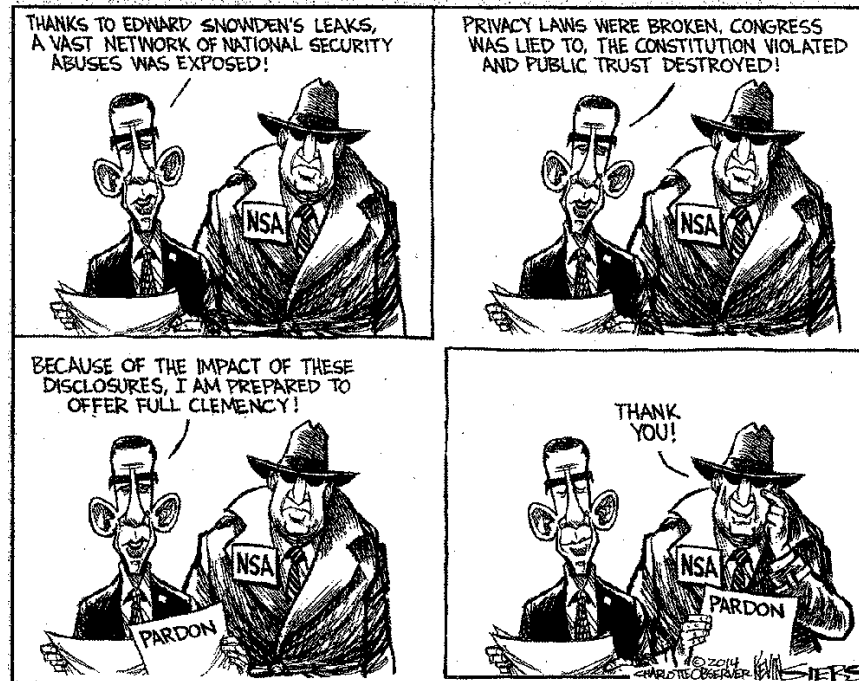


Military Resistance 12B15



Taliban Overrun Afghan Army Base, Killing Soldiers In Their Sleep:

“Insurgents Entered The Fortified Base With The Collusion Of Infiltrators Who Had Been On Guard Duty In The Base’s Three Watchtowers And Outside Its Barracks”

“Reinforcements Sent To The Area Ambushed By Insurgents” Afghan Soldiers ‘Had Prior Warning’ Of Taliban Attack



Feb. 24, 2014: A military vehicle in Narai military camp in Ghazi Abad district which Taliban insurgents attacked army checkpoints on Sunday, Feb. 23, killing 21 soldiers, in Kunar province, Afghanistan, It was the deadliest single incident for the Afghan army in at least a year. (AP Photo/Massoud Hossaini)

FEB. 23, 2014 By NIAMATULLAH KARYAB and ROD NORDLANDFEB, New York Times & By Hashmat Baktash, Los Angeles Times. [Excerpts]

ASADABAD, Afghanistan — Taliban insurgents overran an Afghan National Army base near here on Sunday morning, killing 21 soldiers in their bunks in what appeared to be the worst single blow to government forces since 2010, according to both government and insurgent officials.

President Hamid Karzai ordered an investigation and canceled a planned state visit to Sri Lanka in response to the attack, in the Ghaziabad district of Kunar Province, near the eastern border with Pakistan.

The governor of Kunar Province, Shuja al-Mulk Jalala, said it appeared that infiltrators had let the Taliban insurgents into the base around 4 a.m., and that most of those who died had been killed in their sleep. Mr. Jalala put the death toll at 20, with eight other soldiers reported to have been taken prisoner by the insurgents.

A spokesman for the Afghan Defense Ministry, Gen. Zaher Azimi, later posted on Twitter to update the estimate to 21 dead and three wounded.

One of the Afghan soldiers taken prisoner, who later escaped and was interviewed in the eastern city of Asadabad, said he believed that the insurgents had entered the fortified base with the collusion of infiltrators who had been on guard duty in the base's three watchtowers and outside its barracks.

"I believe these four soldiers had links with the Taliban," he said. "They shot our soldiers while they were sleeping. When others woke up, they were taken alive, along with me." He said that he and three other soldiers had managed to escape from the insurgents as they fled the area.

Local Taliban officials, reached by telephone, gave a different account, denying that they had infiltrators in the base.

"When U.S. warplanes were over our heads, we conducted our operations successfully, and now that they no longer fly above us, we conduct our operations still more successfully," said an insurgent official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect himself from capture.

A statement from the Defense Ministry said the fighting with "local and foreign terrorists" lasted four hours.

A battalion of reinforcements was sent to the area, but the soldiers were ambushed by insurgents using a suicide bomber.

Afghan officials said it was the worst attack on the Afghan National Army since 2010, when the Taliban thwarted an Afghan offensive in Laghman Province and killed, wounded or dispersed an entire 100-man company, although the exact death toll was never divulged.

The Afghan army received warnings from the Taliban three weeks before an ambush which killed 21 soldiers, the BBC has learned.

Security sources confirmed to the BBC that phone conversations had been intercepted between soldiers from the Afghan army and fighters from the Taliban about 20 days ago.

The BBC's Karen Allen in Kabul says it now appears those warnings were ignored.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Afghanistan Theater:

“US Foreign Fighters Suffered 11 Combat Casualties During The Period Days Ending Feb 20 As The Total Rose To 40,420”

February 21, 2014 www.michaelmunk.com

AFGHANISTAN THEATER: US foreign fighters suffered 11 combat casualties during the period days ending Feb 20 as the total rose to 40,420. The total includes 21,462 dead and wounded (9 pending) from what the Pentagon classifies as "hostile" causes and 18,958 dead or medically evacuated (as of Dec. 3, 2012) from what it calls "non-hostile" causes.

US media divert attention from the actual cost in American life and limb by reporting regularly only the total killed (6,799: 4,489 in Iraq, 2,310 in Afghanistan) but rarely mentioning those wounded in action (51,894: 32,239 in Iraq; 19,655 in Afghanistan).

They ignore the 59,908 (44,607 in Iraq; 18,463 in AfPak (as of Dec 3, 2012) military casualties injured and ill seriously enough to be medevac'd out of theater, even though the 6,799 total dead include 1,455 (961 in Iraq, 494 in Afghanistan) who died from those same "non hostile" causes of whom almost 25% (332) were suicides (as of Jan 9, 2013).

Beaverton Soldier, Sunset H.S. Graduate Killed In Afghanistan



Feb 13, 2014 By Christian Henry, KATU News

A Beaverton family is mourning the loss of their son who was killed in action in Afghanistan on Wednesday.

John Alexander Pelham was 22 years old and a graduate of Sunset High School.

He was in his second tour of duty. Pelham is one of six children. He was not married and did not have any children of his own.

His father, Wendall Pelham, describes him as a man on a mission who was pursuing what he knew he was meant to be doing. "He was very comfortable with who he was and what his life was and what his mission was," said Pelham.

The fallen soldier's uncle and grandfather both served in the military and his father says that history inspired his son. "I believe that true warriors know what they're doing and why they're doing it and they do it because they can and because they have a heart for it," said Pelham.

The 22-year-old discovered that heart when he was younger and spent six months in the "Oregon Youth Challenge" program, which is run by the Oregon National Guard, where he excelled. "He got there and he was a model soldier and a model student... that proved to him that he made the correct choice," Pelham said

John Pelham went on to play baseball in high school and college, but he decided the military was his true calling. He worked as an intelligence analyst in the Army, but the details of his work are classified.

His family last talked to him on Monday and his father says he had a feeling it would be the last time he'd talk with his son, "I felt that when John and I finished our conversation that that was going to be the case. I couldn't say I'll talk to you when you get back nor could he say I'll call you when I get home," said Pelham.

The Department of Defense said Pelham died of injuries from small arms fire in the Kapisa Province. The family hasn't made funeral arrangements yet, but they say the funeral will most likely be held at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Chapel in Beaverton.

**POLITICIANS REFUSE TO HALT THE
BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE
WAR**

MILITARY NEWS

Military's Mental-Health Efforts Are Ineffective: Report Finds No Evidence That Programs For Soldiers And Families Prevent Psychological Disorders

Feb. 20, 2014 by Shirley S. Wang, Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

An independent report on mental-health programs for military members and their families paints a bleak picture of the efforts being made to stave off depression, suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder and domestic violence among service personnel.

The Institute of Medicine report, which was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Defense and issued Thursday, reviewed data on prevention programs for active-duty military currently in use and found that few exhibited strong evidence they work. In addition, there was little coordination within and between service branches regarding these efforts.

"There's a surprising lack of empirical evidence for the creation of and evidence for the maintenance of" prevention programs, said M. David Rudd, provost of the University of Memphis and one of 13 committee members who helped write the report. He called the findings disappointing.

The Department of Defense has made prevention and treatment of psychological disorders a priority in recent years and has made a significant financial investment in such programs.

Meantime, it had to make decisions, sometimes based on preliminary or no data, about how to treat and prevent psychological disorders in soldiers now.

Significant financial investments often were made without a clear strategy for how the programs fit together, he said.

One example of this, highlighted in the report, is the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness program, one of the Army's key prevention programs, which was launched in 2009.

The \$125 million effort, based on a program developed by the University of Pennsylvania, is designed to prevent negative consequences from exposure to trauma and improve resilience, according to the report.

The program has been used with over one million soldiers, but evidence supporting it from studies conducted by the military is weak, the committee found.

ANNIVERSARIES

February 25, 2011: The Uprising Spreads



Day of Rage in Taiz, Yemen

Carl Bunin Peace history Feb 24-March 2

A Day of Rage saw demonstrations across the Middle East. Protesters in Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Bahrain showed their support variously for an end to corruption and income inequality, political reform and better public services, and the replacement of long-running dictatorships with democratic regimes.

February 25, 1968: Anniversary Of Memorable Bullshit: A General Cuts His Throat With His Tongue



Vietnam commander Gen. William Westmoreland meeting with Pres. Lyndon Johnson

Carl Bunin Peace History Feb 25-March 2

Discussing the war capacity of North Vietnam, a country that had been fighting for its independence for 23 years and had just staged the massive, successful Tet Offensive, U.S. General William C. Westmoreland stated, "I do not believe Hanoi can hold up under a long war."

He was replaced as commander in Vietnam less than four months later.

February 26, 1984: Reagan Withdraws U.S. Troops After Saying To Do So "Means The End Of Lebanon"

**"There Was No Way That We Could
Really Contribute To The Original
Mission By Staying There As A Target"**



[Thanks to Carl Bunin Peace History Feb 25-March 2]

The last of the 1400 peacekeeping troops Pres. Ronald Reagan had sent to the Lebanese capital of Beirut were evacuated. The troops were part of an international force sent to deal with the Lebanese civil war.

The president withdrew almost all American troops following the deaths of 241 Marines and 58 French paratroopers in a suicide truck bombing carried out four months earlier by combined forces of Islamic Jihad and Hizbollah.

France withdrew its troops as well.

Three weeks earlier, Reagan had told the Wall Street Journal, "As long as there is a chance for peace, the mission remains the same. If we get out, that means the end of Lebanon."

In a barb directed at House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. (D-Massachusetts), Reagan had said, "He may be ready to surrender, but I'm not."

BBC News: On This Day

American forces have withdrawn almost all of their troops from the Lebanese capital, Beirut. About 1,000 US Marines left the coast beside the international airport as Shi'ite militiamen arrived in jeeps and armoured vehicles to take over.

US President Ronald Reagan ordered military personnel to begin pulling out of the area over a week ago following a recent upsurge in terrorist attacks.

"Once the terrorist attacks started there was no way that we could really contribute to the original mission by staying there as a target just bunkering down and waiting for further attacks," he said.

The US Marines were sent in 18 months ago to help the Lebanese administration but as the last troops pulled out there was no official government delegation present to see them off. Instead, Insurgents riding motorcycles watched without emotion as US military helicopters airlifted the last front line troops to warships off the Lebanese coast.

OCCUPATION PALESTINE

**Zionist Settler Mob Attacks
Palestinian Farmers, As Usual:
Prevented Them From Cultivating
Their Lands"
"Israeli Soldiers Forced The Land
Owners To Leave"**

21 February 2014 PNN

Settlers, protected by Israeli forces, Friday attacked farmers from al-Asakreh village, east of Bethlehem and prevented them from cultivating their lands.

The head of Tkou' municipality, Tayseer Abu Mufreh told the Palestinian official news agency Wafa that a number of settlers attacked farmers while they were cultivating their lands in al-Ghuzlan area adjacent to Tqou' settlement, and assaulted them.

The settlers also prevented them from continuing to plant olive seedlings in their lands.

He added that the settlers uprooted some of the seedlings that were planted and that the Israeli soldiers forced the land owners to leave and declare it a closed military area. Abu Mufreh said that settlers assaulted few days ago a number of farmers in the same area and prevented them from cultivating their land.

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation commanded by foreign terrorists, go to:

<http://www.palestinemonitor.org/list.php?id=ej898ra7yff0ukmf16>

[The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."]

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?



CHANGE WE CAN BEREAVE IN

Forward Military Resistance along, or send us the email address if you wish and we'll send it regularly with your best wishes. 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 injustices, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: Military Resistance, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657.

CLASS WAR REPORTS



[Thanks to David McReynolds for posting.]

**Egyptian Government Promises
Fail To Satisfy Mahalla Strikers:
Workers Not Appeased By
Investment Minister's Statement
As Strike For Better Pay And
Management Restructuring
Continues;
"This Government Turned Out To Be
Not Much Different To Its
Predecessors"**

“Following The Same Policies Favouring Big Business At The Expense Of The Poor”



Mahalla workers during their 9 day of the strike. (Photo: Al-Ahram)

[Thanks to Alan Stolzer, Military Resistance Organization, who sent this in.]

February 19, 2014 By MAGGIE HYDE, AP & Bassem Abo Alabass, Ahram Online & Socialist Worker UK [Excerpts]

Egypt’s interim president ordered a pay raise for police on Wednesday, after some of their forces joined factory workers, doctors and pharmacists increasingly on strike over the past month.

Adly Mansour said police will receive a 30 percent salary increase as hazard pay starting in March.

Egyptian officials are struggling to deal with the labor strikes, which have dealt a blow to the country’s interim military-backed government and already flagging economy.

More than 22,000 workers in a northern city have been on strike for over ten days, demanding the removal of the government-operated Textile Holding Company’s president Fouad Abdel Aleem and higher wages.

Many earn as little as £45 a month. They are demanding the government keep its promise of a minimum wage of £105.

A gritty industrial town, Mahalla al-Kobra was the scene of numerous labor strikes in 2008. Demonstrators destroyed posters of then-President Hosni Mubarak and clashed with security troops. That strike prompted calls by opposition groups to turn the labor unrest into a wider political protest against the government.

Doctors around the country have also been striking periodically for months now, demanding higher salaries.

After a partial strike of all hospitals on Wednesday, the Ministry of the Health said in a statement that the total rate of participation was 17 percent, while union leaders said that 45 percent of hospitals had taken part.

Kamal Abbas, executive director for the Center for Trade and Union Services, a pro-labor non-governmental organization, said that government workers are striking now because they've seen no results from country's long-awaited minimum wage legislation.

In September, Finance Minister Ahmed Galal said that public workers would all receive a minimum wage of 1,200 Egyptian pounds, or roughly \$170.

Wael Habib, a workers' leader in the factory and one of the founders of the independent union there, said this concession was not enough. "Since 2006 we've been organising successive strikes to demand our rights and improve our conditions," he said.

"We changed regimes and governments and triggered revolutions. But every strike ended with official promises which were never met. This time we have to win our demands. We are waiting for real decisions—not promises they can ignore later."

"The people with limited income, like factory workers, are continually suffering," he said. "This is what's caused the anger."

Egyptians have dealt with rising prices and high unemployment for most of the country's political transition, since Mubarak left power in 2011. Employment is upward of 13 percent, and experts put youth unemployment at more than 25 percent.

The interim government is struggling to keep unrest at minimum with an already strapped budget, even with billions of dollars in financial help from the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The annual rate of inflation stood at 11.36 percent as of January, according to the Central Bank.

On Tuesday the minister of investment met with a worker delegation from the textile company, promising to open investigations into the company's president and saying that the new minimum wage would be implemented soon.

Kamal el-Fayoumi is another founder of the independent union of Mahalla workers. "Workers at Misr Spinning and Weaving sense the real danger to their future and the future of the company," he said.

"The delay in responding to workers' demands increases that sense of danger. What is the company trying to hide from us? We went on strike many times to change this situation and we will continue to exercise our right to strike until our demands are met.

"The bonus is not enough for workers to feel secure."

Thousands of Mahalla workers started sit-ins last week demanding the minimum wage and the sacking of Fouad Abdel-Alim, chair of the state-run holding company.

He promised them a bonus of two months' pay in February but didn't pay up.

Government officials announced that they would pay the bonus just a few hours after the strike began.

But on Wednesday, Kamal al-Fayoumi, a strike leader from the Textile Holding Company, said that workers were not giving in yet.

"We are not asking for anything impossible," he said.

Kamal El-Fayoumy, a striking worker and labour activist, told Ahram Online that workers had rejected the minister's proposals.

"We aren't going to end our strike as predicted. The minister's statement is so vague and doesn't meet our demands explicitly, such as sacking the heads of the firm and its holding company," El-Fayoumy said. "The minimum wage scheme remains in limbo as well."

Sixteen out of 32 companies within the organisation have halted production as part of the strike.

Company boss Abdel-Fattah El-Zoghba stated on Sunday that the strike had taken its toll on the company's revenues, with around LE20 million (\$2.8 million) in estimated losses.

The company suffered a net loss of LE157 million (\$22.5 million) in 2011, according to the official website of Egypt's public sector.

An attempt by Investment Minister Osama Saleh to end a strike by textile workers in Mahalla is unlikely to succeed, according to a labour activist.

The strike entered its tenth day on Wednesday, with around 20,000 workers demanding a minimum wage, back pay of yearly bonuses, the removal of the company's head and the head of the firm's holding company.

Saleh has promised to appoint a new board that will include "experienced members," Al-Ahram Arabic news website reported.

But implementation of the LE1200 minimum wage would have to comply with regulations set by the National Wages Council, he added.

Kamal Abu Aita, former president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, made one of these promises. Abu Aita was appointed minister of labour last year. In July last year he toured TV stations offering concessions to workers' demands for social justice, including a rise in the minimum wage.

These promises played an important role in winning support for the military after huge popular protests overthrew Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Mursi.

They helped to calm workers' anger while the military set about crushing the Brotherhood.

Now workers are finding Abu-Aita's promises were empty.

Many hoped the new minimum wage would apply to all public sector workers.

Workers from the nearby Tanta Flax and Shibin al-Kom Spinning are fighting for the return of their company to the public sector. They organised a sit-in outside the Cabinet offices last week and plan to escalate their action next week. In a statement they added, "We expected the Cabinet to intervene and look urgently for ways to meet our demands after we began our sit-in yesterday.

"But this government turned out to be not much different to its predecessors, following the same policies favouring big business at the expense of the poor."

The chants of Mahalla workers have been echoed in a rash of other strikes reported at other smaller textile factories across Egypt. After just two days the action forced the government to invest £516 million in the textile industry to improve wages.

But it isn't only textile workers who are challenging the bosses and the military regime over the minimum wage. Over 800 drivers, conductors and other bus workers held a sit-in at Al-Agami garage in the west of Alexandria for the second day running on Thursday of last week.

One maintenance worker said their central demand was the implementation of the minimum wage. But they also want improvements in the bus fleet and spare parts. Another demand is for contracts for fixed-term workers who had not been given permanent jobs, as the law stipulates, after three years' service.

Said Adel Gaber is president of the bus workers' independent union. He said that the government allocated £1.6 billion to apply the minimum wage for six million workers, but in the end only 400,000 benefited.

Doctors, pharmacists and vets have taken part in a series of strike since the New Year over pay, conditions and the health care budget.

The government has been trying to dismiss these as having little support, but the doctors' union said 50 percent of doctors took part in the action.

Nurses unions didn't officially back the doctors' strikes but 400 struck on Tuesday of last week Sidi Salem Central Hospital in Kafr al-Sheikh in the Nile Delta. They demanded the reinstatement of a promised 40 percent bonus that had been cancelled.

The outbreak of strikes has got the government worried. That's why it pledged money to pay Mahalla workers' bonuses so quickly.

But workers are angry at their treatment and at how little their pay and conditions have improved since the revolution began. The government's offer wasn't enough and they stayed out on strike.

**Number Of Hungry People Going
To Food Pantries And Soup
Kitchens Grows After Obama
Regime Cuts Food Stamps Help:
“The Washington Heights
Ecumenical Food Pantry, Which
Gives Out 275 Bags Of Food A Week,
Turned Away 141 People In January”
“They Are Rationing Food, Prioritizing
Donations To Households With Babies And
Seniors And Turning Away Greater Numbers
Of People”**



A volunteer distributes food at CAMBA's Beyond Hunger Emergency Food Pantry on February 18 in the Brooklyn. Getty Images

Feb. 17, 2014 by Melanie Grayce West, Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

When a cut to food-stamp benefits went into effect in November, the impact was felt immediately by the area's food pantries and soup kitchens. They say they are still struggling to meet the increased need.

At St. Edward's Food Pantry in Staten Island, 250 new registrants came in from Nov. 1 to Jan. 1. The average had been about 30 people a month.

At two pantries in the Bronx, Our Lady of Grace Church and United Bronx Parents Inc., the number of households coming for food doubled in November. Organizers at the Washington Heights Ecumenical Food Pantry, which gives out 275 bags of food a week, turned away 141 people in January.

The connection between a drop in food stamps and a surge of need for free food isn't new.

Demand for so-called emergency food given away at pantries and kitchens has been rising steadily since the most recent recession began, advocates say.

But what is designed to be the occasional last resort for needy people has, for many, become a regular resource.

The recent months have been a reckoning for the patchwork of emergency-food providers already stretched thin by the recession.

Many say they are rationing food, prioritizing donations to households with babies and seniors and turning away greater numbers of people.

Margaret Purvis, president and chief executive of the Food Bank for New York City, which distributes 74 million pounds of food annually, summed up the situation: "We cannot replace the food they are losing."

Overall, 85% of member agencies saw a jump in visitors in November 2013 when compared with November 2012, according to an internal survey.

In New York City, the average cut in benefits provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—called SNAP and known broadly as the food-stamp program—was about \$19 a month, from the \$281 total, during the period between October and December of last year.

Statewide, the household total dropped to \$255 from \$274 during the same period, according to data from the state's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

The Myth Of Venezuelan Socialism:

“A Continuing Balancing Act Between The Interests Of The Masses And The Big Bourgeoisie”

“Decisive Sectors Of The Venezuelan Bourgeoisie See Chavista Rule As Quite Compatible With Their Capital Accumulation Goals”

Feb 24, 2014 by Louis Proyect, The Unrepentant Marxist [Excerpts]

Once you get past the anti-Communist hysteria about the Bolivarian revolution, you will discover that decisive sectors of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie see Chavista rule as quite compatible with their capital accumulation goals.

While the pro-Chavista left pins its hopes on a possible socialist transformation of Venezuela, I tend to see a continuing balancing act between the interests of the masses and the big bourgeoisie.

The Financial Times, one of the more sophisticated and class-conscious foundation stones of the bourgeois press, advised its readers on December 3, 2008 that “Boligarchs” were quite comfortable with “socialist” Venezuela:

“A new business elite is profiting since the industry shutdown and failed putsch of 2002, reports Benedict Mander

“Ten years ago, Wilmer Ruperti was just another ambitious businessman.

Now, as Hugo Chávez marks a decade in power as Venezuela’s president, Mr Ruperti is a billionaire shipping tycoon and one of the richest men in the country.

“Many of Mr Ruperti’s peers claim that his success is owed to more than his business acumen.

“He has been branded a quintessential ‘boligarch’, one of a new breed of Venezuelan business magnates. They are said to enjoy close relations with Mr Chávez’s ‘Bolivarian’ government, named after Simón Bolívar, South America’s 19th-century independence hero.

“Mr Ruperti says he has been castigated for his role in breaking the infamous oil industry shutdown in 2002-03, which was engineered by Mr Chávez’s opponents, many of them business leaders, who were trying to topple his government.

“After making oil tankers available to the government, thereby enabling the president to survive the opposition’s attempt to cut off his key revenue source, oil exports, Mr Rupert was well positioned to win future shipping contracts with the state oil company, PDVSA, at a time when others were excluded.

“It was a big decision. Normally I don’t gamble like that,” says Mr Rupert, who admits it paid off. “But really I was just complying with my contract”

The final television station to be separated from the opposition was Globovision. Without a trace of irony, Huffington Post—a snarling enemy of President Maduro—described how the station succumbed to the Venezuelan version of the Bolsheviks:

“The last remaining television station critical of Venezuela’s government is being sold to an insurance company owner who is apparently friendly with the ruling socialists, its owners announced Monday, following an unrelenting official campaign to financially strangle the broadcaster through regulatory pressure.”

Excuse me?

An insurance company owner “friendly with the ruling socialists” decides to buy a takeover-ripe TV station and presumably run it as a profit-making venture?

What exactly does this have to do with dictatorial rule?

Isn’t the right to buy and sell enterprises sacrosanct under the free enterprise system?

It is hard to say whether RCTV or Globovision was more of a disgrace to journalism. The station once played interviews of distraught prison mothers 269 times over four days and added the sound of gunfire to the reports. I think that this would be too much even for Roger Ailes.

The insurance company owner is one Juan Domingo Cordero. He paired up with Raul Gorrin, another insurance tycoon.

Like the Boligarchs alluded to above, they have thrown in their lot with a government that is committed to protecting their interests as well as those of the ordinary working person or peasant.

Good luck, I say.

MORE:

**“A State Governor And Longtime Ally
Of Venezuelan President Nicolás**

Maduro Condemned Attacks On Protesters”

José Vielma Mora, The Governor Of Táchira State And Member Of The United Socialist Party “Was Among The First To Have Joined Mr. Maduro’s Predecessor, Hugo Chávez”

Feb. 24, 2014 By Kejal Vyas and Ezequiel Minaya, Wall Street Journal. Juan Forero contributed to this article, [Excerpts]

CARACAS, Venezuela—A state governor and longtime ally of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro condemned attacks on protesters that have roiled the country, becoming the first critical voice from within the ruling party’s ranks.

José Vielma Mora, the governor of Táchira state and member of the United Socialist Party, told a Caracas radio station on Monday that he was opposed to the force being used to put down student rallies in his state in western Venezuela.

The rallies spread to cities nationwide, with hundreds of thousands of people voicing anger over a dysfunctional economy, high inflation and corruption.

"I am against putting down a peaceful protest with weapons," the governor said in an interview with Onda, the radio station. "No one is authorized to use violence."

He characterized the government’s deployment of heavily armed security forces, and the use of Russian Sukhoi fighter jets over the state capital of San Cristóbal, as excessive and unnecessary.

Mr. Vielma also said he pushed for a National Guard general to be relieved of his command for his rough handling of the protesters, who have told Venezuelan media of being beaten and arrested.

"It’s a sign that I’m against repression," said Mr. Vielma. explaining that the general was relieved and replaced.

Mr. Vielma’s comments are particularly bracing in Venezuela because he was among the first to have joined Mr. Maduro’s predecessor, Hugo Chávez, when he led a failed coup in 1992.

Mr. Vielma, a military officer like Mr. Chávez, participated in the failed uprising that made Mr. Chávez a household name. Six years later, Mr. Chávez won the presidency,

sweeping his leftist movement and close allies—among them Mr. Vielma—into power with him.

The governor stressed that he hadn't broken away from the government but said he was in a difficult situation.

"From my side, they are calling me a coward," Mr. Vielma said, adding that he had to respond to the citizens of his state.

The governor later said he still backed the Socialist Party and remained loyal to Mr. Maduro. But he didn't repudiate his comments criticizing the government's handling of the protests in his state, where they have been particularly large and unruly.

Mr. Vielma also told the radio station that he opposed the imprisonment of Leopoldo López, a 42-year-old politician from the affluent east of Caracas who had surrendered to authorities Feb. 18 after he was accused of having incited a deadly protest on Feb. 12.

Mr. Vielma's comments seemed to energize people such as José Luiz Nuñez, a 45-year-old chauffeur who was protesting Monday in Caracas.

"Look, the members of their own government are doing an about-face," Mr. Nunez said. "The government knows that this country is a disaster. They are scared."

Attorney General Luisa Ortega announced the protests had led to 13 deaths, with at least one in Táchira.

In Caracas, antigovernment protesters set up barricades across the city, using tree trunks, trash and debris to close off roads. Demonstrators in other cities also blocked roads, leaving traffic in knots.

Another protester, Carlos Fronterotta, 26, who is studying to be an accountant, said demonstrators were "enraged" by the government crackdown. That, he said, has given the protests momentum.

"We have been repressed in a way that you can only describe as a dictatorship," he said. "We have been left blind without media outlets reporting the news. I have never been part of protests before but I just felt like I need to be part of the marches."

“Nobody Was Prepared To Risk Their Lives To Defend A Regime That Had Completely Rotted”

**“Oligarchs Have Benefited From
The Corruption And Political
Chaos In Ukraine Over The Past
Two Decades”**

**“A Tiny Handful Of Wealthy Robber
Barons Enjoy Obscene Wealth From
The Property They Have Stolen From
The People”**

**“About Half A Dozen Oligarchs In
Ukraine Have Concentrated Fabulous
Wealth Since The Collapse Of The Soviet
Union”**

The Ukrainian economy suffers from a fatal combination of all the worst features of the old bureaucratic state and all the worst features of gangster capitalism.

The Ukrainian people literally have the worst of all worlds.

24 February by Alan Woods, marxist.com/ [Excerpts]

The dramatic events in Ukraine have led to the fall of Yanukovych.

But in reality this is not the end of the drama but only the possible end of its second act. In the moment of truth nobody was prepared to risk their lives to defend a regime that had completely rotted from the inside to the point where one energetic shove sufficed to bring it crashing to the ground.

In the USSR the Ukraine was under the control of the central Moscow Bureaucracy. But, as in every other Republic, there was a nationalist Ukrainian bureaucracy, formed in the image of its Big Brother in Moscow.

The collapse of the Stalinist bureaucratic system therefore led swiftly to the breakup of the USSR into its component parts. Under the cover of fighting for “national independence”, the greedy and corrupt bureaucrats took advantage of the prevailing chaos and confusion to plunder the nationalised economy, transforming themselves into private capitalists.

These oligarchs have benefited from the corruption and political chaos in Ukraine over the past two decades. A tiny handful of wealthy robber barons enjoy obscene wealth from the property they have stolen from the people through so-called privatisation. About half a dozen oligarchs in Ukraine have concentrated fabulous wealth since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Rinat Akhmetov has an estimated fortune worth \$15.4bn and is 47th on Forbes' list of billionaires.

Ukraine's richest man, Akhmetov is the most powerful of the oligarchs.

He is the owner of Shakhtar Donetsk football club and is the biggest player in the mining industry in the Donbas, heartland of the president in east Ukraine. In 2011, he paid £136.4m for a penthouse at One Hyde Park in London, the most expensive property ever bought in Britain.

He has long been considered to be the power behind the throne and was instrumental in securing Yanukovich's rise to power.

Viktor Pinchuk also built up a huge fortune while his father-in-law, Leonid Kuchma, was president.

Yanukovich's son Oleksandr, a dentist, has built up a huge fortune in the past three years, which would require the extraction of a very large number of teeth.

An unknown 28-year-old named Sergey Kurchenko suddenly appears to control around \$800m (£480m) of assets, but nobody knows where from.

These, and others like them, are the real rulers of Ukraine.

They control members of parliament and political parties, they own television stations, and have the political leaders in their pockets.

Such men and their families live in luxury, as if on a different planet to their countrymen and women.

At the other extreme, millions of Ukrainians live in extreme poverty, some on the verge of beggary, others forced to emigrate.

Such is the balance sheet of two decades of bourgeois "independence" in Ukraine.

That is how things go in Ukraine nowadays.

Those at the top have their snouts firmly inserted in the pig's trough, while those at the bottom sink ever lower.

This has given rise to a seething discontent, anger and frustration among broad layers of the population.

Nine years ago people expressed their discontent in what became known as the Orange Revolution. In 2004-2005 the mass protests lasted for two months. Viktor Yanukovich was also President then. He was defeated by the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko and his then ally Yulia Tymoshenko.

But that merely led to the transfer of political power from one faction of the oligarchy to another.

Nothing changed except the faces of the exploiters.

In the recent period Ukraine's chronic economic crisis has turned into a freefall of terrifying dimensions.

The national currency, the hryvnia, has plunged to its lowest official level against the US dollar since its inception nearly 18 years ago. After desperate attempts of the Ukrainian Central Bank to keep the currency stable by intervention on the currency markets it was finally forced to cut the exchange rate and impose capital controls including a limit on private transfers abroad and a ban on foreign currency purchases for overseas investment.

This attempt to prop up the hryvnia was ruinous for the country's reserves. According to official data, in January alone the central bank spent \$1.7bn (£1.04bn; 1.25bn euros) propping up the exchange rate, leaving current currency reserves at just \$17.8bn. That is less than Ukraine needs to cover two months of imports.

Foreign investors are getting out.

Ukrainian officials blame the 10% devaluation on the mass protests since November.

But the hryvnia's fall is a natural consequence of years of economic decline, corruption, swindling and chaos which is expressed in a gaping trade and budget deficit, 18 months of recession and mounting foreign debt.

The Ukrainian economy suffers from a fatal combination of all the worst features of the old bureaucratic state and all the worst features of gangster capitalism.

The Ukrainian people literally have the worst of all worlds.

The oligarchy continues to loot the people, especially through its hold over the banks that charge exorbitant rates of interest.

"In Poland you can take a loan for 7%, in Germany you'll pay 3%," says Lviv businessman Zenoviy Berms.

"In Ukraine, it will cost you 25-30% to borrow from the bank." While the oligarchs fight over the division of the plunder, small businesses are being ruined. Between 2010 and 2012 the number of businesses shrank by 600,000, according to the state statistics committee of Ukraine.

Inflation Getting Stronger, Cutting Buying Power Of Wages, Incomes: U.S. Federal Reserve Bank Pleased; “An Acceleration In Domestic Spending In The Second Half Of Last Year Appears To Be Helping Some Firms Raise Prices More Quickly”

Feb. 20, 2014 By Eric Morath, Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

WASHINGTON—Consumers are seeing a slight pickup in inflation, a development that could reassure some Federal Reserve officials as they roll back their easy-money policies.

The consumer-price index, which measures how much Americans pay for everything from hospital visits to heating oil, advanced a seasonally adjusted 0.1% in January from the prior month, the Labor Department said Thursday.

Compared with a year earlier, consumer prices increased 1.6%.

That was the strongest year-over-year gain in six months and a marked acceleration from October, when the annual gain slowed to 1%.

"As we move away from the low inflation rate of the fall, Fed officials who are concerned about deflation will take a little bit of comfort," said Conrad DeQuadros, an economist at RDQ Economics.

The Fed aims for annual inflation of 2%.

Like other recent economic readings, consumer prices are seeing some effect from unusually cold winter weather.

Natural-gas prices were up 3.6% due to many households keeping their furnaces running for longer. Electricity prices rose 1.8% last month, the largest increase since March 2010.

Brandon Kekich could feel the drafts blowing through his Northville, Mich., condominium when the wind chill dipped to negative 40 degrees Fahrenheit during a recent cold snap. The result: His gas bill jumped 30% from a year earlier.

"It's eye-popping," said Mr. Kekich, 40 years old. "A lot of folks are having a really tough time with their bills."

A lackluster economy in the U.S. and abroad had helped keep overall prices in check. But an acceleration in domestic spending in the second half of last year appears to be helping some firms raise prices more quickly.

Services procured locally, from rent to cable television, saw prices rise in January. But prices for goods that are more sensitive to global demand, such as cars and gasoline, fell during the month.

"As we move through 2014, we're going to see higher inflation partly in response to better growth," said Deutsche Bank chief U.S. economist Joseph LaVorgna.

"Also, some of the things weighing on inflation last year, like medical care, don't appear to be as much of a drag."

The price of medical care increased 0.3% in January, driven by higher costs for prescription drugs.

Rising health-care costs ahead could boost the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, the price index for personal consumption expenditures.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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