

## **GI SPECIAL 6E3:**



[Thanks to J, USMC]

**“Some Of Us Are On Our  
Third Or Fourth Tours,  
And We Just Can’t Do  
This Anymore—We  
Really Can’t”**

**“A Baseline Fact Remains: Troops’  
Psyches Can’t Be Bought With Bikes  
Or Bacon Double Cheeseburgers (Or  
Re-Enlistment Bonuses, Or College  
Loans, Or Fill-In-The-Latest-Bait)”**

Apr 28, 2008 By Sarah Stillman, Truthdig.Com

CAMP STRYKER, Iraq—The first warning that many U.S. troops receive here in Baghdad isn’t about the rampant IEDs (improvised explosive devices), or the RPGs (rocket propelled grenades), or even the EFPs (explosively formed projectiles). It’s about the PCPs: the pervasive combat paunches.

As I wait for my C-130 flight from Kuwait to western Baghdad, a soldier tells me about a PowerPoint slide that's becoming popular in Army briefings: "Back in 2003, the average soldier lost 15 pounds during his tour of Iraq," he recounts. "Now, he gains 10."

Arriving at Camp Stryker, I get to savor the dilemma firsthand. My low-slung Army tent is pitched just down the road from a Pizza Hut, a Burger King and a Green Beans Coffee—the war-zone cousin of Starbucks that sells mocha frappes for a cheeky \$4.25. Around the corner sits a massive chow hall run by former Halliburton subsidiary KBR Inc. where troops load up on four varieties of fried meats and five flavors of Baskin Robbins. The facility is billed as "all-you-can-eat," and, trust me, soldiers do.

Traveling all the way to a war zone to report on military calorie counts may seem like the height of triviality, especially as Baghdad's security situation implodes. But Camp Stryker's butterball cuisine is more than a frivolous aside; it's an entree into the general engorgement of the war itself.

**Where, for instance, do the mountains of beef patties, pecan pies and Coco Puffs come from?**

**The Houston-based KBR farms out most of its \$27-billion government contract to Gulf states middlemen, who greet initial food shipments in Kuwait. Low-wage Pakistani and Nepali subcontractors then distribute the goods to U.S. mess halls, where even lower-wage Indians and Sri Lankans prepare them for the troops.**

**All along the route are markups galore, sometimes exceeding 500 percent.**

This logistical gravy train creates the unchecked fat on America's profile here in Baghdad.

The bloat applies to basic counterinsurgency strategy, too.

**Even after Gen. David Petraeus shifted several units out of giant bases and into Joint Security Stations — humbler urban outposts where soldiers, to use the general's words, live "among those we are trying to protect" — the average U.S. camp remains a behemoth and a glutton.**

**Over 70 percent of American troops here are classified as "support" forces, meaning they may never step outside the wire to engage in local operations or address community grievances over a customary glass of chai. These big-base bureaucrats are known to front-line soldiers as "Fobbits" — a play on the acronym for "forward-operating base" (FOB) that echoes J.R.R. Tolkien's plump, provincial milquetoasts.**

The whole scenario unfolds to the ironic soundtrack of "support the troops."

The FOB experience in Iraq, particularly on larger posts, is defined by countless privatized efforts to console and distract: mini-marts where soldiers can buy PlayStations and Harley-Davidsons; KBR recreation facilities where they can shoot pool or take salsa lessons; fast food joints where they can kick back with a non-alcoholic beer and a personalized pizza.

Such perks ostensibly make soldiers feel more at home.

But many insist that the surreal arrangement only highlights what they've been asked to leave behind.

A baseline fact remains: Troops' psyches can't be bought with bikes or bacon double cheeseburgers (or re-enlistment bonuses, or college loans, or fill-in-the-latest-bait) — especially after Gen. George Casey's acknowledgment that "the current demand for our forces exceeds the sustainable supply."

**Passing time in a rec tent back in Kuwait, I chat with a soft-spoken 28-year-old sergeant who is preparing to fly back into the caldron of Baghdad's Sadr City after three weeks of R&R in Georgia. In a room strewn with crepe paper palm trees and plastic hula skirts left over from the previous night's "Spring Fling Luau," the two of us look like attendees at a cornball junior prom.**

**But the sergeant's mind is a long way from such frivolities: He has recently lost his squad leader, and two other soldiers from his area of operations were killed a few days later.**

**Burying his head in his hands as we talk, he says: "All the Burger Kings in the world wouldn't be enough for this.**

**"Some of us are on our third or fourth tours, and we just can't do this anymore—we really can't."**

## **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. Phone: 917.677.8057**

## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

### **Marine, 21, Is Killed In Iraq**

April 26, 2008 By Daniela Deane, Washington Post Staff Writer

Jonathan Yale was close to his mother, a single parent who gave birth to him when she was only 17. And he was the kind of guy who liked to make people happy, she said.

“He was the class clown, even when he wasn’t at school,” his mother, Rebecca Yale, said yesterday. “But he also didn’t mind sitting home with his momma to watch a chick flick with a box of Kleenex between us. He was the best boy you could ask for.”

Yale, a 21-year-old corporal from Burkeville, Va., was one of two Marines who died Tuesday in Iraq of wounds suffered in combat operations in Anbar province, the Department of Defense said yesterday.

Yale, who was stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, was scheduled to come home soon, his mother said.

Lance Cpl. Jordan C. Haerter, 19, of Sag Harbor, N.Y., also died Tuesday, the Defense Department said.

Yale grew up in rural Meherrin, one of those “teeny tiny little Virginia towns where if you sneeze, you miss it,” Rebecca Yale said.

When he was little, Yale loved to hang out with his granddad “in the bush and the thicket,” his grandfather, William Sydnor Sr., said. “I used to call him ‘Wild Man.’ No matter how much he would get scratched up in the woods, he always wanted to go again next time . . . and he was only 5 or 6 then.”

Sydnor said his son, Yale’s father, lived with the boy off and on while he was growing up.

Yale became an “awesome skateboarder” and “one of the top paintball players” in the area, according to his mother. She said he was setting up a Web site for a paintball team he had founded.

Yale and his little sister, Tammy, had signed up to play in a paintball tournament in August, said Rebecca Yale, 38. Because he had missed Tammy’s 16th birthday while serving in Iraq, he made plans to take her to Busch Gardens for a special celebration when he got home.

“They had lots of plans,” his mother said. “John loved his family and his friends.”

Rebecca Yale said her son, who left for Iraq on Oct. 31, was due home in less than a month.

Mother and son were so close that when he got stationed at Camp Lejeune almost two years ago, she and his sister moved to North Carolina from Virginia to be closer to him.

“He wanted his mom and his sister down here with him so he would have some family, so that’s what we did,” Rebecca Yale said yesterday from her home in North Carolina.

A neighbor in Virginia, Kenny Ellis, said Yale was a good son, always “helping his momma.”

“He helped her pay the rent, buy a car,” Ellis said. “They were right close, and he was a good boy.”

Yale graduated from Prince Edward County High School in 2006, his mother said. He was a member of the school robotics and drama clubs. He was a thespian who liked to put on his own plays.

“He could’ve gone to New York to do his own Broadway show,” Rebecca Yale said.

Sydnor said that before shipping out to Iraq, Yale came home to Virginia to say goodbye to friends and family.

“I told him I didn’t want him to go because he was young and he didn’t know what he was getting into,” Sydnor said. “I tried to talk him out of it, but that’s what he wanted. And I’m proud of him for going into the service.”

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **FUTILE EXERCISE: ONLY 4 MILLION MORE TO SEARCH: ALL HOME NOW!**



U.S. Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit search a house near the town of Garmser, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, May 3, 2008. (AP Photo/David Guttenfelder)

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## **TROOP NEWS**

# NOT ANOTHER DAY NOT ANOTHER DOLLAR NOT ANOTHER LIFE



The casket of Army Staff Sgt. Christopher M. Hake, 26, of Enid, Okla. at Arlington National Cemetery April 8, 2008. Hake was killed March 23 by a roadside bomb in Baghdad. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

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## “The Curtains Pull Away. They Come To The Door. And They Know. They Always Know”

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd), who sent this in.]

April 30, 2008 NPR

Excerpt from FINAL SALUTE: A Story of Unfinished Lives by Jim Sheeler, The Penguin Press, May, 2008.

### **Chapter One: Every door is different.**

Some are ornately hand-carved hardwood; some are hollow tin. Some are protected by elaborate security systems, some by flapping screens. The doors are all that stand between a family and the message.

For Major Steve Beck it starts with a knock, or a ring of the doorbell — a simple act, really, with the power to shatter a soul.

Since 2003, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan intensified, Marines such as Major Beck found themselves catapulted into a duty they never trained for — a mission without weapons.

As a Marine the forty year-old had already won accolades as the most accomplished marksman of his class. He later earned two master's degrees in a quest to become a leader on the battlefield. He then trained and led Marines in preparations for conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti at the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command in Twenty-nine Palms, California. During the initial invasion of Iraq, he was finishing his term at the Air Command and Staff College, hoping to transfer quickly to a deploying unit. Instead, he was sent to Colorado, where he once again trained Marine reservists for war, expecting he would soon join them.

He found himself faced with an assignment that starts with a long walk to a stranger's porch and an outstretched hand sheathed in a soft white glove.

From the beginning, Major Beck decided, if he was going to have to do it, he would do it his way, the way he would want it done if he were the one in the casket.

Over the next two years and through several notifications, Beck made a point of learning each dead Marine's name and nickname. He touched the toys they grew up with and read the letters they wrote home. He held grieving mothers in long embraces, absorbing their muffled cries into the dark blue shoulder of his uniform. Sometimes he returned home to his own family and cried in the dark.

When he first donned the Marine uniform, Steve Beck had never heard the term casualty assistance calls officer. He certainly never expected to serve as one.

As it turned out, it would become the most important mission of his life.

As Veterans Day slid into another blank date on the calendar, the Marines drove through the snowy streets of the Laramie neighborhood. The house found them first, beckoning with the brightest porch lights and biggest address numbers on the block.

Inside the SUV, the major played out scenarios with his gunnery sergeant as if they were headed into battle. What if the parents aren't home? What if they become aggressive? What if they break down? What if, what if, what if?

The major pulled to the curb and cut his headlights. He looked at the gunnery sergeant. Then the two men climbed out of the truck, walked into the untouched powder, and heard the soft snow crunch.

From then on, every step would leave footprints.

In the basement of their home in Laramie, Kyle Burns's parents didn't hear the doorbell. The couple had spent most of the snowy night trying to hook up a new television. It was nearly 1:00 A.M. when the dog leapt into a barking frenzy.

Kyle's mother climbed the stairs from the basement, looked out the window and saw the two Marines on the frozen porch.

Go away! she thought. Get the hell away from here! Then she started screaming.

While each door is different, the scenes inside are almost always the same. "The curtains pull away. They come to the door. And they know. They always know," Major Beck said.

"You can almost see the blood run out of their body and their heart hit the floor. It's not the blood as much as their soul. Something sinks. I've never seen that except when someone dies. And I've seen a lot of death.

"They're falling — either literally or figuratively — and you have to catch them. In this business, I can't save his life. All I can do is catch the family while they're falling."

**NEED SOME TRUTH?  
CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces.

Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! ([www.ivaw.org/](http://www.ivaw.org/))

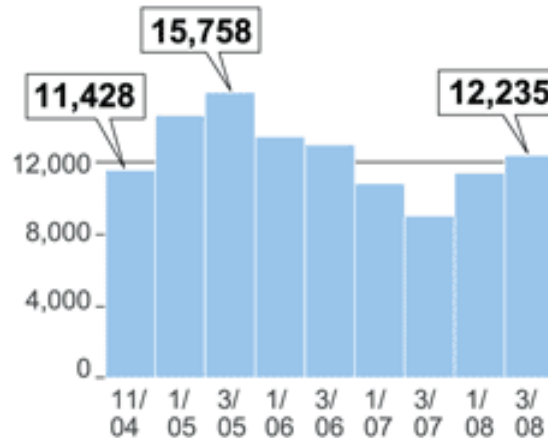
**“I Am Currently Serving Overseas  
In The Military And I Completely  
Disagree With Stop Loss”**

**“I Have Deployed And Done My Part,  
All I Ask Is That The Military Let Me  
Go In Peace, I’ve At Least Earned  
That Much”**



# “These Are The Guys Who Bear The Brunt Of It. They Just Get Put Back Into The Grinder Continually”

The number of soldiers being affected by stop-loss orders has increased despite Defense Secretary Robert Gates' directive to limit the practice.



Source: Army  
By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd), who sent this in. She writes: Today I was at the U of Wyo campus, the ROTC kids were handing out freebies and playing amateur recruiter (what a way to 'lock them in' by having them sell it to others!). So I scolded them with "The army teaches you to hate and kill. When you kill someone, it puts a hole in your heart that you can not ever heal. You live with it for the rest of your life." [As I was walking away, another student (not ROTC) said "Good job." Made my day.]

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2008-04-21 By Tom Vanden Brook, USA Today [Excerpts]

WASHINGTON — The Army has accelerated its policy of involuntary extensions of duty to bolster its troop levels, despite Defense Secretary Robert Gates' order last year to limit it, Pentagon records show.

James Martin, a social work professor at Bryn Mawr College and retired Army colonel, said stop loss is the result of an Army that's too small to meet its commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Sergeants are often most affected.

"These are the guys who bear the brunt of it," Martin said. "They just get put back into the grinder continually."

Although some soldiers say they understand the reasons for stop loss, it doesn't boost morale, said Robert Sauder, 24, a staff sergeant who was involuntarily retained in 2006

when he was preparing to leave the service. By then, he'd spent 13 months in Afghanistan. Then he spent 15 months in Iraq.

Sauder, of Baroda, Mich., said he "was pretty sour about the whole situation." Near Kirkuk, he and his comrades dodged rockets, mortars and roadside bombs. "It ended up pretty good for me and my guys. We made it back alive."

#### **Comment from a Soldier: armyrod24**

**I am currently serving overseas in the military and I completely disagree with stop loss.**

**I am currently 10 months short of separating after 10 years of service and rumors of stop loss are already rumbling. This has affected my morale and inconvenienced my family and I in planning our employment and housing issues upon separation.**

**It would be great to plan for the future without the military having there own say in it.**

**I have deployed and done my part, all I ask is that the military let me go in peace, I've at least earned that much. Please pray for our service members wherever they might be.**

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## **Resistance, Los Angeles Style**



[www.freewayblogger.com]

[Thanks to SSG N, ret'd, who sent this in April 29, 2008. She writes: This guy has been at it for years in LA (I did it once in Laramie, didn't last long. We only have one good overpass, and it's vulnerable) I check his site every month or so for new stuff. Makes me feel good inside.]

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## **FORWARD OBSERVATIONS**

### **Birth of Illusions**



From: Mike Hastie  
To: GI Special  
Sent: April 29, 2008  
Subject: Birth of Illusions

#### Birth of Illusions

The American people absolutely do not know what their military does behind closed doors. This blind spot in their sense of morality, greatly clouds their sense of reality. 'What they do not know won't hurt them,' becomes an impregnable line of defense that protects them from ever knowing the truth.

Mike Hastie  
U.S. Army Medic  
Vietnam 1970-71  
April 29, 2008

Photo and caption from the I-R-A-Q (I Remember Another Quagmire) portfolio of Mike Hastie, US Army Medic, Vietnam 1970-71. (For more of his outstanding work, contact at: ([hastiemike@earthlink.net](mailto:hastiemike@earthlink.net)) T)

## Greetings Indeed



[Thanks to SSG N, ret'd, who sent this in.]

25 April 2008 Hifructose.com [Excerpts]

Ron English and his west coast brethren the Billboard Liberation Front have subverted the advertising world with their billboard "improvements" for decades.

Hi-Fructose has received an exclusive first look at English's latest Popaganda-sized romp through Los Angeles.

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**ANNIVERSARIES:**

# **April 30, 1975: An Imperial War Ends In Defeat: After 100 Years Of Colonial Occupation, A Nation Wins Its' Fight For Liberation**



Last helicopter out of Saigon 4/30/75

[Thanks to Mark Shapiro.]

Carl Bunin Peace History April 30-May 6

The U.S. presence ended in Vietnam as U.S. Marines and Air Force helicopters, flying from carriers off-shore, begin a massive airlift, Operation Frequent Wind. In all, 682 flights went out-- 360 at night. 5,000 people were evacuated by helicopter from the military compound near Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport; about 2500 from the U.S. Embassy (1000 Americans total, the rest Vietnamese).

That morning, two U.S. Marines, Darwin Judge and Charles McMahon Jr., Marine security guards, were killed in a rocket attack at the airport. They were the last Americans to die in the Vietnam War. At dawn, the last Marines of the force guarding the U.S. embassy lifted off.

The war in Vietnam ended as the government in Saigon announced its unconditional surrender to the North Vietnamese. Vietnam was reunited after 21 years of U.S. domination and 100 years of French colonial rule.

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**Declared Bill Ehrhart, a marine in Vietnam:**

**In grade school we learned about the redcoats, the nasty British soldiers that tried to stifle our freedom. Subconsciously, but not very subconsciously, I began increasingly to have the feeling that I was a redcoat. I think it was one of the most staggering realizations of my life.**

# May 1, 1886: Noble Anniversary American Workers Create May Day



Carl Bunin Peace History April 30-May 6

May Day was called Emancipation Day in 1886 when 340,000 went on strike (though it was Saturday it was a regular workday) in Chicago for the 8-hour day.

May 1, 1890: May Day labor demonstrations spread to thirteen other countries; 30,000 marched in Chicago as the newly prominent American Federation of Labor threw its weight behind the 8-hour day campaign.

## **Troops Invited:**

**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 email [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org): Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe. Phone: 917.677.8057**

# **May 4, 1970: Dishonorable Anniversary: Unarmed Students Murdered By Ohio National Guard Scum**



Carl Bunin Peace History April 30-May 6

**Ohio National Guard troops opened fire on anti-war protesters at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine others.**

The previous day, President Nixon had announced a widening of the Vietnam War with bombing in neighboring Cambodia. There were major campus protests around the country with students occupying university buildings to organize and discuss the war and other issues.



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## **OCCUPATION REPORT**

# **Nation's Top Iraq War-Profiteers Set Up Fake Corporation Office Offshore To Duck Paying U.S. Taxes; “With An Estimated \$16 Billion In Contracts, KBR Is By Far The Largest Contractor In Iraq” “Their Whole Mindset Was Deceit”**

March 6, 2008 By Farah Stockman, Globe Newspaper Company [Excerpts]

CAYMAN ISLANDS - Kellogg Brown & Root, the nation's top Iraq war contractor and until last year a subsidiary of Halliburton Corp., has avoided paying hundreds of millions of dollars in federal Medicare and Social Security taxes by hiring workers through shell companies based in this tropical tax haven.

**More than 21,000 people working for KBR in Iraq - including about 10,500 Americans - are listed as employees of two companies that exist in a computer file on the fourth floor of a building on a palm-studded boulevard here in the Caribbean.**

**Neither company has an office or phone number in the Cayman Islands.**

**The Defense Department has known since at least 2004 that KBR was avoiding taxes by declaring its American workers as employees of Cayman Islands shell companies, and officials said the move allowed KBR to perform the work more cheaply, saving Defense dollars.**

**But the use of the loophole results in a significantly greater loss of revenue to the government as a whole, particularly to the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. And the creation of shell companies in places such as the Cayman Islands to avoid taxes has long been attacked by members of Congress.**



With an estimated \$16 billion in contracts, KBR is by far the largest contractor in Iraq, with eight times the work of its nearest competitor.

The no-bid contract it received in 2002 to rebuild Iraq's oil infrastructure and a multibillion-dollar contract to provide support services to troops have long drawn scrutiny because Vice President Dick Cheney was Halliburton's chief executive from 1995 until he joined the Republican ticket with President Bush in 2000.

Social Security and Medicare taxes amount to 15.3 percent of each employees' salary, split evenly between the worker and the employer.

While KBR's use of the shell companies saves workers their half of the taxes, it deprives them of future retirement benefits.

In interviews with more than a dozen KBR workers registered through the Cayman Islands companies, most said they did not realize that they had been employed by a foreign firm until they arrived in Iraq and were told by their foremen, or until they returned home and applied for unemployment benefits.

"They never explained it to us," said Arthur Faust, 57, who got a job loading convoys in Iraq in 2004 after putting his resume on KBRcareers.com and going to orientation with KBR officials in Houston.

**But there is one circumstance in which KBR does claim the workers as its own: when it comes to receiving the legal immunity extended to employers working in Iraq.**

In one previously unreported case, a group of Service Employees International workers accused KBR of knowingly exposing them to cancer-causing chemicals at an Iraqi water treatment plant. Under the Defense Base Act of 1941, a federal workers compensation law, employers working with the military have immunity in most cases from such employee lawsuits.

So when KBR lawyers argued that the workers were KBR employees, lawyers for the men objected; the case remains in arbitration.

**"When it benefits them, KBR takes the position that these men really are employees," said Michael Doyle, the lawyer for nine American men who were allegedly exposed to the dangerous chemicals. "You don't get to take both positions."**

To the people listed as its workers, Service Employees International Inc. - known to them as SEIU - remains something of a mystery.

**"Does anybody know what or where in the Grand Cayman Islands SEIU is located?" a recently returned worker wrote in a complaint about the company on JobVent.com, an employment website. He speculated that the office in the Cayman Islands must be "the size of a jail cell . . . with only a desk and chair."**

**In fact, the address on file at the Registry of Companies in the Cayman Islands leads to a nondescript building in the Grand Cayman business district that houses**

**Trident Trust, one of the Caymans' largest offshore registered agents. Trident Trust collects \$1,000 a year to forward mail and serve as KBR's representative on the island.**

**The real managers of Service Employees International work out of KBR's office in Dubai. KBR and Halliburton, which also moved to Dubai, severed ties last year.**

**Both KBR and the US military appear to regard Service Employees International and KBR interchangeably, except for tax purposes.**

**According to the Defense Contract Auditing Agency, KBR bills the Service Employees workers as "direct labor costs," and charges almost the same amount for them as for direct hires.**

**The contract that workers sign in Houston before traveling to Iraq commits workers to abide by KBR's code of ethics and dispute-resolution mechanisms but states that the agreement is with Service Employees International.**

Henry Bunting, a Houston man who served as a procurement officer for a KBR project in Iraq in 2003, said he first found out that he was working for a foreign subsidiary when he looked closely at his paycheck.

"Their whole mindset was deceit," Bunting said. He said that he wrote to KBR several times asking for a W-2 form so he could file his taxes, but that KBR never responded.

David Boiles, a truck driver in Iraq from 2004 to 2006, said that he realized he was working for Service Employees International when he arrived in Iraq and his foreman told him he was not a KBR employee, despite the fact that his military-issued identification card said "KBR."

"At first, I didn't believe him," Boiles said.

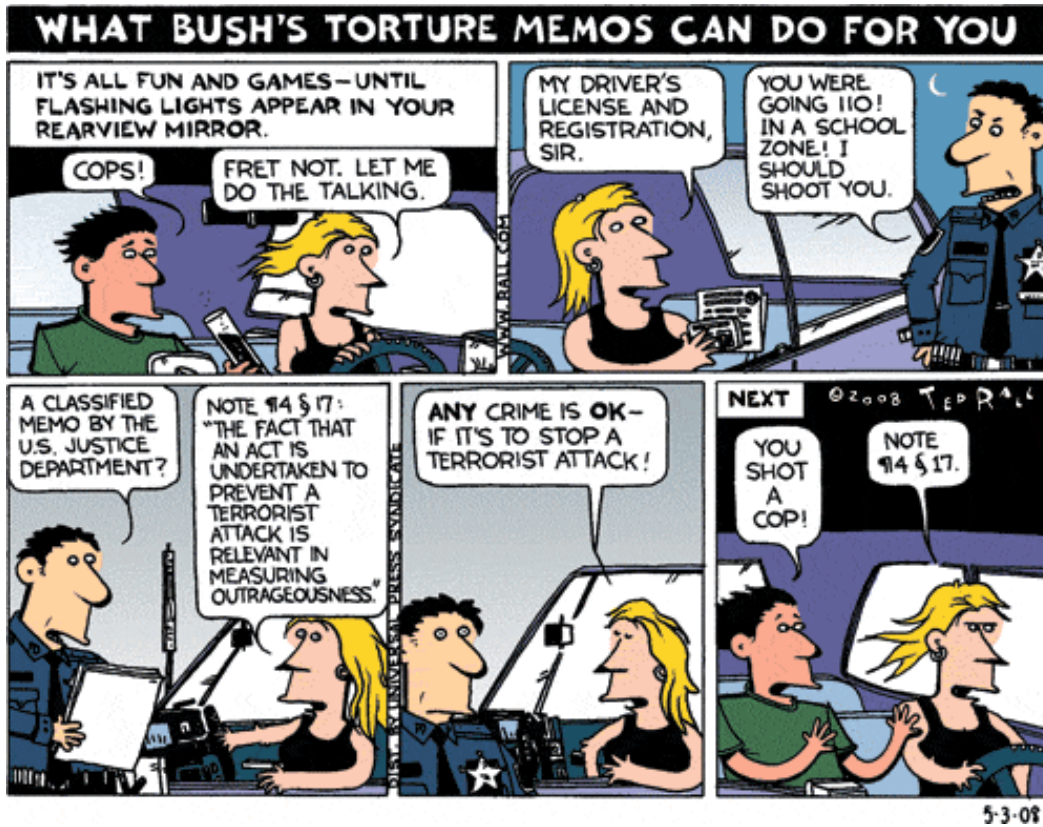
**Danny Langford, a Texas pipe-fitter who was sent to work in a water treatment plant in southern Iraq in July 2003, said he, too, initially believed that he was an employee of KBR.**

**But when he allegedly got ill from chemicals at the plant and was terminated that fall, he said, his application for unemployment compensation was rejected because he worked for a foreign company.**

"Now, I don't know who I was working for," he said in a telephone interview.

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

**DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK**



## CLASS WAR REPORTS

**“Faced With The Toughest Economic Times Since The Early 1990s, Americans Are Selling Prized Possessions Online And At Flea Markets”**

[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier & The Military Project, who sent this in.]

April 29 By ANNE D'INNOENZIO, AP

The for-sale listings on the online hub Craigslist come with plaintive notices, like the one from the teenager in Georgia who said her mother lost her job and pleaded, "Please buy anything you can to help out."

Or the seller in Milwaukee who wrote in one post of needing to pay bills — and put a diamond engagement ring up for bids to do it.

Struggling with mounting debt and rising prices, faced with the toughest economic times since the early 1990s, Americans are selling prized possessions online and at flea markets at alarming rates.

To meet higher gas, food and prescription drug bills, they are selling off grandmother's dishes and their own belongings. Some of the household purging has been extremely painful — families forced to part with heirlooms.

"This is not about downsizing. It's about needing gas money," said Nancy Baughman, founder of eBizAuctions, an online auction service she runs out of her garage in Raleigh, N.C. One former affluent customer is now unemployed and had to unload Hermes leather jackets and Versace jeans and silk shirts.

At Craigslist, which has become a kind of online flea market for the world, the number of for-sale listings has soared 70 percent since last July. In March, the number of listings more than doubled to almost 15 million from the year-ago period.

Craigslist CEO Jeff Buckmaster acknowledged the increasing popularity of selling all sort of items on the Web, but said the rate of growth is "moving above the usual trend line."

He said he was amazed at the desperate tone in some ads.

In Daleville, Ala., Ellona Bateman-Lee has turned to eBay and flea markets to empty her three-bedroom mobile home of DVDs, VCRs, stereos and televisions.

She said she needs the cash to help pay for soaring food and utility bills and mounting health care expenses since her husband, Bob, suffered an electric shock on the job as a dump truck driver in 2006 and is now disabled.

Among her most painful sales: her grandmother's teakettle. She sold it for \$6 on eBay.

"My grandmother raised me, so it hurt," she said. "We've had bouts here and there, but we always got by. This time it's different."

Economists say it is difficult to compare the selling trend with other tough times because the Internet, only in wide use since the mid-1990s, has made it much easier to unload goods than, say, at pawn shops.

But clearly, cash-strapped people are selling their belongings at bargain prices, with a flood of listings for secondhand cars, clothing and furniture hitting the market in recent months, particularly since January.

Earlier this decade, people tapped their inflated home equity and credit cards to fuel a buying binge. Now, slumping home values and a credit crisis have sapped sources of cash.

Meanwhile, soaring gas and food prices haven't kept pace with meager wage growth. Gas prices have already hit \$4 per gallon in some places, and that could become more widespread this summer. The weakening job market is another big worry.

Christine Hadley, a 53-year-old registered nurse from Reading, Pa., says she used to be "a clotheshorse," splurging on pricey Dooney & Bourke handbags. But her live-in boyfriend left last year, and she has had trouble finding a job.

Piles of unpaid bills forced her to sell more than 80 items, including the handbags, which went for more than \$1,000 on a site called AuctionPal.com. Now, except for some artwork and threadbare furniture, her house is looking sparse.

"I need the money for essentials — to pay my bills and to eat," Hadley said.

At AuctionPal.com, which helps novices sell things online, for-sale listings rose 66 percent from February to March, much faster than the 25 percent to 30 percent average monthly pace since the company was formed in September, CEO Maureen Ellenberger said. She said she was surprised to see that most of her clients desperately needed to sell items to raise cash.

For LiveDeal.com, a classifieds and business directory site, for-sale listings for January through March rose 10 percent from the previous year.

"We can definitely detect economic stress on the part of the consumer," said John Raven, the site's chief operating officer.

On Craigslist, Buckmaster said, three of the four fastest-growing for-sale categories are tied to gas — recreational vehicles like campers and trailers, cars and trucks, and boats.

Raven noted more and more listings for furniture, particularly in areas around Miami and Las Vegas and other regions hardest hit by the housing crisis.

Baughman, who runs eBizAuctions, said that over the past four months she's been working with mostly desperate sellers instead of mainly casual ones. Most are middle-class customers who can't pay their bills and now want to be paid up front for the items instead of waiting until they are sold, she said.

The trend may be hurting secondhand stores too. Donations to the Salvation Army were down 20 percent in the January-to-March period. George Hood, the charity's national community relations and development secretary, said that was probably partly because people were selling their belongings instead.

And secondhand buyers want better deals now as well, driving prices down. Secondhand merchandise online is going for 25 to 35 percent below what it commanded a year ago, estimated Brian Riley, senior analyst at research firm The TowerGroup.

"It won't hit the saturation point until the (economy) hits the bottom and right now, we don't know when that is," he said.

In Alabama, Bateman-Lee said that she only received \$30 for her TV and \$45 for her DVD player at a local flea market. She doesn't have too much left to sell, but she's going back to "sort through more things."

Her \$30 water bill is due this week.

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## **Class War In Egypt: Eyewitness Report "When Security Forces Attempted To Block The March, All Hell Broke Loose"**

April 25, 2008 Mostafa Omar, Socialist Worker

*One of the U.S. government's most important allies in the Middle East was shaken in early April by strikes and demonstrations over rising food prices. Mostafa Omar reports from Egypt on how the confrontations came about--and explains the backdrop to the crisis that spurred them.*

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THE CALL by opposition groups in Egypt for an April 6 general strike against the economic policies of the regime of President Hosni Mubarak marked a significant step for the country's new democratic movement.

Textile workers in the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kobra, Arab nationalists, moderate Islamists and socialists joined Kifaya (meaning "Enough!" the unofficial name of the loose-knit opposition movement, the Egyptian Movement for Change) and others in putting out the call to demand pay raises that could keep up with runaway inflation.

To get around emergency laws that stifle freedom of expression, activists relied heavily on the Internet network Facebook and mobile text messages to publicize the call. They asked workers, government employees and students to boycott schools, factories, banks and government agencies.

Despite widespread popular support, the call produced mixed results--due to intensive government propaganda and scare tactics, such as declaring the Mahalla strike illegal, threatening mass arrests and accusing organizers of plotting riots and violence.

On the day of April 6, Egyptians woke up to find that state security forces, riot police and much-hated hoodlums paid by the state had occupied every single major square in cities across the country. In Cairo's downtown Tahrir Square, thousands of security forces literally outnumbered pedestrians and tourists.

Despite the intimidation, a number of small but lively demonstrations took place in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt's two largest cities. College students protested at Cairo and Helwan Universities, and 300 people demonstrated on the roof of the Egyptian Bar Association in midtown Cairo, cheered and supported by thousands of pedestrians.

The number of protests and the turnout for demonstrations was much lower than organizers hoped for. Still, hundreds of thousands of workers and students across Egypt heeded the strike and boycott call by staying home. Many schools and workplaces reported lower-than-usual attendance. Traffic in Cairo, a city notorious for its nightmarish congestion, was almost clear.

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BUT IN the city of Mahalla, a historic bastion of working-class resistance in the central Nile Delta, things unfolded in a very different way.

On the morning of the 6th, all eyes were focused on the city, since the call for a general strike had been initiated by the textile workers of the Misr Spinning and Weaving Co., who have been battling the government over wages and conditions for over a year.

Despite pressure by pro-government union officials not to participate, many rank-and-file workers were ready to occupy their plant at 7:30 a.m., at the start of the morning shift. When workers arrived, however, they found it surrounded and occupied by hundreds of police. Uniformed and plainclothes officers intimidated the workers and, under threat of arrest, literally walked workers to their machines.

**By midday, government-controlled media and news agencies were boasting that the strike had failed and hailing Egyptian workers for supporting "law and order."**

**But to the government's dismay, Mahalla proved more defiant than that. At around 4 p.m., as the morning shift came to a close at the textile factory, 25,000 workers, students and others poured out of schools and workplaces for a peaceful mass march against government policies.**

**When security forces attempted to block the march, all hell broke loose.**

For hours, Mahalla's streets resembled a scene from the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

Thousands of residents battled police, throwing rocks and lobbing tear gas canisters back at them. As efforts at repression intensified, the anger grew deeper. Many burned cars, and a rail line connecting Mahalla to the Mediterranean.

By the next day, hundreds of protesters had been wounded by live and rubber bullets and tear gas.

But dozens of the security forces had also taken a beating.

**The government-run media tried to portray the mini-Intifada in Mahalla as the act of a few "thieves" and "robbers," but the independent newspaper Al Masry Al**

**Yom carried impressive pictures of mass street battles against state barbarity, not “a handful of thieves.”**

The following day, Al Yom announced the death of Ahmed Ali Mubarak, a 15-year-old student shot by the police as he watched the protests from the window of his home. In the days that followed, four other deaths caused by police shootings were confirmed.

And with close to 300 people detained in connection with the demonstrations, hundreds of angry relatives camped outside Mahalla’s police stations to demand the protesters’ release.

Al Yom also ran interviews with women who explained why they participated in the protests. “How can I feed the children and care for my mother who has a heart condition on her retirement, which is 59 pounds (\$11) a month?” one woman told the paper.

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**EGYPT, THE largest country in the Arab world and the second-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid after Israel, is experiencing a serious economic and political crisis that threatens the regime of Hosni Mubarak.**

Despite achieving rates of annual economic growth of 7 percent in the last few years, the government’s neoliberal economic policies of privatization have left up to 40 percent of the country’s population of 75 million living under the poverty line.

Recently, severe shortages in bread, the main staple for Egyptians, left millions to stand in lines for hours at a time, only to go home empty-handed. In March alone, ten people were killed in fights that broke out in bread lines.

In addition to bread shortages, ordinary people are struggling to keep up with unprecedented rates of inflation. Prices for most basic foods, such as rice and cooking oil, rose by 50 percent in the first three months of 2008.

Meanwhile, wealthy Egyptians and their multinational partners continue to amass huge wealth.

The list of multinational corporations doing business in Egypt, while not as long as in, say, India or China, is still quite substantial. Driving through the streets of Cairo, you see signs for IBM, General Motors, McDonald’s, BMW, Vodafone, Shell and dozens of other Western conglomerates.

These multinationals enjoy a skilled workforce in Egypt, yet pay starvation wages. Most Egyptian workers earn \$100 per month on average. Consequently, they find it harder and harder to put enough food on the table.

Yet while poor Egyptians can spend six and seven hours in bread lines, the rich enjoy a life of luxury. Any wealthy couple in Cairo can drive from their 5 million-pound apartment in their BMW to any of the hundreds of fancy restaurants that cater to the rich, where they can spend more than 1,000 Egyptian pounds (\$200) on one dinner.



This situation is a result of a major transformation that the Egyptian economy has undergone in the past 30 years, under both the late President Anwar Sadat and current President Mubarak.

During the 1950s and '60s, the state nationalized most large industries, guaranteed full employment, free education and health care, and subsidized basic foods. It also launched an ambitious industrialization campaign, enlisting the help of the former USSR. However, while attempting to ensure a safety net for workers and the poor, the state repressed all aspects of independent political or union activities.

After its crushing defeat suffered at the hands of Israel in the June 1967 war and under pressure from U.S.-led neoliberal economic policies, the government changed course.

Beginning in the 1970s, Sadat embarked on an open-door investment policy that began to reintegrate Egypt into the world economy under U.S. tutelage. The first act was to lift subsidies on bread and basic foods, as instructed by the International Monetary Fund.

That move was met by a mass uprising of Egyptian workers in January 1977. But the government succeeded in crushing the rebellion, while delaying the cuts only temporarily. In the absence of a strong union movement or a left, a significant number of Egyptian workers hoped that the neoliberal model would improve their lives.

In the last 20 years, the economy has gone from being dominated by a public sector that accounted for 70 percent of its operation to having an 80 percent private-sector economy. The government relaxed many labor laws and protections for workers, especially in the growing private sector. Many public-sector workers lost relatively decent-paying and secure jobs, and were told to seek employment in the private sector.

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AFTER THREE decades of privatization and the phasing out of state subsidies, public opinion has shifted dramatically in the other direction. The majority of workers today have lost faith that privatization policies would improve their lives.

More importantly, years of passivity have begun to give way to a new era in which struggle is seen as a means of winning social change.

At first, poor and landless peasants carried out a campaign of resistance against government attempts to roll back gains from Egypt's modest land reforms and restore the powers of their former landowners.

**By 2004, the industrial working class took the lead in struggles against neoliberalism. Between 2004 and 2008, there has been an average of 100 strikes per year, involving numbers close to half a million workers.**

**Textile workers, subway and rail workers, tax collectors, university professors and many others all struck for higher wages--mostly, they won these battles. Private-sector workers played a growing role in the strike movement, and women workers were at the heart of many of these successful strikes.**

In the meantime, a courageous democracy movement by lawyers and judges for real reforms and an end to fraudulent elections helped stir public sentiment and emboldened the workers' movement.

However, due to the success of the Egyptian government in repressing radical Islamist groups such as Jihad in the 1990s and because of the youth and small size of the developing new left, the Association of Muslim Brotherhood has become the Mubarak regime's main opposition force.

The Brotherhood denounces former radical Islamists who employed violent means to reach political power. It seeks, along the lines of the Islamist Welfare Party in Turkey, to achieve power through electoral means.

While critical of the government's pro-U.S. and pro-Israel stances and its repressive measures, the Brotherhood's economic and social goals differ little from those espoused by the regime. The Brotherhood shares a principled commitment to the sanctity of private property and the capitalist free-market system, albeit in more Islamic robes.

This explains why the Brotherhood at key moments refuses to go head to head with the government. Despite being denied formal legal status or fair access to ballots and with hundreds of its members languishing in the regime's torture chambers, the Brotherhood leadership aims to play the loyal opposition.

Popular anger over the deteriorating economic situation has forced the Brotherhood leadership to adjust its rhetoric recently away from key slogans such as "Islam is the solution" and more towards addressing workers' demands for pay raises and subsidies.

But while it now pays lip service to workers' grievances and formally supports popular democratic reforms, the Brotherhood leadership still refuses to mobilize its half a million-strong membership to directly challenge the government in the streets.

This was made clear during the April 6 standoff.

While the Brotherhood formally supported the idea of a strike in a statement issued on the Internet, it refused to call on rank-and-file members (who were generally quite sympathetic to the strike demands) to take part. The rationale it gave was that the Brotherhood doesn't support "civil disobedience" that could compromise law and order.

The lack of participation of younger Brotherhood members in the strike was a missed opportunity.

For example, across the street from the Bar Association headquarters during the lawyers' demonstration on April 6, I saw hundreds of men and women watching. Many of these spectators were Brotherhood supporters, and they expressed public support for the protesters and disdain for security forces. Yet they felt ambivalent about taking part in the strike, as their leadership continued to waffle.

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THE EGYPTIAN government claims that the economic crisis is solely the result of a steep rise in food prices internationally.

But the reality is different. As other countries in Asia and South America have experienced, rising poverty is the consequence of the failure of neoliberal and privatization policies to improve workers' lives. While the government might be able to stabilize the bread situation, the deeper issues aren't about to go away.

Moreover, the government has been forced to grant concessions to striking workers in the hope of stemming the tide. These concessions reflect the regime's vulnerability and, at the same time, are emboldening more workers to strike and protest.

Mahalla is a case in point.

On April 8, Mubarak announced a bonus of a month's pay for the Misr textile workers for not striking on April 6 and a 15-day grant for all textile workers.

So the next day, 1,000 angry workers at the El Nasr Company for Spinning and Weaving occupied their factory to demand the month's pay bonus, in parity with Misr workers. "We learned that striking is the only way to win our demands," a strike leader told Al Masry Al Yom.

**As the popular anger and strikes play out and the government races to find ways to buy time, one thing is certain: one of the pillars of U.S. domination in the Middle East is in for trouble.**

**Popular anger at social injustices and poverty among Egyptians is compounded by bitter resentment at the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Israel's slow genocide against the Palestinians.**

In Mahalla, protesters made a connection between their struggle and that of the Palestinians--confronting riot police with stones, they chanted: "Allah, Allah, Allah. This is not Ramallah," in reference to the Palestinian city in the occupied West Bank.

These sentiments have begun to find all kinds of expressions. Popular movies and soap operas gain great applause when they tackle the question of Israeli and U.S. arrogance in the region.

Even on previously apolitical sports programs, commentators ask why the U.S. media pay attention only to Chinese human rights violations and continue to ignore the plight of the Palestinians.

**It would be an exaggeration to describe the events unfolding in Egypt as a storm. Yet they could represent the first stages of one.**

In these circumstances, the Egyptian left has a great opportunity to deepen its connections and roots among workers and build a true democracy movement that could reshape the region based on making people's needs the priority, not the interests of the U.S. and Israel.

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