

GI SPECIAL 5E23:

**NO MORE:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



U.S. soldiers, Delta Company, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, in Quarghuli village, near Youssifiyah, Iraq, May 19, 2007. (AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo)

**“Just Don’t Treat Us Like
We’re Nothing And
Sweep Us Underneath
The Carpet”
Betrayed And Abandoned By
The Traitors He Served;**

Low Rated On His Disability To Save The Government Money: Now The Filth Who Rule America Are Confiscating His Severance Benefits



Fred Ball

May 18, 2007 Essex Porter, KIRO 7

EAST WENATCHEE, Wash. -- A Washington state Marine pays the price in Iraq.

His war wounds forced him from the service, so why does the military want him to pay back thousands of dollars?

Fred Ball still has the piece of shrapnel that could have killed him.

"This is the actual main piece that was lodged in my right temple," Ball said.

The Marine sergeant was wounded in April 2004 in the battle of Fallujah -- his Humvee destroyed, his body battered.

"Shoulder injury, my shoulder can only raise so far," he said.

Brain injury, too.

"I have these dizzy spells and my eyes go really blurry and they cut out for a second and then come right back," he said.

Now home in East Wenatchee, Fred Ball is safe from insurgent attacks, but he's still fighting a battle for survival.

It's a battle that now includes his wife and 4-month-old son.

"Even though he got hurt, but he's not the only one who's going to deal with it, we are the ones who (are) going to deal with it and especially he's the one who's going to deal with it," said Hilda Ball, Fred's wife.

Two years after Fallujah, the Marine Corps discharged Fred Ball. A medical board placed his disability rating at 10 percent.

"When they separated me, they gave me 10 percent and they made number one, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and they subcategorized and they didn't rate me for the physical injuries," said Ball.

That 10 percent rating keeps Ball from qualifying for a lifetime pension and health benefits.

Instead, he got a \$40,000 severance check from the Marines -- less than a year's worth of his sergeant's pay.

But because he now gets benefits from the Veterans Administration, the law requires that he pay his severance check back.

"They way they figure out the math, it's going to take around three years for me to pay this off."

Each month, the Veterans Administration withholds 80 percent of his disability check -- paying him just barely \$300 to take care of his family.

That's why -- despite his injuries -- Ball works 16-hour days at a packing crate factory to pay the bills.

Lou Barrier served 30 years as a Navy medic in Korea and Vietnam. Now he's a volunteer veterans advocate helping Ball appeal his case.

"No, we shouldn't be asking for that money back. I mean they're offering \$25,000 enlistment bonuses now," Barrier said.

With thousands in similar situations, Sen. Patty Murray has questions for the Pentagon.

"Of those soldiers that I have talked to, many believe they have been deliberately low-balled when it comes to their disability rating in order to save money," Murray said.

Fred Ball hopes his country will be there for him.

"We don't care what happens to us, just don't treat us like we're nothing and sweep us underneath the carpet."

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Baghdad IED Kills Six U.S. Soldiers And Interpreter

May 20, 2007 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE
No. 20070520-05

BAGHDAD — Six MND-B Soldiers and one interpreter were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated in the western section of the Iraqi capital May 19.

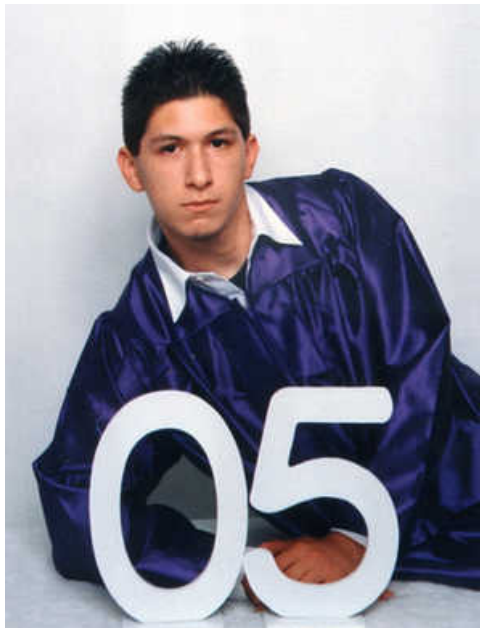
IED Kills One U.S. Soldier Near Ad Diwaniyah, Two Wounded

May 20, 2007 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE
No. 20070520-13

LSA ANACONDA, Iraq – One 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) Soldier was killed and two were wounded in an improvised explosive device attack against their tactical vehicle near Ad Diwaniyah at approximately 12 a.m. May 19.

The wounded Soldiers were evacuated to a nearby military medical treatment facility.

Fort Worth Soldier Killed In Iraq



Joshua Romero, seen in his graduation picture from Crowley High School, was killed in Iraq (Courtesy Romero Family).

May. 19, 2007 By DIANE SMITH, Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH -- Joshua Romero's father is proud of his son's 2005 graduation picture from Crowley High School.

Most of the time, the younger Romero shied away from the camera's lens, but this photo was a favor for his father. It's also the very photo Joe Romero pulled out Saturday to help remember his son -- a 1st Calvary Division soldier from Fort Worth who died in Iraq.

Pfc. Joshua Romero, 19, served in B Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Calvary. The U.S. Army informed his wife and father about his death on Friday, the family said. He would have turned 20 next month.

"He made me proud," said Joe Romero. "I want people to know what he did."

The family is trying to piece together how he died. Preliminary reports indicate he was a victim of a roadside bomb while riding in a Bradley tank, the said. He had been stationed out of Fort Hood.

The last time the family saw Joshua was in April, when he was granted leave to attend a family funeral. "Josh was brave to go out there," said a younger brother, Anthony Romero, 6.

Joshua Romero enlisted in 2005 shortly after graduating from Crowley High School. He told his father the military would help open doors for his future. Plus, he liked the structure.

"He joined the military because we don't have a lot of money," said Joe Romero. "College was out of our reach."

When Joe Romero learned his son wanted to join the military, he sat him down and told him: "This is not fun and games. You might not come back."

But Joshua had made up his mind and given his word. He never second guessed his decision to join the military and if he was afraid or scared, he never showed it.

"I was more afraid," Joe Romero said. "I've always known there was a chance. You hear about soldiers getting killed everyday."

On Friday, the family was shocked to learn that Joshua was now a casualty of the War in Iraq. Joe Romero allowed himself to be interviewed by the Star-Telegram because he wanted his son remembered in printed words.

Joshua Romero was a typical All American youth. He liked Rock music, including Jimi Hendrix. He was quiet and low-key, but he made time to hang with his pals. He was also close to eight siblings from his blended family.

Joe Romero said Joshua left behind a wife, Michelle, and a 1-year-old son, Joshua David. His survivors also include his step-mother, Shellie Romero, and his biological mother, Kimberlee Cummings.

Joshua Romero attended Worth Heights Elementary, Rosemont Middle School and Trimble Tech High School before graduating from Crowley High School. He tried playing football while at Rosemont, but discovered he's a better fan than a player, said his father.

"He loved football. He liked to watch basketball," said Joe Romero, adding after a pause: "That's Joshua in a nutshell."

WI Soldier Dies, Uncle Reflects

May 20, 2007 By Elizabeth Ries, WBAY

Another Wisconsin soldier is killed in Iraq. The family of Sergeant 1st Class Scott Brown, 33, says they don't know the circumstances behind his death. Family members in Denmark are calling Brown a hero.

"I'm proud of him... it's hard to believe he's dead."

Glenn Dahlke remembers his nephew Scott's dedication to the military. "He was proud to be in the service. He wanted to make a career of it, but the good lord called him and now it's gone."

Brown's career lasted 12 years. He was serving his fourth tour of duty in Iraq when he was killed. He had survived missions in Kuwait, Kosovo and Afghanistan before that.

"He sent us shirts from his 82nd airborne division. He sent my wife, my son and myself one."

But Dahlke says, something about this deployment made his nephew nervous. "He was afraid of this tour. He says something going to happen to me. So..."

And now, Dahlke and the rest of Brown's family, including his mother, his wife, and his 11-year old son, are left remembering who he was as a person and as a soldier.

"He was very likeable, you know, he's bend over backwards to help you."

"But, life goes on, you know, he's a hero in my eyes so, what can you say?"

The Defense Department hasn't confirmed Brown's death. But his uncle tells us he is planning a memorial service at the VFW post in Denmark.

Local Soldier Killed In Iraq

May 19, 2007 KRIS

CORPUS CHRISTI - A 26-year-old soldier from Corpus Christi was killed Friday in an explosion in Iraq. The family of Staff Sergeant Anselmo Martinez, III was notified late Friday morning of his death.

SSgt. Martinez left for his first tour of duty in Iraq, back in October. His family said they were planning to call 6 News when he arrived home on leave next month. Instead they called Friday to report the sad news of his death.

Anselmo Martinez's mother Diana flew a U.S. flag in honor of his service in Iraq. Friday afternoon, his brother and sister were lowering it to half staff in memory of his death. They've been consoling each other after hearing the tragic news that showed up at the front door Friday just before noon.

"My husband answered and I was looking at TV in the other room and he told me they were here and I said 'you're lying' and he told me no, just came and told me that B.J.'s dead," Diana Martinez said.

His mother called him B.J., short for 'Baby Junior, her first son. He had been stationed at Camp Warhorse in Ba'qbah, Iraq, just north of Baghdad. (map)

She was told he was killed when the Bradley vehicle he was driving hit a land mine.

"If they would've given him leave like he wanted, this would've never happened - his leave was changed like three times," she said. His family expected him home on leave for two weeks in May. His homecoming now will be a much sadder one.

"Well, he's coming home alright, but in a box now."

Now the Martinez family only has the memories of happier times to hold onto now.

Anselmo was 1998 graduate of Robstown High School, he loved fishing, and was known for being respectful, polite, and was always there to listen when his three older sisters needed to vent.

He waited to tell his mother he joined the Army until after he enlisted five years ago and when he told her he was leaving for Iraq. Debbie wanted to travel to Iraq to see her son.

"I said I can get the money to ship myself over where he's at and they say you're crazy, I say, hey, I wanna see my son, I wanna go over there and protect him," she said.

Little did she know Thanksgiving would be the last time she would hear his voice.

"He said 'I love you mom', and that was it."

Two other soldiers were killed in the same explosion.

Funeral services for Anselmo Martinez are pending. The family is still waiting on word from the Army to find out when his body will be brought home.

Brookfield Native Killed By Bomb In Baghdad

May 19, 2007 By JOHN FAUBER, Journal Sentinel Inc.

A 33-year-old former Brookfield resident and U.S. Army sergeant has died in Iraq after his Humvee was hit with an improvised explosive device and small arms fire, according to the soldier's former girlfriend, who also is the mother of their 11-year-old son.

Scott Brown, a member of the 82nd Airborne Division, was riding on the passenger side of the vehicle on Friday in Baghdad when the bomb exploded, said Kristen Leedom, who lives in New Berlin. She said it was unclear whether the bomb was thrown at the vehicle or if it exploded from the road.

"The vehicle blew up," Leedom said. "He died instantly."

Leedom said two other soldiers in the vehicle also died.

Brown has a wife who recently got out of the military and lives near Fort Bragg in North Carolina, Leedom said.

Brown has been in the Army since 1998. He had spent all but six months of the last three years in Iraq, she said. Before that, he had been stationed in Afghanistan, she said.

"He loved the military," Leedom said. "It was his passion."

However, she said he had been upset about all of his comrades who had been killed in Iraq.

Leedom and Brown, who were sweethearts at Brookfield Central High School, have a son, Taylor James Brown, who lives with her.

She said Taylor is having a hard time taking his father's death.

"His dad is his idol," she said. "They had a lot of plans for the future when he got out of Iraq."

The 82nd Airborne is an elite airborne infantry division. It conducts parachute assaults, according to the division's Web site.

Brown is the 74th member of the armed forces from Wisconsin to be killed while serving in Iraq.

“Unidentified Number” Of British Soldiers Wounded In Basra;

Bases Under Attack

May 20, 2007 Deutsche Presse-Agentur

Baghdad - An unidentified number of British soldiers were wounded in a twin blast when armed clashes erupted Sunday with the Shiite Mahdi Army in the southern Iraqi city of Basra city, sources said.

A British force had launched a search campaign in Shuala neighbourhood in western Basra, 550 kilometres south of Baghdad, Sunday morning and detained four suspected militants, independent Voices of Iraq news agency reported citing British army spokesperson Captain Katie Brown.

'While conducting raids in the area an explosive charge went off near a British force, wounding some soldiers who were taken to a British military medical facility for treatment,' Brown was quoted as saying.

She said two British bases in Basra have come under repeated attacks in the last 24 hours and there were no reports of casualties.

Memorial High School Graduate Injured While Serving In Iraq

May 19, 2007 Gray Television Group, Inc.

A 2005 graduate of Memorial High School in Eau Claire has been injured while serving in Iraq.

According to family statements posted on the web site caringbridge.org, Army Specialist Shane Nault suffered critical injuries when an I.E.D. exploded near his humvee in Baghdad on May 8th.

Nault was reportedly stationed out of Fort Bliss, Texas.

Specialist Nault's family says shrapnel entered his left temple, went through his frontal lobe and exited just above his right temple.

They say he is currently being treated at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

Lured Into A Resistance Killing Ground By Capture Of Soldiers

And U.S. Command Stupidity, U.S. Troops Being Chewed Up Day By Day; “Some Soldiers Complained It Was Another Wild Goose Chase”

The search for the troops who went missing after a May 12 ambush is grinding down U.S. forces already strained by the push to restore calm in and around Baghdad.

May 20, 2007 (AP) [Excerpts]

MAHMOUDIYA, Iraq Sweat-drenched U.S. and Iraqi soldiers sprawled on the muddy farmhouse floor, taking a break from the grueling search for three kidnapped comrades. A report of a soldier shot by a sniper came over the radio.

The platoon commander ordered his men to their feet and they dashed off to help. The sniper victim's unit had no medic, but the one taking a rest did.

It was the second attack of the day: A bomb buried in a field had exploded under a foot patrol hours earlier, killing one American and wounding three others and two Iraqi soldiers.

The search for the troops who went missing after a May 12 ambush is grinding down U.S. forces already strained by the push to restore calm in and around Baghdad.

Firefights erupt daily as troops search a 135-square-mile area south of the capital. Roadside bombs hit armored Humvees.

The troops have taken to walking but the fields are heavily mined.

Still, the military insists it won't quit until it finds the missing men, or knows what happened to them. [Proving, as if any further proof were necessary, that any skilled and intelligent resistance opponents can dictate what moves U.S. commanders' order by capturing a couple U.S. soldiers, thereby pushing them at will into this idiotic knee jerk response, having set up their the traps in advance. Moralistic stupidity like this never won any war anywhere anytime. Duh.]

American soldiers with the Bravo Company, Second Battalion, 10th Mountain Division, and their Iraqi counterparts have spent days trudging through rough terrain—muddy canal banks lined with tall reeds, parched farmland and fields of sweet-smelling wildflowers. [And getting ambushed, wounded or killed every day. Exactly as the resistance planned when they organized the capture.]

The military searchers stopped to question a shepherd in a lavender gown. He was patted on the back and returned to tending his flock once the soldiers found his name was not on their list of wanted men.

Capt. Aaron Bright's troops were debating how long they should rest in the two-story farm house, where they took refuge after three hours of searching, when they got the call that a soldier had been shot through the forehead by a sniper.

Spc. Andrew Carbajal, a 20-year-old medic from Clinton, Iowa on his first tour in Iraq, grabbed his bag and leapt to his feet and sprinted with fellow troopers over parched fields and through a date palm grove to reach the site of the attack, 2.5 miles away. It took them 30 minutes.

The wounded soldier was evacuated in serious condition to Balad air base north of Baghdad.

One of his friends flew back to base carrying the wounded man's personal effects. He sat through the flight holding his buddy's blood-soaked flak jacket, looking at the floor of the clattering helicopter.

But most of the wounded soldier's comrades stayed with Bright's troops, preparing to clear one more area before nightfall.

Bright said most of the troops have lost weight, many as much as 12 pounds, as Iraq's weather has climbed above 100. The searchers spend hours patrolling only to return to base after the mess hall closes.

Bright was forced to cancel a rest day for one platoon and send it out searching in place of the company that was hit by the roadside bomb on Saturday.

"I was going to give them a break today," the 29-year-old platoon commander said, leaning on one knee and examining a map. "But we're going to do the mission and we'll be as vigilant as ever." **[They had methods of dealing with brain dead fanatics like this in Vietnam. Read the history.]**

Tips have poured in but most have ended in disappointment, with no sign of Pfc. Joseph J. Anzack Jr., 20, of Torrance, Calif., Spc. Alex R. Jimenez, 25, of Lawrence, Mass. or Pvt. Byron W. Fouty, 19, of Waterford, Mich.

Four other American soldiers and an Iraqi were killed in the attack.

An evening raid on a Sunni mosque and houses in Latifiyah late Saturday turned up a weapons cache, some bundles of money but no troopers.

Some soldiers, returning from the raid to a dinner of cold peas and chicken at the forward operating base in Mahmoudiya, complained it was another wild goose chase.

Still, they said they weren't ready to quit the search. **["They?" A Captain said and, next a Lt. Col. says.]**

"I choose to remain positive, but with each passing day with no evidence of life the likelihood of soldiers being found alive is less," Lt. Col. Randy Martin, a spokesman for troops searching for the soldiers, said in an e-mail Sunday. **[This reporter has to be the biggest fool on the face of the earth to write that a Lt. Co. is a "spokesman for troops." This is so imbecilic it's breathtaking.]**

"We will not stop until we find our fallen comrades." **[How many days has this asshole spent tramping around through minefields getting targeted by snipers? Care to guess? "We" will not stop? Oh please. This is nothing but a soldier-killing rat making points to impress the officers above him. U.S. soldiers had methods of dealing with brass kissers like this in Vietnam. Read the history.]**

**REALLY BAD IDEA:
NO MISSION;
HOPELESS WAR:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



U.S. soldiers secure a road in Baghdad January 16, 2007. REUTERS/Ceerwan Aziz

**“Schacht’s Battalion Has Suffered Heavy
Losses Since Last August:
17 Killed And 71 Wounded Out Of 800
Men”**

May 28, 2007 U.S. News & World Report [Excerpt]

Farther south, in Adhamiya, Lt. Col. Eric Schacht's 1-26 Infantry Task Force has had a much rougher time in this longtime haven for insurgents. In early March, Schacht's men set up JSS Adhamiya in the police station a few blocks from Baghdad's main Sunni mosque. A platoon rotates in every 24 hours.

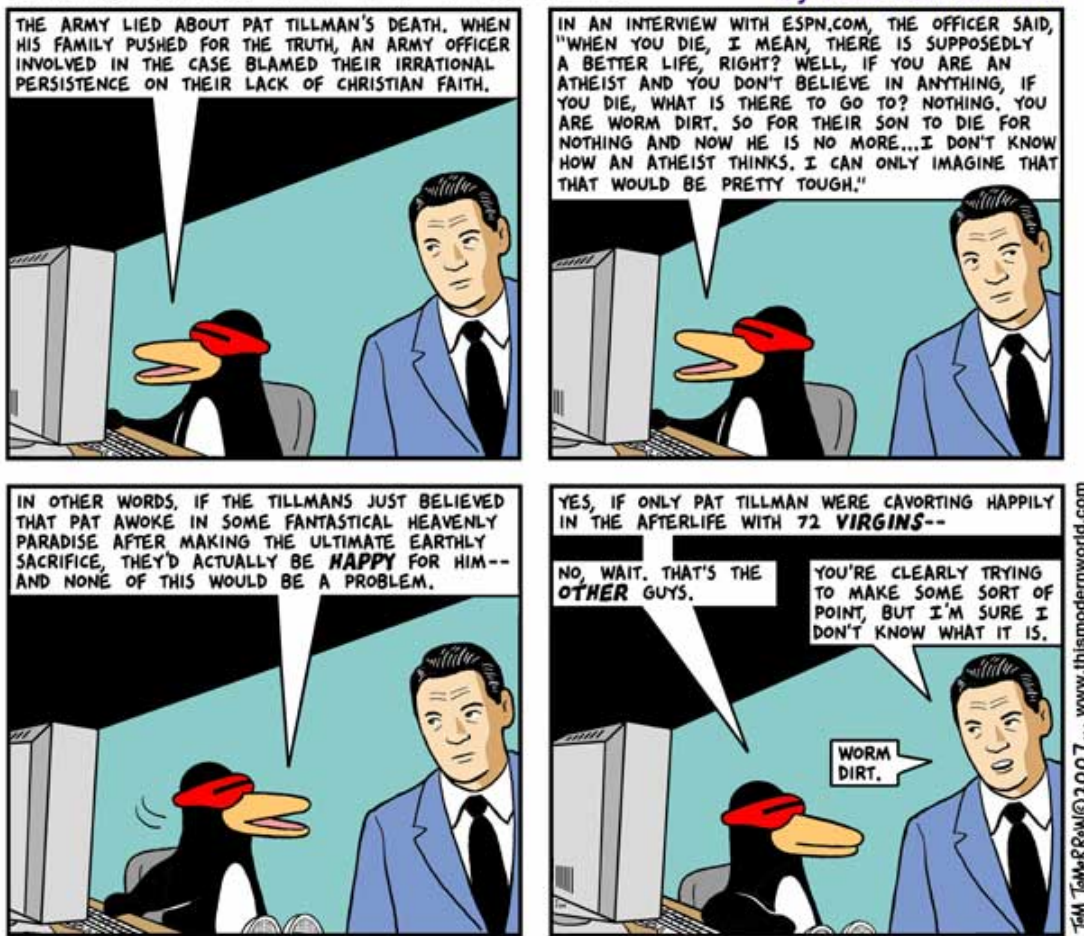
For three weeks the soldiers came under intense attack from grenades, molotov cocktails, mortars, and gunfire. They still receive fire daily, but an extra perimeter of concertina wire staves off grenades.

With Shiite militias moving in, Schacht's battalion has suffered heavy losses since last August: 17 killed and 71 wounded out of 800 men.

TROOP NEWS

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

19 May 2007 Reuters & By Laith Hammoudi, McClatchy Newspapers & 5.20.07 (AP) & Reuters & (AFP)

Near the western city of Ramadi, a bomber blew up a vehicle, killing a policeman.

A pilot in the Iraqi air force was killed in the capital, security officials said.

Guerrillas killed a policeman on his doorstep and wounded two other bystanders in northern Kirkuk on Friday, police sources said.

A security member working for Sami Al Araji, the deputy minister of industry, was killed when a Katyusha rocket hit near Araji's house near the foreign ministry complex in Salhiyah neighborhood downtown Baghdad at 8:00 am.

1 Iraqi army soldier was killed and 2 others were wounded in a parked car bomb explosion targeted their check point near Jordan intersection in Yarmouk neighborhood west Baghdad around 3:15 pm.

Guerrillas killed Thamir Mohammed Khalaf, an employee in the ministry of foreign affairs in Baghdad Al Jadida neighborhood east Baghdad around 9:00pm.

A police man was injured by a sniper in Jisr Diyala neighborhood south east Baghdad around 4:00 pm.

Iraqi army soldiers were killed and 6 others were wounded when a car bomber attacked their check point near Al Sa'aa restaurant in Mansour neighborhood west Baghdad at 6:00 pm.

Police source in Kirkuk city said that guerrillas driving a sedan car shot dead yesterday (Friday) a policeman and injured his brother while the two were in their car in Al Mamdoda neighborhood downtown Kirkuk city around 3:00 pm. The killed policeman was one of the employees of Kirkuk hospital policemen. The source said that the brother was injured and he had been moved to Kirkuk hospital.

A policeman in the emergency brigade of Kirkuk was killed by gunmen in Wahid Huzairan neighborhood in Kirkuk city yesterday evening. Police said that the policeman was shot multiple times.

A police source said that a policeman was killed and another one was injured when the combined operation headquarter in Basra city yesterday evening.

A bomber exploded a tanker truck near an Iraqi police checkpoint outside a market west of Baghdad, killing at least two officers and injuring nine.

Guerrillas killed Hadi al-Rubaie, a senior figure in the [collaborator] Iraqi National Accord Party headed by former [occupation] Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, on Friday in Baghdad, his party said on Sunday.

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION**

GET THE MESSAGE?



A demonstrator steps on a U.S. flag during a march and rally against the U.S. occupation in Baghdad May 19, 2007. Demonstrators took to the streets denouncing the frequent raids of the U.S. forces in Baghdad's Shi'ite neighbourhood, protesters said. REUTERS/Kareem Raheem

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. Frederick Douglas, 1852

Vietnam GI: Reprints Available

Not available from anybody else, anywhere

Edited by Vietnam Veteran Jeff Sharlet from 1968 until his death, this newspaper rocked the world, attracting attention even from Time Magazine, and extremely hostile attention from the chain of command. The pages and pages of letters in the paper from troops in Vietnam condemning the war are lost to history, but you can find them here.

The Military Project has copied complete sets of Vietnam GI. The originals were a bit rough, but every page is there. Over 100 pages, full 11x17 size.

Cost: \$15 if picked up in New York City. For mailing inside USA or APO add \$5 for bubble bag and postage.

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All proceeds are used for projects giving aid and comfort to members of the armed forces opposed to today's Imperial wars.

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward GI Special along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

OCCUPATION REPORT

**60% Of Iraqis Want U.S. Troops
Dead:
Big Surprise**



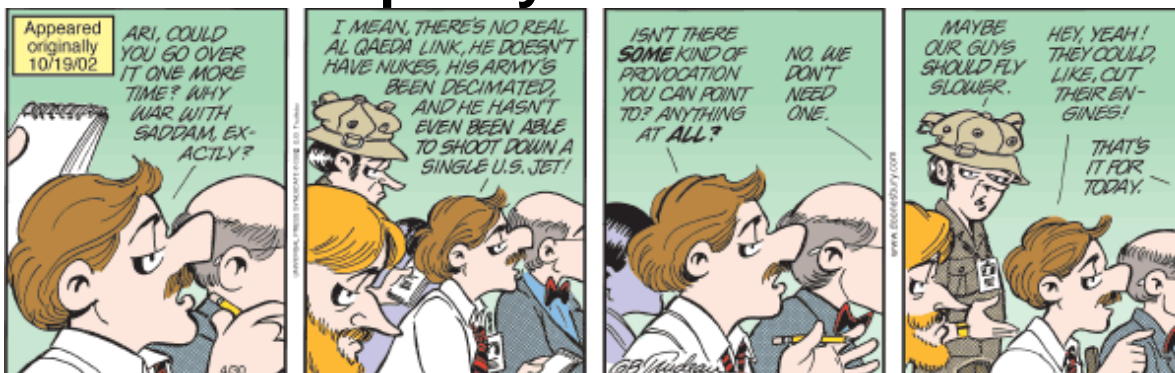
An Iraqi living in the al-Obaidy neighborhood in eastern Baghdad tries to clean up the wreckage of his home after foreign occupation soldiers from the US broke in and searched it, throwing household possession to the floor it at night May 16, 2007. (AP Photo/Karim Kadim)

[U.S. sponsored polls reported recently that 60% of Iraqis favor killing U.S. troops. After reading this, it would take a drooling idiot not to understand why. Iraqis feel about U.S. troops trampling them in the dirt the same way Americans felt about British troops trampling them in the dirt in 1776. They are right to resist. T]

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

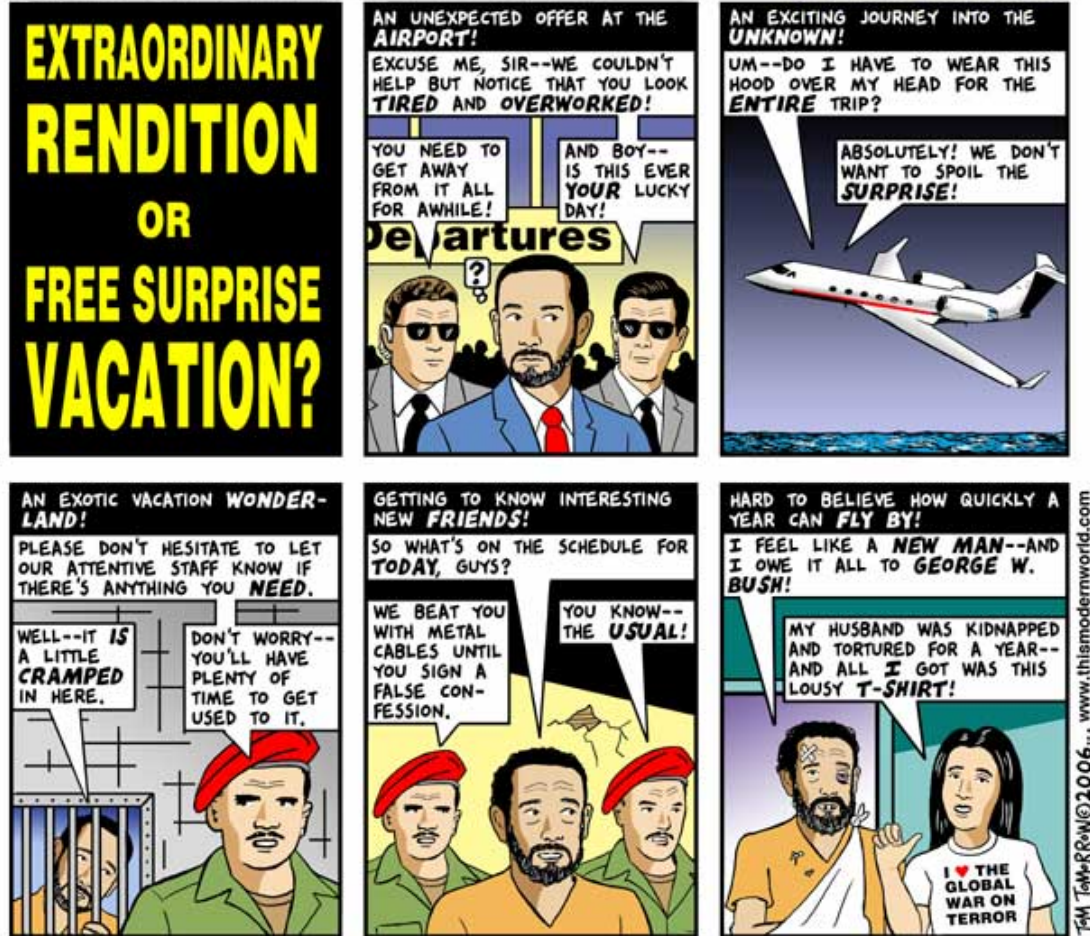
Prophecy: 10.19.2002



[Thanks to David Honish, Veteran, who sent this in.]

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send to contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential. Same to unsubscribe.

CLASS WAR REPORTS

Strike Wave Shakes Egyptian Dictatorship

[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

May 9, 2007 Joel Beinin and Hossam el-Hamalawy, Merip.org

The longest and strongest wave of worker protest since the end of World War II is rolling through Egypt.

In March, the liberal daily al-Masri al-Yawm estimated that no fewer than 222 sit-in strikes, work stoppages, hunger strikes and demonstrations had occurred during 2006. In the first five months of 2007, the paper has reported a new labor action nearly every day. The citizen group Egyptian Workers and Trade Union Watch documented 56 incidents during the month of April, and another 15 during the first week of May alone. [1]

From their center of gravity in the textile sector, the strikes have spread to mobilize makers of building materials, Cairo subway workers, garbage collectors, bakers, food processing workers and many others.

Like almost all strikes in Egypt in the last 40 years, the latest work stoppages are "illegal" -- unauthorized by the state-sponsored General Federation of Trade Unions and its subsidiary bodies in factories and other workplaces. But unlike upsurges of working-class collective action in the 1980s and 1990s, which were confined to state-owned industries, the wave that began in late 2004 has also pushed along employees in the private sector.

Around the same time the first strikes broke out, the most outspoken pro-democracy street protests in years -- including in their ranks leftists and secular nationalists and sometimes Muslim Brothers -- also appeared.

Having spent three years trying to contain the pro-democracy ferment, the regime of President Husni Mubarak has now launched a counterattack on the workers' movement as well. The counterattack comes as many activist workers have shifted their gaze from wages, benefits and working conditions to the explicitly political question of their relation, through the General Federation, to the state.

Notable among the April actions were repeated work stoppages by 284 workers at the Mansura-Spain Company, at which a 75 percent female work force produces quilts and ready-made clothes. They are protesting the sale of their enterprise without a commitment from the prospective new owner, the private sector bank al-Masraf al-Muttahid, to pay supplemental wages and profit shares due them since 1995.

The largest private-sector strike to date occurred in the coastal city of Alexandria at Arab Polvara Spinning and Weaving, a fairly successful enterprise privatized in the first

tranche of the public-sector selloff during the mid-1990s. On March 24, and again on April 2, nearly half of the firm's 12,000 workers struck to protest discrimination between workers and managers in the allocation of shares when the company was sold, failure to pay workers dividends on their shares, and the elimination of paid sick leave and a paid weekend. Workers last received dividends on their shares in 1997, when they were paid 60 Egyptian pounds (about \$10.45 at the current exchange rate).

The demands of the Arab Polvara workers indicate that public-sector workers are correct to suspect that, even if privatized firms initially agree to offer pay and benefits similar to those in the public sector (in some cases, the pay is even higher), the requirements of competing in the international market will eventually drive down wages and worsen working conditions.

Since there are few trade unions in the private sector, workers lack even the weak institutional mechanism of the state-sponsored union federation to contest the unilateral actions of private capital.

The government has charged the Muslim Brothers with inciting the Arab Polvara strike, but there is no evidence that they played any role in this or any other labor action in the last year.

Labor solidarity is an unusual stance for the Brothers, who have never had a strong base in the industrial working class and, in the past, have assisted the government in breaking strikes.

While some Muslim Brothers have acted to encourage the present spate of worker activism, it appears there are differences within the organization between the affluent businessmen who dominate the leadership and rank-and-file members from the lower middle classes and working poor.

In February, the Muslim Brother MP 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Husayni announced his backing for the walkout of the Misr Spinning and Weaving workers in Kafr al-Dawwar, south of Alexandria. His parliamentary colleague Sabir Abu al-Futouh, from Alexandria, followed up by issuing several statements supporting the Arab Polvara strike.[2]

Earlier, Abu al-Futouh had been coordinator of the Brothers' campaign to run candidates in the fall 2006 trade union elections. The government disqualified thousands of Muslim Brothers, leftists and independents from running in those elections -- consequently judged "undemocratic and non-transparent" by independent observers.[3] Abu al-Futouh had declared that if the elections were rigged, the Muslim Brothers would establish a trade union independent of the regime, similar to the independent student unions they have founded in cooperation with the Trotskyist-leaning Revolutionary Socialist group at several universities.

Yet on November 21, after the first rounds of voting were over and their undemocratic character was apparent, the Brothers' Deputy General Guide Muhammad Habib sounded more reserved. In an interview at the American University of Cairo, Habib said: "Establishing an independent labor union requires a long period of consistent organizing. Workers are different than students because they have family responsibilities and will not lightly risk their livelihoods."

The Alexandrian Brothers are generally considered more militant, more confrontational toward the regime and closer to the popular classes than the organization's other branches. Even if Abu al-Futouh was serious in his initiative, however, it was spurned by the Nasserists and the so-called legal left National Progressive Democratic Union Party (Tagammu'), who rejected an alliance with the Islamist opposition.[4] There is no indication that the Muslim Brothers are involved anywhere in setting up trade union structures on the ground.

IDEAS OF INDEPENDENCE

The fresh momentum for the idea of an independent trade union federation has come from among the striking workers themselves, particularly those in the mills of Nile Delta towns.

In December 2006, the local union committee at the Misr Spinning and Weaving facility in Mahalla al-Kubra declined to back the rank and file when they halted production -- eventually resulting in the single most militant (and successful) action of the strike wave. Angered, the Mahalla strikers demanded that federation bosses in Cairo remove the union committee and, when this demand was ignored, protested by handing in their resignations from the General Federation of Trade Unions. In early February, strikers at the Shibin al-Kum Spinning and Weaving Company echoed the Mahalla workers' call for mass resignations from the federation.[5] Workers in other localities also adopted the idea of an independent network of trade unions, most prominently in Kafr al-Dawwar. [6]

The idea of an autonomous national union to supplant the state-sponsored General Federation has circulated among trade unionists for over a decade and is supported in principle by many progressives. Among them are the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS) and its general director, Kamal 'Abbas, veteran trade union organizers like Sabir Barakat and labor lawyer Khalid 'Ali 'Umar of the Workers' Coordinating Committee for Trade Union Rights, 'Abd al-Ghaffar Shukr, a leader of the Socialist Alliance, which seeks to forge a coalition among all the Egyptian socialist forces, Socialist Horizons, the labor studies center affiliated with the Communist Party of Egypt, and Workers for Change, an offshoot of the Kifaya movement for democracy. Yet government repression and internal divisions over tactics and strategy have produced great uncertainty among the opposition forces over whether they have the organizational capacity to launch a parallel trade union.

While the Revolutionary Socialists back an independent national trade union in principle, they have been more cautious than the other political forces involved. Fearing elitism and recognizing that grassroots support for such a project does not yet exist, they have focused on the preparatory steps of supporting the demands of Nile Delta activists to impeach their factory-level union committee officials and establishing channels of communication between strike leaders.

Notably, Tagammu' appears not to support the establishment of an independent trade union federation, though it used such rhetoric during the labor union elections in an attempt to deter the government from mass vote rigging. 'Abd al-Rahman Khayr, a Tagammu' representative in the upper house of Parliament and president of the General Union of Military Industries, is the only non-ruling party member who won a seat on the state-affiliated federation's executive committee. In February, Khayr assembled General

Federation bureaucrats to disrupt a press conference at the Journalists' Syndicate called by the CTUWS and other trade unionists to denounce government attacks against labor activists. Many believe he has made a deal with the regime.

In the weeks leading up to May 1, encouraged by liberal intellectuals and the extensive strike coverage in al-Masri al-Yawm, a former textile worker named 'Ali al-Badri and other trade unionists hatched plans to establish a "Free Union of Egyptian Workers" on the international day of labor.

The plan was to hold simultaneous demonstrations in Cairo and 15 provincial cities, followed by elections for an executive committee. State Security prevented the few individuals who showed up in Cairo's Tahrir Square on May 1 from demonstrating. But the project was foredoomed by its proponents' serious miscalculation of how many people would heed the call. The liberals who encouraged al-Badri and his companions have little experience in organizing workers and little to lose by encouraging them to act without adequate preparation. The putative organizers themselves suffered from political isolation and lack of mass support.

Al-Badri began working in the textile mills of Shubra al-Khayma in 1977. By 1979 he was elected to his local trade union committee, and he eventually became secretary of the regional textile federation. He was fired from his job and blacklisted from the industry as a result of participating in a wildcat strike at the ESCO textile mill in 1986. About 10,000 workers occupied the mill in January, followed by a smaller sit-in several months later, to demand implementation of a 1981 law and a court ruling awarding them one paid day off per week.[7] The ESCO strikes were partially victorious and among the salient labor actions of the mid-1980s.

These working-class struggles erupted without any politically organized leadership. Tagammu', which was much more closely connected to workers then than it is now, publicized and offered material support to such struggles.

It began to issue a workers' magazine and to cover labor affairs regularly in the pages of its weekly al-Ahali. In addition, several independent workers' newspapers based on industrial regions or sectors were established.[8] Tagammu' was unable to strike deep roots among insurgent workers, however. During the 1990s the party lost most of its popular base, amidst a general retreat of leftist politics, because of the party's strategic decision to support the Mubarak regime in its battle against the Islamist insurgency based in southern Egypt and the urban slums of Cairo and Alexandria, and eventually against the non-violent Muslim Brothers as well.

This strategy was the brainchild of Tagammu' chief and former Communist Party of Egypt member Rif'at al-Sa'id. It was embraced by the underground Communist Party, the remnants of which work actively inside Tagammu'.

Since neither Tagammu' nor the Communist Party was deeply engaged with workers' struggles by the 1990s, 'Ali al-Badri ended up finding political shelter as general secretary for labor affairs in the utterly insignificant Democratic Generation Party. This party has no discernible public activity and a total national membership that likely numbers in the dozens.

Despite the retreat of the “legal” and much of the underground left from engagement with industrial workers in the 1990s, the career of CTUWS director Kamal ‘Abbas was marked with relative success. ‘Abbas got his start as a leader in the upsurge of labor activism in the 1980s, culminating in two fierce strikes at the Egyptian Iron and Steel Company in 1989. Like al-Badri, ‘Abbas was fired for participating in an “illegal” strike that had no support from the official trade union. In 1990, ‘Abbas founded CTUWS with advice and support from the late Yusuf Darwish, a veteran communist and labor lawyer who had represented many trade unions in Shubra al-Khayma and Cairo from the 1930s through the 1950s.

Darwish had also recruited many union leaders into the Workers’ Vanguard organization, one of the three main trends in the communist movement that eventually united in the Communist Party of Egypt in 1958. At one point, ‘Abbas joined Darwish and another veteran communist militant, the late Nabil al-Hilali, in the leadership of the People’s Socialist Party, a small group that left the Communist Party objecting to Rif’at al-Sa’id’s iron grip on party affairs and the strategy of supporting the Mubarak regime against the Islamists.

Despite ‘Abbas’ early association with underground Marxist politics, in recent years his center has abandoned overt political demands to focus on bread-and-butter issues. This strategy has not saved CTUWS from the attacks of the Mubarak regime.

On April 25, the Ministry of Social Solidarity ordered the closure of the CTUWS headquarters in the industrial suburb of Helwan, south of Cairo. The center’s two regional offices in southern and northern Egypt had already been shut down, on March 29 and April 11, respectively.

‘Adil Zakariyya, editor of the CTUWS magazine Workers’ Talk, told a reporter, “The authorities are clamping down on the center now because they don’t know how to deal with the waves of strikes that have rocked the country over the past six months. They need a scapegoat, so they are accusing us of inciting the workers to strike. But how can they accuse us of inciting all 220 of the strikes estimated to have occurred in 2006?” [9]

The closure of CTUWS was the climax to a month of escalating aggressiveness by security forces in attempting to break up strikes and other forms of collective action. On April 15, a delegation of 100 workers from Misr Spinning and Weaving in Mahalla al-Kubra, including 36 year-old CTUWS activist and December strike leader Muhammad al-‘Attar, was prevented from traveling to Cairo to protest at the headquarters of the General Federation of Trade Unions.

Police first confiscated the license of the driver of the bus they had hired, and then physically blocked the workers from boarding a Cairo-bound train. The intended demonstration was a further step in the Mahalla workers’ campaign to resign en masse from the General Federation. On May 6, at the behest of State Security, Misr Spinning and Weaving management ordered al-‘Attar’s summary transfer to the company’s branch in Alexandria.

Many Egyptian non-governmental organizations could be shuttered on the same pretext that the regime used to close CTUWS -- that they are not properly registered with the Ministry of Social Solidarity in accordance with the extremely restrictive regulatory legislation. The ministry refused to grant CTUWS recognition as an NGO, so it registered as a civil company. Because the closure of CTUWS is perceived as a potential assault upon all advocacy NGOs, the center received strong support from 30 NGOs in a statement released at a press conference on April 24.

Representatives of over a dozen NGOs occupied the CTUWS office the next day. Hundreds of riot police gathered outside and eventually implemented the closure decision. CTUWS has reopened as a legal office of its legal counsel and program director, Rahma Rif'at, but the regime has sent its message.

Though the Mubarak regime is showing signs of desperation, internal division and weakness, lashing out at Muslim Brothers, bloggers, journalists, striking workers and NGO activists alike, the opposition is even weaker and more divided.

The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest opposition force, is embattled by a full-scale security crackdown. With its senior members facing trial in military courts, the Brotherhood has decided to avoid a direct confrontation with the regime.

While the relationship between the Brothers' leaders and the secular opposition is fraught with contention and mistrust, on the ground there are signs of gradual rapprochement among the youth who make up their respective bases.

A common strategy, however, has yet to be established. Kifaya, which showed so much promise from late 2004 through mid-2005, has been unable to mobilize effectively since the end of the Lebanon war in August 2006. Primarily a movement of students, intellectuals and middle-class professionals, Kifaya has only tenuous relations with the insurgent workers' movement. The few candidates from its labor affiliate Workers for Change who were not banned by the security forces from running in the fall 2006 union elections performed poorly.

While Kifaya and the rest of the oppositional intelligentsia remain incapable of providing the technical and logistical support required to launch an independent trade union federation in the face of fierce opposition from the regime, the strike wave has opened a channel of communication for radical activists in Cairo with those in the provinces.

Since the December strike in Mahalla al-Kubra, leftist elements in Kifaya have worked to establish links with the industrial centers in the Nile Delta by organizing solidarity trips, mobilizing media support and raising strike funds. The Misr Spinning and Weaving workers' planned trip to Cairo on April 15, though aborted by security forces, was nonetheless a landmark. Some of the strike leaders contacted leftist Kifaya activists in Cairo to ask for their support on that day, suggesting that they are beginning to consider political issues beyond their immediate economic demands, perhaps including regime change.

The organized oppositional intelligentsia still has a long way to go before it establishes the necessary credibility and grassroots support to provide political leadership. The

Egyptian left has long been dominated by a perspective that treated the “national question” and the “social question” as mutually exclusive arenas, even as leftists paid lip service to the organic link between the two.

The result was the subjugation of the demands of labor and other social justice movements to the nationalist agenda of opposition to Western colonialism and Israel’s dispossession of the Palestinians.

There is a link between US domination of the Middle East in alliance with Israel and the current strike wave, which is in great measure a response to the US-sponsored neoliberal program for Egypt.

But few opposition intellectuals have been able to translate their general opposition to Zionism and imperialism into concrete support for the one social movement in Egypt that has a mass base and a track record of measurable victories.

Under these circumstances, the mere fact that a workers’ movement has persisted and achieved as much as it has is eloquent testimony that the struggle between labor and capital is alive and well -- and likely to intensify as the neoliberal project in Egypt advances.

Endnotes

[1] The Egyptian Workers and Trade Union Watch report for the month of April (in Arabic) is available at <http://arabist.net/arabawy/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/aprilreport.pdf>. The report for the first week of May (in Arabic) is available at: <http://arabist.net/arabawy/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/1stmay.pdf>.

[2] See the statements of March 20 and April 3, 2007 at <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Home.asp?zPage=Systems&System=PressR&Press=Show&Lang=E&ID=6687> and <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Home.asp?zPage=Systems&System=PressR&Press=Show&Lang=E&ID=6836>

[3] Interview with Jano Charbel posted at <http://arabist.net/arabawy/2006/11/29/ndp-abducts-the-egyptian-trade-union-federation/>

[4] Al-Masri al-Yawm, November 12, 2006.

[5] Mohamed El-Sayed Said, “Silent No More,” al-Ahram Weekly, February 8-14, 2007.

[6] See the Kafr al-Dawwar Workers for Change statement, posted at http://arabist.net/arabawy/2007/04/18/kafr_dawwar_workers_for_change_mahlla/

[7] Marsha Pripstein Posusney, “Collective Action and Workers’ Consciousness in Contemporary Egypt” in Zachary Lockman, ed., *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 230-231.

[8] Joel Beinin, "Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand Up?" in Lockman, Workers and Working Classes, pp. 262-266.

[9] Faiza Rady, "Workers Remain Undaunted," al-Ahram Weekly, May 3-9, 2007.

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