. "When the U.S. military came to me repeatedly I called a meeting of the judicial law enforcement body, the entire body, the anticorruption department, the judiciary, the justice department, the Attorney General...they all told me unanimously that the U.S. has not provided any evidence other than tape recordings."

Asked whether he shouldn't have fired Mr. Abu Bakr after all, Mr. Karzai said: "Well, that's a different issue."

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.

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

**Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you-
Ye are many — they are few
-- Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1819, on the occasion of a mass murder of British
workers by the Imperial government at Peterloo.**

**Women:
The Libyan Rebellion's Secret
Weapon:
“We Have A Brain, We Can Think For
Ourselves, We Can Speak Out,’
Gargoum Told Me”
“Most Of The Women I Interviewed
Believe That The Battle For Equality Has
Barely Begun”**



They helped overthrow the regime, but can they overcome tradition and win their share of political clout? (Here: Women rally in Tripoli.) Photo: Michael Christopher Brown

By Joshua Hammer; Smithsonian magazine, April 2012

Inas Fathy's transformation into a secret agent for the rebels began weeks before the first shots were fired in the Libyan uprising that erupted in February 2011.

Inspired by the revolution in neighboring Tunisia, she clandestinely distributed anti-Qaddafi leaflets in Souq al-Juma, a working-class neighborhood of Tripoli. Then her resistance to the regime escalated.

“I wanted to see that dog, Qaddafi, go down in defeat.”

Her house soon became a collection point for the Libyan version of meals-ready-to-eat, cooked by neighborhood women for fighters in both the western mountains and the city of Misrata. Kitchens across the neighborhood were requisitioned to prepare a nutritious

provision, made from barley flour and vegetables, that could withstand high temperatures without spoiling. “You just add water and oil and eat it,” Fathy told me. “We made about 6,000 pounds of it.”

Fathy’s house, located atop a hill, was surrounded by public buildings that Qaddafi’s forces often used. She took photographs from her roof and persuaded a friend who worked for an information-technology company to provide detailed maps of the area; on those maps, Fathy indicated buildings where she had observed concentrations of military vehicles, weapons depots and troops. She dispatched the maps by courier to rebels based in Tunisia.

On a sultry July evening, the first night of Ramadan, Qaddafi’s security forces came for her.

They had been watching her, it turned out, for months. “This is the one who was on the roof,” one of them said, before dragging her into a car. The abductors shoved her into a dingy basement at the home of a military intelligence officer, where they scrolled through the numbers and messages on her cellphone. Her tormentors slapped and punched her, and threatened to rape her. “How many rats are working with you?” demanded the boss, who, like Fathy, was a member of the Warfalla tribe, Libya’s largest. He seemed to regard the fact that she was working against Qaddafi as a personal affront.

The men then pulled out a tape recorder and played back her voice. “They had recorded one of my calls, when I was telling a friend that Seif al-Islam (one of Qaddafi’s sons) was in the neighborhood,” recalls Fathy. “They had eavesdropped, and now they made me listen to it.” One of them handed her a bowl of gruel. “This,” he informed her, “will be your last meal.”

The bloody eight-month campaign to overthrow Qaddafi was predominantly a men’s war.

But there was a vital second front, one dominated by Libya’s women.

“The War Could Not Have Been Won Without Women’s Support”

Denied a role as combatants, women did everything but fight — and in a few instances, they even did that.

They raised money for munitions and smuggled bullets past checkpoints. They tended injured fighters in makeshift hospitals. They spied on government troops and relayed their movements by code to the rebels.

“The war could not have been won without women’s support,” Fatima Ghandour, a radio talk-show host, told me as we sat in the bare-bones studio of Radio Libya, one of dozens of independent media outlets that have arisen since Qaddafi’s downfall.

Ironically, it was Qaddafi who first implanted a martial spirit in Libyan women.

The dictator surrounded himself with a retinue of female bodyguards and, in 1978, ordered girls 15 years and older to undergo military training. Qaddafi dispatched male instructors to female-only high schools to teach young women how to drill, shoot and

assemble weapons. The edict resulted in a major change in a highly traditional society in which schools were sex-segregated and in which the only option for women who aspired to a profession had been to enroll at a single-sex teaching college.

The mandated military training “broke the taboo (against mixing sexes),” says Amel Jerary, a Libyan who attended college in the United States and serves as the spokeswoman for the National Transitional Council, the government body that will rule Libya until elections for a Parliament are scheduled to take place in mid-2012. “Girls were suddenly allowed to go to university. There were male instructors anyway in high school, so (parents figured), ‘Why not?’”

Since then, Libyan gender roles have become less stratified, and women enjoy greater rights, at least on paper, than many of their counterparts in the Muslim world. Divorced women often retain custody of their children and ownership of their home, car and other assets; women have freedom to travel alone, and they dominate enrollment in medical and law schools.

Even so, until the war broke out, women generally were forced to keep a low profile. Married women who pursued careers were frowned upon.

And Qaddafi’s own predatory nature kept the ambitions of some in check. Amel Jerary had aspired to a political career during the Qaddafi years.

But the risks, she says, were too great. “I just could not get involved in the government, because of the sexual corruption.

The higher up you got, the more exposed you were to (Qaddafi), and the greater the fear.” According to Asma Gargoum, who worked as director of foreign sales for a ceramic tile company near Misrata before the war, “If Qaddafi and his people saw a woman he liked, they might kidnap her, so we tried to stay in the shadows.”

Now, having been denied a political voice in Libya’s conservative, male-dominated society, the female veterans are determined to leverage their wartime activism and sacrifices into greater clout.

They’re forming private aid agencies, agitating for a role in the country’s nascent political system and voicing demands in the newly liberated press. “Women want what is due to them,” says Radio Libya’s Ghandour.

I met Fathy in the lobby of the seafront Radisson Blu Hotel in Tripoli one month after the end of the war. The usual crowd of do-gooders and mercenaries bustled around us: a team of French medical workers wearing stylishly coordinated tracksuits; burly former British soldiers now employed as security “consultants” to Western businessmen and journalists; former Libyan rebels in mismatched uniforms, still euphoric about the news that Qaddafi’s second-oldest son and one-time heir apparent, Seif al-Islam Qaddafi, had just been captured in the southern desert.

Like many women in this traditional Arab society, Fathy, round-faced and soft-spoken, was not comfortable meeting a male reporter on her own. She showed up with a chaperon, who identified himself as a co-worker at the new NGO, or nongovernmental

organization, she had founded to assist former prisoners of the Qaddafi regime. Fathy eyed him for reassurance as she recounted her story.

She isn't certain who betrayed her; she suspects one of her couriers.

In mid-August, after 20 days locked in the basement, with rebel forces advancing on Tripoli from both the east and the west, she was moved to Abu Salim prison, notorious as the site where, according to Human Rights Watch, Qaddafi's troops had massacred nearly 1,300 prisoners in 1996.

The place was now filled to capacity with regime opponents, including another young woman in the next cell. As rumors flew among the prisoners that Qaddafi had fled Tripoli, Fathy prepared to die. "I was really thinking it was the end," she says. "I had given away so much information to the fighters, so I thought that before they left they would rape and kill me. Some of the guards told me that they would do that."

Meanwhile, though, she was unaware that Tripoli was falling. The guards vanished, and a few hours passed.

Then a group of rebel fighters appeared, opened the jail and set the inmates free. She walked home to a joyous welcome from her family. "They were convinced that I would never come back," she says.

"I Told Him, They Will Never Expect To Find Guns At The Home Of A Woman"

I met Dalla Abbazi on a warm afternoon in the Tripoli neighborhood of Sidi Khalifa, a warren of mosques and concrete bungalows a stone's throw from Qaddafi's now-demolished residential compound. The final battle for Tripoli had raged up and down her block; many of the houses were pocked with bullet holes and scarred by blasts from rocket-propelled grenades. Standing in the tiny front courtyard of her three-story pink stucco house, with a flag of the new Libya hanging from the second floor, Abbazi—a strong-looking woman of 43 wearing a multicolored hijab, or headscarf—said she had nursed a quiet antipathy toward the regime for years.

"From the beginning, I hated (Qaddafi)," she says.

In 2001, her three older brothers fell afoul of Qaddafi after a questionable call in a national soccer game—the sport was controlled by the Qaddafi family — led to an eruption of street protests against the regime.

Charged with insulting the dictator, the men were sentenced to two years in Abu Salim prison. Their parents died during the sons' incarceration; after their release, they were shunned by potential employers, Abbazi told me, and lived on handouts from relatives.

Then, on February 20 in Benghazi, protesters overwhelmed government forces and seized control of the eastern Libyan city. In Tripoli, "I said to my brothers, 'We must be in this uprising, in the center of it,'" recalls Abbazi, who is unmarried and presides over a household that includes her younger siblings—five brothers and several sisters.

Tripoli, the seat of Qaddafi's power, remained under tight control, but its residents engaged in increasingly brazen acts of defiance. In March, Abbazi's eldest brother, Yusuf, climbed into the minaret of a neighborhood mosque and proclaimed over the loudspeaker: "Qaddafi is the enemy of God."

Abbazi sewed liberation flags and distributed them around the neighborhood, then stored weapons for another brother, Salim. "I told him, they will never expect to find guns at the home of a woman," she said.

Tipped off by a neighborhood informant, military intelligence came looking for her. They appeared at her house after midnight.

"I began screaming at them and biting the arm of one of the brigade members. They tried to get into the house, but I blocked them and fought them off. I knew that all of the guns were there and the flags." As Abbazi told me the story, she showed me the marks on the wooden door left by a soldier's rifle butt.

The troops fired in the air, drawing neighbors into the street, and then, inexplicably, abandoned their effort to arrest her.

Not far from Abbazi's home, in the Tajura quarter of Tripoli, Fatima Bredan, 37, also watched with exhilaration as revolution engulfed the country. I had learned of Bredan from Libyan acquaintances and was told she was working as a part-time volunteer at the Maitiga Hospital, a single-story compound set on a former army base. The hospital and adjacent airport and army barracks had been the scene of fighting during the battle for Tripoli. Now there was a heavy presence of former rebels here; some were guarding Qaddafi's former ambassador to the United Nations, who had been badly beaten in one of many alleged revenge attacks against members of the deposed regime.

Sitting on a cot in a bare, sunlit hospital room, Bredan, a statuesque, dark-eyed woman wearing a brown hijab and a traditional gown known as an abaya, told me that she had seen her ambitions destroyed by the dictatorship years earlier. As a teenager, she never hid her contempt for Qaddafi or his Green Book, a turgid ideological tract published during the 1970s.

The Green Book was compulsory reading for schoolchildren; extracts were broadcast every day on television and radio. Bredan perceived the document—which advocated abolition of private property and the imposition of "democratic rule" by "popular committees"—as fatuous and incomprehensible.

When she was 16, she informed her politics teacher, "It's all lies." The instructor, a die-hard Qaddafi supporter, accused her of treason. "We have to get rid of this kind of person," he told her classmates in front of her.

Bredan, an excellent student, dreamed of becoming a surgeon. But the teacher denounced her to Libya's revolutionary committee, which informed her that the only place she could go to medical school was Misrata, 112 miles down the coast from Tripoli. For Bredan, that was unthinkable: Libya's strict social codes make it difficult, if not impossible, for an unmarried woman to live alone. "I was very disappointed," she recalls. "I fell into a depression." Bredan married young, had a daughter, opened a

beauty salon, taught Arabic and continued to imagine what her life could have been if she had been allowed to become a doctor.

Most of all, she yearned to work in a hospital, to help the sick and dying. Then the war broke out.

“Shukri Had Taken Part In The Battle Of Misrata, Which Withstood A Siege That Some Have Compared To The Battle Of Stalingrad”

Misrata was the hardest-hit city during the Libyan civil war. I went there at the invitation of the al-Hayat, or Life, Organization, a newly formed women’s charity whose members I had encountered while touring Qaddafi’s destroyed compound in Tripoli two days earlier. Arriving in Misrata in the late afternoon, I drove past the ruins of Tripoli Street, the former front line, and found my way to the city’s two decent hotels, both of which, it turned out, were fully occupied by Western aid workers. The only alternative was the Koz al Teek Hotel, a battle-scarred hulk where rebels had fought a fierce battle with Qaddafi’s troops.

Inside a bullet-torn lobby with a burned and blackened ceiling, I met Attia Mohammed Shukri, a biomedical engineer-turned-fighter; he worked part time for al-Hayat and had agreed to introduce me to one of Misrata’s female heroes.

Shukri had taken part in the battle of Misrata, which withstood a siege that some have compared to the Battle of Stalingrad. “You just cannot imagine how terrible it was,” he told me.

In February, government forces surrounded Misrata with tanks, sealing off the entrances and pummeling the city of 400,000 for three months with mortars, Grad rockets and heavy machine guns; food and water ran short. The rebels had shipped weapons in by sea from Benghazi and, with the help of precision NATO bombing on Qaddafi positions, retook the city in June. In a dimly lit classroom, I first met 30-year-old Asma Gargoum. Slight and energetic, she spoke fluent English.

On February 20, the day violent clashes erupted in Misrata between government forces and demonstrators, Gargoum told me, she had driven back from her job at the tile factory, two miles from Misrata, and gone out to get groceries when she was stopped by the police. “Go back to your house,” they warned her. She hurried home, logged onto Facebook and Twitter, and prepared for the worst. “I was afraid,” she told me. “I knew how much Qaddafi armed himself, what he could do to people.”

As government forces rained down mortars on the city center, Gargoum’s three brothers joined the civilian army; Gargoum, too, found a useful role. During the lull that usually lasted from 6 to 9 each morning, when the exhausted fighters went home to eat and sleep, Gargoum crept up to the rooftop of her house overlooking ruined Tripoli Street—the center of the standoff between rebels and government forces—and scanned the city, pinpointing troop movements. She spent hours on her computer every morning, chatting with friends and former classmates across Misrata. “What did you see on this street? What’s moving? What’s suspicious?” she would ask. She then sent messages via courier to her brothers — Qaddafi’s intelligence operatives were monitoring all cellphones — informing them, for instance, about a white car that had cruised six times

slowly around her block, then disappeared; a minibus with blackened windows that had entered the gates of the medical university, possibly now an army barracks.

Sometimes she posed online as a Qaddafi supporter, to elicit responses from friends who likely opposed the rebels. “Twenty tanks are coming down Tripoli Street, and they will enter Misrata from the east side, they will kill all the rats,” one former classmate told her. In this way, Gargoum says, “We were able to direct (rebel) troops to the exact street where the government troops were concentrating.”

The war exacted a heavy toll on those close to her: Gargoum’s best friend was shot dead by a sniper; the heavily damaged minaret of a next-door mosque toppled onto the family house on March 19, destroying the top floor.

On April 20, a mortar scored a direct hit on a pickup truck carrying her 23-year-old brother and six other rebels on Tripoli Street. All were killed instantly. (The war photographers Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros were both mortally wounded by another mortar blast around the same time in Misrata.)

“My brother’s (torso) was left completely untouched,” she recalls.

“But when I picked up his head to kiss him, my hand went through the back of his skull,” where the shrapnel had struck.

“She And Other Family Members Assembled Pipe Bombs And Molotov Cocktails In A Primitive Lab On The Second Floor Of Her Home”

In Tripoli, Dalla Abbazi joined two of her brothers in a dangerous scheme to smuggle weapons into the city from Tunisia — an operation that, if exposed, could have gotten them all executed.

First she secured a loan of 6,000 dinars (about \$5,000) from a Libyan bank; then she sold her car to raise another 14,000 dinars and withdrew 50,000 more from a family fund. Her older brother Talat used the money to purchase two dozen AK-47s and a cache of Belgian FN FAL rifles in Tunisia, along with thousands of rounds of ammunition.

He sewed the arms into sofa cushions, packed them into a car and drove across a border checkpoint held by rebels. In the Jebel Nafusa, Libya’s western mountains, he passed the car to brother Salim. Salim in turn smuggled the weapons and ammunition past a checkpoint that led into Tripoli.

“My brothers were scared of being caught, but I wasn’t afraid,” insists Abbazi. “I told them not to worry, that if the security agents came to my house, I would take responsibility for everything.”

From her home, Abbazi distributed the weapons at night to neighborhood fighters, who used them in hit-and-run attacks on Qaddafi’s troops.

She and other family members assembled pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails in a primitive lab on the second floor of her home.

The advantage of Abbazi's operation was that it remained strictly a family affair: "She had a network of eight brothers who could trust one another, so she could avoid the danger of being betrayed by government informants," a former fighter in Tripoli told me. Abbazi's belief in eventual victory kept her spirits high: "What encouraged me most was when NATO got involved," she says. "Then I was sure that we would succeed."

Today, in Sidi khalifa, Abbazi has turned her house into a shrine to the fighters who fell in the battle for Tripoli. As her brothers' children play in the courtyard, she shows me a poster taped to her window: a montage of a dozen rebels from the neighborhood, all killed on August 20. She disappears into a storeroom inside the house and emerges carrying bandoleers of bullets, a live RPG round and a defused pipe bomb, leftovers from the war.

Abbazi is euphoric about Libya's new freedoms, and about the expanded opportunities available for women.

In September, she began raising money and food for displaced people. With other women in the neighborhood, she hopes to set up a charity for families of war dead and missing.

In Qaddafi's time, she points out, it was illegal for individuals to form private charities or similar groups. "He wanted to control everything," she says.

After liberation, Inas Fathy, the computer engineer, formed the 17th of February Former Prisoners Association, an NGO that provides ex-prisoners psychological support and helps them retrieve property confiscated by Qaddafi's forces.

Sitting in the hotel lobby, she seems a strong, stoic figure, bearing no apparent scars from her ordeal in Qaddafi's prisons.

But when asked by a photographer to return to Abu Salim prison for a portrait, she says quietly, "I cannot go back there."

Fatima Bredan will soon cease her volunteer work at Maitiga Hospital, a far calmer place now than during the battle for Tripoli, and return to her job as an Arabic teacher. Bredan stops at the bedside of a former rebel crippled by two bullets that shattered his femur.

She promises the man — who has large surgical pins in his heavily bandaged leg — that she'll help him obtain travel documents from Libya's (barely functioning) government, to allow him to receive advanced treatment in Tunisia. Leaving the room, she consults with a young medical student about the man's condition. Knowing that the next generation of doctors will escape Qaddafi's malign influence, she says, gives her a measure of satisfaction.

"When they feel depressed, I cheer them up, and I tell them, 'This is for Libya,'" she says. "I lost my chance, but these students are the physicians of the future."

"Despite Their Wartime Achievements, Most Of The Women I Interviewed Believe That The Battle For Equality Has Barely Begun"

Despite their wartime achievements, most of the women I interviewed believe that the battle for equality has barely begun.

They face tremendous obstacles, including a deep-seated resistance to change commonplace among Libyan men.

Many women were outraged when the first chairman of Libya's National Transitional Council, Mustapha Abdul Jalil, in his Declaration of Liberation, failed to acknowledge women's contributions in the war and, in an apparent bid to curry favor with the country's Islamists, announced that Libya would reinstitute polygamy. (He later softened his position, stating that he personally didn't support polygamy, adding that women's views should be taken into account before any such law was passed.)

Two of 24 members of Libya's new cabinet, appointed in November by Prime Minister Abdel Rahim el-Keab, are women: Fatima Hamroush, the minister of health, and Mabruka al-Sherif Jibril, the minister of social affairs. Some women told me that represents substantial progress, while others expressed disappointment that female participation in the first post-Qaddafi government isn't greater.

Yet all the women I interviewed insisted there will be no going back.

In Misrata, Asma Gargoum now works as national projects coordinator for a Danish development group that administers a training program for teachers working with children traumatized by war. Her house has been damaged, her brother lies buried in a local cemetery. Tripoli Street, once the vibrant main thoroughfare, is an apocalyptic wasteland. Yet schools and shops have reopened; thousands of displaced residents have returned.

Perhaps the most heartening change, she says, is the ascendance of female power.

Misrata now boasts a half-dozen aid and development groups run by women, who have channeled organizational skills honed during the three-month siege into rebuilding post-Qaddafi Libya.

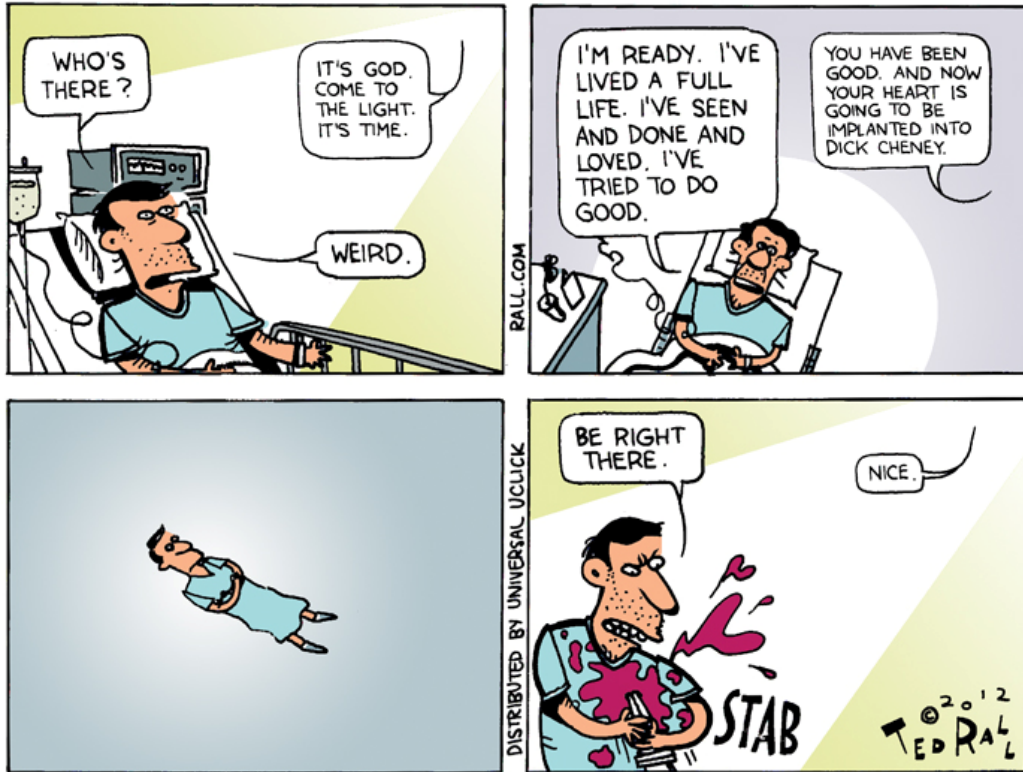
In concert with women across the country, Gargoum wants to see more women in the new government and enactment of legislation that would protect women from violence, as well as guarantee them access to justice, health care and psychological support.

She, like many others, is prepared to fight for those rights.

"We have a brain, we can think for ourselves, we can speak out," Gargoum told me.

"We can go to the streets without fear."

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OCCUPATION PALESTINE

**“The 30th Of March Brings Back
A Memory Of Our Land, My
Father’s Land”**

**“Between Palestinians And Their
Land Is An Unbreakable Bond’**

**“By Uprooting Plants And Cutting
Trees Continually, Israel Is Trying To**

**Break That Bond And Impose Its Own
Rules Of Despair On Palestinians”
“By Replanting Their Trees Over And
Over Again, Palestinians Are Rejecting
Israel’s Rules. Palestinians’ Land,
Palestinians’ Rules”**



Olive Trees Palestine (Photo: Abed Othman)

March 30, 2012 by Sarah Ali, Mondoweiss.net

About Sarah Ali: Sarah Ali, 20, is a student of English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza. She blogs at sarahmali.wordpress.com and you can find her on twitter at twitter.com/Saritah_91.

To Dad...

I looked at his teary eyes, and, beholding something akin to happiness, I smiled.

The man I have always known to be my father was back.

He did not look like that unfamiliar block whom I could not really recognize during the last three years. He was no longer that absent-minded, silent figure gazing at walls all the time and uninterestingly nodding whenever addressed by anyone at home. He was there.

He was present. He was actually listening as I went on bragging about a high grade of mine. A phone call and a piece of paper signed by some Turkish-sponsored institution brought me back my father.

It didn't matter what brought him back. He was back; that was all that mattered. I looked at his eyes again, this time more carefully lest my first glance should be false. I saw that absolute happiness in my father's eyes. A big smile leaped my heart and made it to my face. Again.

As we now commemorate the Land Day, we honor the people who stood up for their land back in 1976 when Israel announced thousands of Palestinian dunams to be confiscated.

During marches held to protest against that declaration of Israel, six people were killed.

The 30th of March brings back a memory of our Land, my father's Land.

A couple of weeks ago we got a phone call informing us that my father's name has been selected for a reconstruction program funded by Turkey. The program aims at helping Gazan farmers whose lands were damaged during the Israeli offensive in 2008-2009 to replant their trees. It provides farmers with all types of facilitating materials like fences, tree seeds, and irrigation systems.

My father declined to apply for those organizations that gave financial compensations to farmers. Unlike any other aid program, this program gives no money to farmers. It instead helps them stand on their own.

My father was not born a farmer, nor was he naturally brought up to plant trees. He studied economics and political science in Egypt and spent most of his youth working as a journalist, mainly a columnist writing about economic and political issues in Kuwaiti newspapers.

When he was back to Gaza, though, he had to take care of the piece of land my grandfather left for him years before. It was not very difficult for dad. He was born to a family of farmers after all.

Gradually the Land became more of a passion than a profession to my father. It was one of the few things he cared about. It was the daily thing that kept him busy. It was heaven on earth.

During those 23 days of the Israeli attack on Gaza, we were constantly receiving news of Lands being run over by Israeli bulldozers.

We were told thousands of trees were gone. We were told my uncles' trees were gone. We were told our trees were gone. We were told the whole district of eastern farmland called Sharga was gone.

But these were false rumors, or so my father wanted to believe. We all had hope that our land was still intact, totally untouched.

We were clinging to the assumption that only other people's trees could get uprooted, but certainly not our beautiful, unmatched olives. Certainly not the trees that were, to my father, the only thing he boasted of to prove he was no less of a Gazan than those who repeatedly reproached him for, as they put it, "recklessly leaving the land of black oil" where they assumed he swam in oil pools everyday, and for "coming to live here" with a small "h".

My father looked at it quite differently, for Here, he always believed, is the land of the Holy Zait—the golden oil. The golden Palestinian oil.

Gaza's sky was blue again. Things were over—the news said things were over. My father pulled it together and went there.

He went to check upon the Land. He put his faith in his intuition about his olives being an exception and he went there. He put his faith in that little white spot in the heart of the bulldozer's guy who, my father supposed, could not have resisted the beauty of our Land and who listened to his innate, good being that told him not to run over this land. He had faith in the goodness of Man and he went there. He put his faith in God and he went there.

My brother, who accompanied him, told us later that all they saw as they walked was ruined lands void but of the bulldozed, dead trees which seemed to suffice for the families need of firewood for years to come.

My brother said dad started crying as he saw people crying.

They went on. They saw more trees laying down, feeble and defeated. They went on. There was the heaven. The scene of our land was not shocking. Simply put, our trees were no exception. Our trees were gone.

A miscellany of affliction and denial took over the place. My father's faith, I could tell, was smashed into little pieces. The world seemed like an ugly place.

One of our trees, that later became the interesting subject matter the whole neighborhood spoke of, was still standing there.

Just one week before 27/12/2008, my father told my brother how slanted this tree was and how quickly they needed to get rid of it. They were planning to cut it, and yet, ironically, it was the only tree the Israeli army left (out of boredom or out of mercy I cannot tell). But it was still there.

And later whenever my cousins wanted to make dad feel less terrible about it, they made fun of the whole thing. "How the hell did the soldiers know you were planning to cut it anyway and hence decided not to cut it themselves?" my cousins would remark. Everyone would start laughing. My father, though hysterically, would also join in laughing at the rhetorical, not-so-funny question.

When my father and brother were home that day, my brother started telling us about what he saw. He told us that the trees were uprooted—"El-Shajar tjarraf ," he kept repeating.

My father was in his room, crying. During the weeks that followed my father's visit to the Land, he had a daily schedule. In the morning, he prayed and read Quran. At night, he cried.

Speaking about the Land and the houses and generally the financial losses during or right after the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip in 2008 would have simply sounded very selfish and indifferent to others.

When you have people dying, you do not speak of your beautiful house that was leveled to the ground. When you have people losing their legs and arms thus getting labeled as handicapped for the rest of their lives, you do not speak of your fancy car that once looked like a vase adorning the aisles of your modest neighborhood and that is now a bunch of gray wrecks letting go of a vulnerable piece each time someone barely passes by.

When you have a mother who buried her kid before she could say good-bye, you do not speak of your land and your trees that were mercilessly uprooted.

Those people speak. They cry. They mourn. You listen. And for the memory of your insignificant, little misery, you grieve in silence.

This morning as I was writing this, I went to father so I would get accurate information about the trees that were uprooted, their numbers and their age.

"Why are you asking? Are you applying for one of those charity institutions that offer some bucks and a flour bag instead of helping people plant their trees again? Are you? We do not need those! The guy I met from the reconstruction program called last week, and they already sent laborers and farmers to start their job. Do you still want to apply for charity?"

"No Baba! I am just writing something for my blog."

"Blog? Ok, whatever that is!"

"So, how many trees were there? 180 I guess?"

"189 olive trees. 160 lemon trees. 14 guava trees..." he bellowed.

Embarrassed, I lowered my head and wondered why I was doing this to myself. My thoughts were interrupted when he went on,

"Next time you decide to do whatever it is that you want to do right now, get your numbers straight!"

I made no reply.

"You hear me? They were 189 olives. Not 180. Not 181. Not 182. 189 olives."
He left the room a few minutes afterwards. Guilt was all I could feel then.

That an Israeli soldier could bulldoze 189 olive trees on the land he claims is part of the "God-given Land" is something I will never comprehend.

Did not he consider the possibility that God might get angry? Did he not realize that it was a tree he was running over?

If a Palestinian bulldozer were ever invented (Haha, I know) and I were given the chance to be in an orchard in Haifa for instance, I would never uproot a tree an Israeli planted.

No Palestinian would.

To Palestinians, the tree is sacred, and so is the land clasping it.

And as I talk about Gaza, I remember that Gaza is but a little part of Palestine. I remember that Palestine is bigger than Gaza. Palestine is the West Bank; Palestine is Ramallah; Palestine is Nablus; Palestine is Jenin; Palestine is Tulkarm; Palestine is Bethlehem; Palestine, most importantly, is Jaffa and Haifa and Akka and all those cities that Israel wants us to forget about.

Today I came to realize that it was not the phone call that brought my father back, nor was it the paper signed by the aid institution. It was the memory of the Land being revived again that brought him back.

It was the memory of olive trees giving that sense of security each time he sat under them enjoying their shades and dodging the burning sun rays.

It was the memory of the golden oil, the best and purest oil being poured into jerry-cans and handed to family and friends as "precious gifts".

It was the memory of long years of cherishing the Land; years of giving and belonging.

Between my father and his Land is an unbreakable bond.

Between Palestinians and their Land is an unbreakable bond.

By uprooting plants and cutting trees continually, Israel is trying to break that bond and impose its own rules of despair on Palestinians.

By replanting their trees over and over again, Palestinians are rejecting Israel's rules. Palestinians' Land, Palestinians' rules.

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation commanded by foreign terrorists, go to: www.rafahtoday.org The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."]

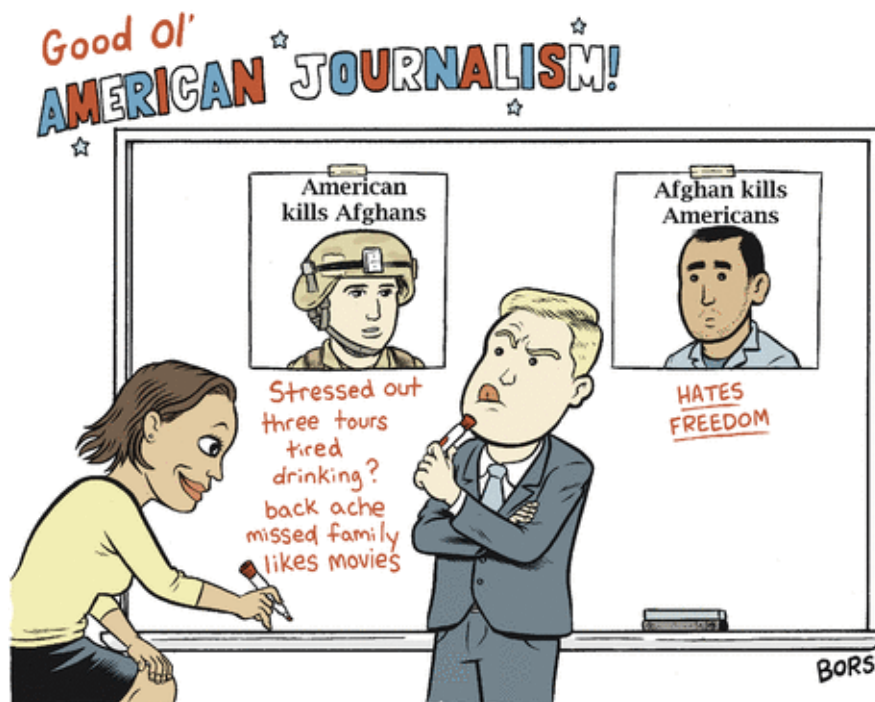
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DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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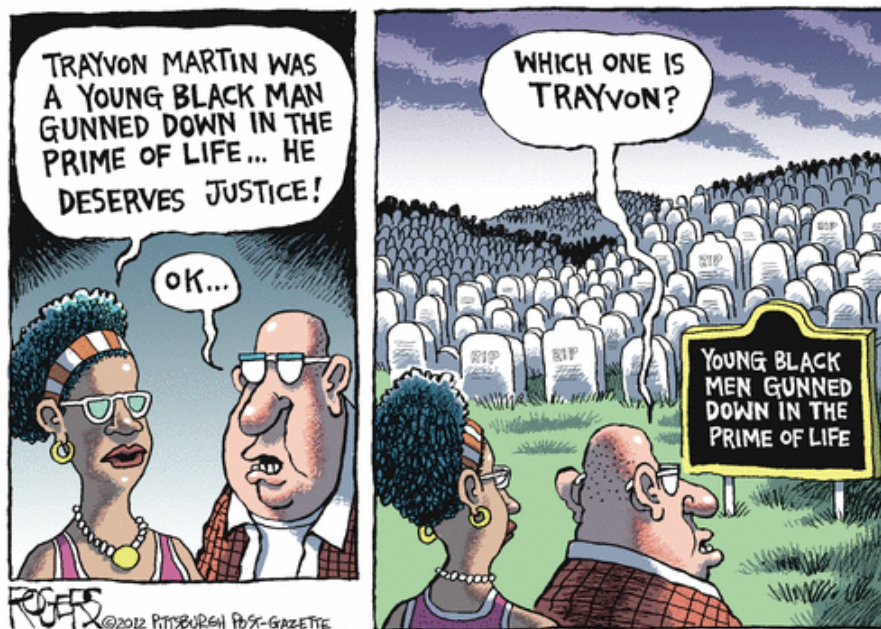
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CLASS WAR REPORTS



The Heat Turns Up The Heat:

“James And Several Of His Teammates, Took The Floor With Messages Such As ‘Rip Trayvon Martin’ And ‘We Want Justice’ Scrawled On Their Sneakers”



“The entire Heat squad posed for a photo, all wearing the now iconic hooded sweatshirts”

March 25, 2012 By Dave Zirin, The Nation

The thing is that, when you are a popular athlete, and you accept the money and the fame, and you become a front person for those who have the power, and they say be like this guy and kids that are coming up say, well, be like him, I won't protest against anything, I'll accept everything, I'll just try to be a great athlete and make a lot of money. So a culture dies when you do that. You're doing a great injustice to young kids that are coming up, and I never wanted to be a representation of less than a man and have young kids coming up emulating me.”

— Jim Brown

The senseless killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by a self-appointed “neighborhood watch captain” has provoked anguish, rage and now, at long last, resistance. We've seen rallies, demonstrations and walkouts at dozens upon dozens of high schools in Florida alone.

Even more remarkably, this resistance has found expression in the world of sports. An impressive group of NBA players from Carmelo Anthony to Steve Nash to the leaders of the NBA Players Association have spoken out and called for justice.

The most notable and widely publicized example of athletic solidarity was seen on the NBA's marquee team, the Miami Heat.

The entire Heat squad posed for a photo, all wearing the now iconic hooded sweatshirts. Trayvon was wearing a “hoodie” when he was killed, and this fact has, maddeningly, been a central rationale given by his killer’s defenders for why he was perceived as a threat.

Of all teams in the league, the Heat had the greatest responsibility to step up and be heard. They were Trayvon’s favorite and he was killed that late afternoon after leaving his house for a snack during half-time of the NBA All-Star game, which featured the Heat’s Big Three of LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh.

Given the depth of this movement, particularly in southern Florida, it’s not too surprising that the Heat made this powerful gesture.

But maybe it is surprising for many fans to learn that the effort was driven by “The King” himself, LeBron James. The photo was reportedly James’s idea and it was first posted to his personal Twitter account with the hashtag #WeWantJustice.

James later said, “It was very emotional, an emotional day for all of us. Taking that picture, we’re happy that we’re able to shed light on the situation that we feel is unjust.”

His teammate Wade commented to the Associated Press, “This situation hit home for me because last Christmas, all my oldest son wanted as a gift was hoodies. So when I heard about this a week ago, I thought of my sons. I’m speaking up because I feel it’s necessary that we get past the stereotype of young, black men and especially with our youth.”

Later, at their game on Friday night, James and several of his teammates, took the floor with messages such as “RIP Trayvon Martin” and “We want justice” scrawled on their sneakers.

LeBron’s actions might surprise fans given that he’s never publicly displayed a social conscience, but perhaps they shouldn’t.

Years ago, before “The Decision,” before he “took his talents to South Beach,” before anyone burned his jersey, and before he became the sports world’s favorite villain, a young LeBron James—pegged already the most physically gifted basketball player to ever walk the earth—said he had two goals in life.

One was to be the richest athlete in history and the other was to be “a global icon like Muhammad Ali.”

These might be two great goals, but they don’t exactly go great together.

The contradiction is rooted in the fact that Ali remains a global icon because of the fame and fortune he sacrificed for what he believed to be the greater good. “The Greatest” took deeply unpopular stands against war, racism and even the mainstream civil rights movement.

He was sentenced to five years in Leavenworth for opposing the draft, and said, “If I have to go to jail, I’ll go to jail happy.”

He also shouted three words pro athletes are hardwired to never say: “Damn the money.”

Lebron James would have miles to travel, millions of dollars to forsake and dozens of Confederate talk radio hosts to offend to ever be mentioned in the same breath as Ali. But this is a start.

The fact that LeBron James has used his exalted platform to speak out for Trayvon and his family even at the risk of his own bottom line, should be in these dark days, a great source of hope.

Trayvon’s killing has motivated millions to wake up and give a damn about what rots beneath the mini-malls, gated communities and “security culture” that shades great swaths of our country.

We all have a role to play in not only making sure there is justice for Trayvon but also in ensuring no other family or community has to suffer such a loss.

If and when there is another killing rooted in fear and ignorance, we now have every right to ask LeBron, “What are you going to say now?” That’s the scary thing about choosing to give a damn. People will expect you to mean it.

Obamacare: “The Law Preserves The Dominant Role Of The Health Care Industry” “Whether The Law Is Upheld Or Struck Down Or Something In Between, The Insurance Giants, Big Pharma And The Rest Of The Medical Industry Will Remain In Command”

March 29, 2012 By Alan Maass, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

Barack Obama’s health care law was debated in front of the U.S. Supreme Court this week, with the main focus on an issue that highlights the most fundamental of its many flaws--that the law puts the interests of the private insurance companies ahead of people’s right to health care.

The challenge to the law is being driven by Obama’s Republican opponents. All but one of the 26 state officeholders who joined together in the main lawsuit are members of the

GOP. The Republicans did everything they could to stop any reforms when the legislation was being debated, and now they're trying to undo in the courts anything they failed to block in Congress.

But don't let the health care law's rabid opponents fool you.

Even if it survives the Supreme Court intact, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) won't create a more just and equitable health care system.

The law's most helpful provisions, such as long-awaited regulations to prevent insurance companies from excluding the very people who need health care the most, were compromised again and again during the process of writing the law. What positive effects remain are outweighed overall by measures that benefit the insurance industry at the expense of ordinary people--especially the individual "mandate" to buy insurance that is at the heart of the challenge to the law before the Supreme Court.

People who oppose the Republicans and want to see the broken health care system reformed might assume they should rally behind the Obama administration and its law.

But the arguments made in defense of the PPACA by liberal and progressive supporters show just how far they have accepted an assumption that both Republicans and Democrats agree on--that a health care "reform" law must preserve the profits of the private insurance industry, even if that means punishing millions of people who desperately need access to quality care.

Deborah Burger, co-president of National Nurses United, summed up the reality: "Whether the Court overturns part or all of the law, or the Affordable Care Act remains fully intact, we will not have universal coverage, medical bills will still push too many Americans into bankruptcy or prompt them to self-ration care, and insurance companies will continue to have a chokehold on our health."

That means the struggle to make health care a right for all must continue--in the small fights in workplaces and communities against attempts to limit access to care and its quality, and in the broader struggle for a socialized health care system that would eliminate the rule of the insurance companies and the rest of the medical-industrial complex.

The big question is the mandate. Both supporters and opponents believe the requirement that the uninsured buy private insurance is at the heart of the health care law.

The insurance industry agrees. From the start of the debate over the health care law, the insurance giants used a two-pronged approach to make sure their interests were served. Representatives of the corporations worked with the Obama administration in the early stages--and even more closely with Democratic members of Congress like Sen. Max Baucus--to shape health care legislation to their liking.

At the same time, the industry kept up a stream of criticisms of Democratic proposals and encouraged the Republicans' total opposition to all reform--including support for mobilizing the GOP base at events like legislators' town hall meetings.

The aim was to have it both ways--if the health care bill passed, it would be business-friendly, and if it lost, opposition to reform would have the appearance of a popular mobilization.

The insurance companies' attitude toward the Supreme Court case is not so different.

If the health care law is struck down, they can go back to their old and profitable ways of taking money from the healthy and avoiding giving it to the sick. If the law is upheld, then the U.S. government has guaranteed them millions of new customers who will have to buy their product or else--not to mention an estimated \$447 billion in taxpayer dollars funneled to insurers over 10 years in subsidies.

Given all that, it comes as no surprise that the idea of a mandate to buy private health insurance was developed by the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank in the 1990s--and promoted by Republicans during the debate about health care reform during the Clinton years.

It's also no surprise that the mandate is unpopular.

Opinion polls consistently show majority opposition. For example, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll from last year, among all the major elements of the law, the mandate was the only one that people wanted repealed, by a strong two-thirds majority.

Clearly, opposition to the mandate doesn't just come from Tea Party fanatics. For example, last November, the same Ohio voters who overturned a Republican-backed union-busting law aimed at public-sector workers also passed a referendum to bar mandated health insurance.

That result is in keeping with polls which show that among those who say they oppose the health care law overall, a significant minority think it didn't go far enough in providing coverage for the uninsured and putting controls on the health care industry.

One other fact that barely gets mentioned in reports about the Supreme Court case is that a health care law which was supposed to provide universal coverage will fall far short from the start--as a direct result of the continued role for private companies. According to the Congressional Budget Office, 27 million people will still be uninsured in 2016, two years after the law is fully implemented.

The basic problem remains: The law preserves the dominant role of the health care industry.

So whether the law is upheld or struck down or something in between, the insurance giants, big Pharma and the rest of the medical industry will remain in command--and so the crisis of the health care system will continue, with dire consequences for working people.

That means struggles for health care rights will continue to emerge, whether they start small in a single workplace or community, whether they are about single-payer systems at the state level, or they take up the broader question of the U.S. as a whole.

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