

GI SPECIAL 6L15:



Steve Bell

Shoes: “Such A Simple Act For So Much Effect”

17 & 19 Dec 2008 By SSG N (ret'd)

Yes, there is objection because throwing things are an act of violence, but Mr. al-Zaidi expressed the rage of the world when he let fly with his foot wear.

Such a simple act for so much effect.

I think the shoe throw was a change point in attitude both in Iraq and stateside. Really good response to our weekly demonstration on Friday.

This is a comment I picked from the NY Times list of the best comments they've received on the incident:

"The AP reported on 4-11-03 that US troops entered Baghdad, marched to the Al Rashid Hotel, and dug up a mosaic of George Herbert Walker Bush placed on the floor as an insult.

"It appears that the 'freedom of speech' exercised by Iraqis was so offensive to our leaders that our first mission was to remove those tiles and lay tiles with a likeness of Saddam Hussein in the lobby of the battered hotel.

"Instead of forcing soldiers to surf a la APOCALYPSE NOW, our soldiers were reportedly asked to lay tile. Mission accomplished.

"Over five years later, President Bush laughed off the grave Arab insult of shoes flying toward him, joking, 'All I can report is it is a size 10.' How far we've come. In five years, we went from planning assaults against free speech to calling assaults free speech. We reap what we sow."

"— Mark Paladin"

MORE:

Orders Come In For 300,000 Pairs Of Shoes Thrown At Bush; "Around 120,000 Pairs Have Been Ordered From Iraq" "An Outpouring Of Support For Zaidi's Act"

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in, with a shitload of the cartoons below.]

22 December 2008 Robert Tait in Istanbul, Guardian News and Media Limited

Their deployment as a makeshift missile robbed President George Bush of his dignity and landed their owner in jail. But the world's most notorious pair of shoes have yielded an unexpected bonanza for a Turkish shoemaker.

Ramazan Baydan, owner of the Istanbul-based Baydan Shoe Company, has been swamped with orders from across the world, after insisting that his company produced the black leather shoes which the Iraqi journalist Muntazar al-Zaidi threw at Bush during a press conference in Baghdad last Sunday.

Baydan has recruited an extra 100 staff to meet orders for 300,000 pairs of Model 271 - more than four times the shoe's normal annual sale - following an outpouring of support for Zaidi's act, which was intended as a protest, but led to his arrest by Iraqi security forces.

Orders have come mainly from the US and Britain, and from neighbouring Muslim countries, he said. Around 120,000 pairs have been ordered from Iraq, while a US company has placed a request for 18,000.

A British firm is understood to have offered to serve as European distributor for the shoes, which have been on the market since 1999 and sell at around £28 in Turkey. A sharp rise in orders has been recorded in Syria, Egypt and Iran, where the main shoemaker's federation has offered to provide Zaidi and his family with a lifetime's supply of shoes.

To meet the mood of the marketplace, Baydan is planning to rename the model "the Bush Shoe" or "Bye-Bye Bush".

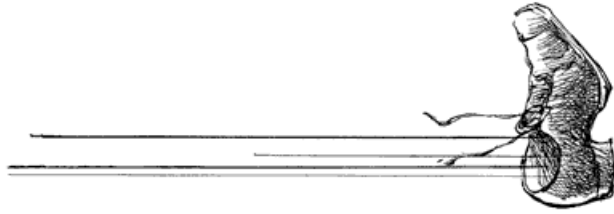
"We've been selling these shoes for years but, thanks to Bush, orders are flying in like crazy. We've even hired an agency to look at television advertising," he said.

Zaidi has been in custody since the shoe-throwing incident, amid has been badly beaten.



Steve Bell



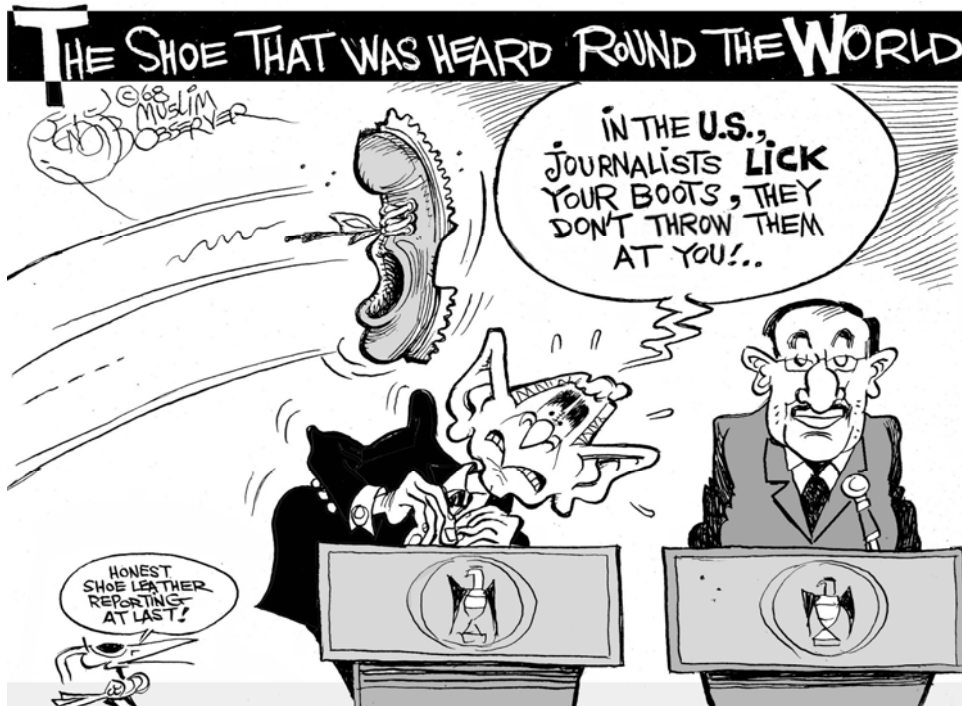


Tribune Media Services
© 2003

"WE WILL BE GREETED AS LIBERATORS. THE IRAQIS WILL THROW FLOWERS..." DICK CHENEY

Bill Day The Commercial Appeal
and the Memphis Press-Scimitar





MORE:

Journalists At Bush Press Conference In Afghanistan Ordered To Remove Shoes



December 16, 2008 Daily Times Monitor

LAHORE, PAKISTAN:

Reporters attending a joint press conference of United States President George W Bush and Afghan President Hamid Karzai were asked to remove their shoes to avoid any 'untoward incident', a private TV channel reported on Monday.

A French reporter said that prior to the press conference, Afghan president's spokesman Saimick Herwai appealed to Afghan reporters to give respect to the US president and address him as 'his excellency'.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Marine Killed In Anbar

22 December 2008 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory
RELEASE No. 20081222-07

KARMAH, Iraq – A Multi National Force – West Marine died Dec. 21, as the result of wounds received in action when he was attacked by an enemy force in al-Anbar province.

**The Traitor Odierno Announces He
Will Defy Status Of Forces
Agreement And Occupy Basra
With Combat Troops:
Using The Royal “We,” He Says “We
Think It’s Important To Maintain
Some Presence”
“He Will Make A Decision About The
Future Role Of American Troops In Early
Spring”**



Two for your money: The face of the enemy foreign *and* domestic: REUTERS/Scott Olson/Pool

21 December 2008 AP

BASRA, IRAQ - The top U.S. general in Iraq says American troops will move into southern Iraq early next year to replace departing British forces.

The news comes as Iraq's parliament again rejected a draft law requiring all foreign troops other than Americans to depart before the end of July 2009. Britain says its 4,000 troops will withdraw from the southern port city Basra by the end of May.

Army Gen. Ray Odierno, the overall commander of U.S. and allied forces in Iraq, said late Saturday he is considering moving either a brigade or division headquarters - about 100 personnel - as well as an undetermined number of combat troops to Iraq's second-largest city.

Odierno said he has not talked with anyone on Obama's transition team.

"We think it's important to maintain some presence down here just because we think Basra is an important city, and we think it's important to have some oversight here," Odierno said in Basra shortly after being briefed by British Maj. Gen. Andy Salmon about the area's stability.

The top U.S. general in Iraq said he will make a decision about the future role of American troops in early spring to allow enough time to address any violence that might arise from January's provincial elections.

NEW GENERAL ORDER NO. 1: PACK UP: GO HOME



U.S. soldiers in Diyala province August 7, 2008. REUTERS/Andrea Comas

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Royal Marine Killed In Nad-E-Ali

21 Dec 08 Ministry of Defence

It is with great sadness that the Ministry of Defence must confirm that a Royal Marine from the Commando Logistics Regiment Royal Marines was killed on the morning of Sunday 21 December 2008 in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

The Royal Marine was killed as a result of an explosion in an area to the north west of Lashkar Gah. He was taking part in a routine move, following operations in the district of Nad-e-Ali.

Lack Of Proper Combat Equipment Killing UK Troops

21 Dec 2008 Thomas Harding, Defence Correspondent, and Jon Swaine, Telegraph [UK] [Excerpts]

Despite contributing just over 8,000 troops to the total foreign force of more than 50,000 in the country, the British have suffered 13 dead since November 1.

Col Stuart Tootal, who commanded the paratroopers of Helmand Task Force in 2006, said the most intense fighting in Afghanistan was in the south.

"We need to recognise the dangerous nature of the environment but we could reduce these casualties if we had the right equipment such as helicopters and properly protected vehicles. That is a really important aspect that needs to be addressed."

TROOP NEWS

Pentagon Pro-Troop Group Misspent Millions, Report Says: “Not To Help The Troops, The Inspector General Says, But To Help Itself”



Photo: DoD

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in. She writes: Oh, boy! Captain America! Spiderman! We support our troops! Can't you see it? Everything is corrupt, even our support. Oh, phooey.]

December 12, 2008 By Noah Shachtman, Wired.com [Excerpts]

A Defense Department project, supposedly designed to support U.S. troops, was used instead to channel millions of dollars to personal friends and allies of its chief.

The "America Supports You," or ASY, program was led in a "questionable and unregulated manner," according to a Department of Defense Inspector General report, obtained by Danger Room. At least \$9.2 million was "inappropriately transferred" by the project's managers.

Much of that money served only to further promote ASY, instead of assisting servicemembers.

In 2004, the office of then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld set up ASY as a six-month effort to showcase the U.S. public's backing for the troops and their families.

In time, however, the program grew. Pro-troop rallies were organized. Special wristband and dog tags were made. Special-edition comic books were printed up. Processions were held on the National Mall, on the 9/11 anniversary. Sesame Street characters were enlisted to make DVDs that encouraged families with young children to talk about overseas deployments. America Supports You became a kind of umbrella group for all sorts of charity-related work for service members and military families.

Meanwhile, ASY began to spend millions — not to help the troops, the Inspector General says, but to help itself.

"Instead of focusing on its primary mission of showcasing and communicating support to the troops and their families, the ASY program focus (turned to) building or soliciting support from the public," the Inspector General's report notes.

In 2006 and 2007, for instance, more than \$600,000 was spent ginning up support for America Supports You among schoolchildren. Another \$165,000 went to a pro-ASY concert aboard the USS Intrepid, docked on Manhattan's west side. And \$15,000 went to actor and musician Gary Sinise's "Lt. Dan Band" to play a separate show. The report calls all of these "questionable and unregulated actions."

By mid-2007, allegations began to surface that the Pentagon official in charge of the program, Armed Forces Information Service chief Alison Barber (pictured, left, above), was improperly redirecting millions of dollars in public funds.

From fiscal years 2004 to 2007, the Inspector General's report notes, Barber funneled \$8.8 million in contracts to the public relations firm Susan Davis International — to set up the myriad events, and to promote the ASY "brand."

The work was incredibly lucrative; Davis' executives made as much as \$312,821 to \$662,691 per year. "Paying a public relations contractor annual salaries approaching three-quarters of a million dollars does not appear to be a cost-effective means to support the ASY program and the war fighter," the report observes.

But what made it even harder to stomach was that Davis was a friend of Barber's, and a well-known Republican operative, according to former Defense Department lawyer Diane Beaver. Another half-million went to media consultant Mitch Semel, for web work.

The Department of Defense's Inspector General had already launched investigations into financial wrongdoing and organizational mismanagement at America Supports You, the Armed Forces Information Service, and the Defense' Secretary's public affairs office. In October 2007, the Inspector General widened its review to include Stars & Stripes.

Barber is no longer at the Pentagon. Two months ago, she abruptly resigned as the heads of both American Supports You and of Defense Media Activity, the new organization that oversees Stars & Stripes.

**“Veterans Are Being Kicked To
The Curb And Abandoned”
Free Legal Services For OIF & OEF
Service Members & Veterans Facing**

Administrative Separation Or A Mental Or Physical Evaluation Board: Also Help For Veterans Who Have Received An Inappropriate Discharge Or Disability Rating, Or Are Having Difficulty With A Claim With The VA For Disability Compensation, Or A Claim For Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance Benefits”

[Thanks to Ward Reilly, Veterans For Peace]

They also help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have received an inappropriate discharge or disability rating, or are having difficulty with a claim with the VA for disability compensation, or a claim for Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance benefits.

December 3, 2008 Lawyers Serving Warriors: National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP)

WASHINGTON – Legal eagles are descending into the emerging healthcare crisis over how injured and disabled veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are treated through a new program called Lawyers Serving Warriors™.

Organized by the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), Lawyers Serving Warriors™ offers free legal help to active duty personnel who served in Iraq or Afghanistan and are facing administrative separation, or going through a mental or physical evaluation board. They also help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have received an inappropriate discharge or disability rating, or are having difficulty with a claim with the VA for disability compensation, or a claim for Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance benefits.

With several cases already under way, Lawyers Serving Warriors™ is planning to amplify its efforts over the next year and expects to assign hundreds of cases to attorneys from high-dollar law firms wanting to help for free.

Attorneys wanting to participate in the project will attend a satellite broadcast training in 15 locations around the country today to learn the ins and outs of the military disability and discharge system, and how to work with their active duty and veteran clients, many of whom are suffering from mental health injuries and in dire need of better healthcare than a strained and antiquated VA can provide.

The VA takes an average of 177 days to decide a benefits claim. But if the claim is initially denied and the veteran appeals, it can take years to resolve the appeal. Meanwhile, the veteran waits, without benefits. In February 2008, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported about 392,000 claims were pending before the VA.

“Lawyers Serving Warriors™ is designed to ensure that our nation keeps its pact to care for its active duty personnel and veterans when they are injured and disabled due to their military service in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF),” said Bart Stichman, co-executive director of NVLSP.

“A wounded service member being evaluated through a mental or physical evaluation board will be well-served by having an attorney at his or her side who can advocate for healthcare and monetary benefits.”

In several cases, noted Stichman, he has been contacted by OEF/OIF veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who have been administratively separated from the military, instead of being treated for PTSD.

This means they receive no military disability benefits, and no military healthcare for the rest of their lives.

“In effect, these veterans are being kicked to the curb and abandoned by the country they swore an oath to protect and defend. That is unconscionable and unacceptable,” said Stichman.

One in five veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD or major depression, according to a study by the RAND Corporation announced in April 2008. With 20 percent of our returning military service members affected, that amounts to 300,000 people needing help, yet only a little more than half have sought treatment.

OIF and OEF veterans seeking help from Lawyers Serving Warriors™ are urged to visit the website at www.lawyerservingwarriors.com and submit information through the “Request Free Legal Help” button on the left side of the screen.

More information is available at www.lawyerservingwarriors.com

ABOUT NVLSP

The National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) is an independent, nonprofit veterans service organization that has been serving active duty personnel and veterans since 1980. NVLSP strives to ensure our nation honors its commitment to our 25 million veterans and active duty personnel by providing them the federal benefits they have earned through their service to our country. NVSLP offers training for attorneys and other advocates, connects veterans and active duty personnel with pro-bono legal help, publishes the nation’s definitive guide on veteran’s benefits, and represents and litigates for veterans and their families before the VA, military discharge review agencies, and federal courts. For more information go to www.nvlsp.org.

CONTACT FOR NEWS MEDIA/PRESS INTERVIEWS: Ami Neiberger-Miller, Public Affairs, cellular 703.887.4877, ami@steppingstonellc.com

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?

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 wars, 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

Vets Group To Fly Flag Upside Down

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in, with the comments below. She writes: Lets make the issue all about the flag instead of getting the health care that's needed.]

December 18, 2008 Valley Morning Star, Harlingen Texas

HARLINGEN -- An announcement by a local veterans group that it plans to fly the American flag upside down to call attention to the lack of a veterans hospital in the Rio Grande Valley is receiving a chilly response from some fellow veterans.

Commander Josemaria Vasquez of America's Last Patrol Post 3 quotes a federal law about displaying the flag in a news release:

"The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property," Vasquez said.

"America's Last Patrol ... unanimously voted ... to display our American flag upside down as a signal that immediate action must be taken to stop the loss of life of our brothers and sisters in arms.

"America's Last Patrol believe that our comrades are dying because ... health care is being denied by our government."

In the past, America's Last Patrol has organized marches across the Valley and from the Valley to San Antonio to call attention to its plea for a veterans hospital.

Luis Perez, leader of United Veterans Organization of the Rio Grande Valley, said he agrees medical care for veterans is inadequate in the Valley.

"That's a fact," he said. "But (displaying the flag upside down) is not going to get us a hospital built. That's not the way to go about it. They need to act like adults, like veterans," Perez, a Marine Corps Vietnam combat veteran, said.

Retired Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. William Steigerwald said he also was shocked that a group of veterans would fly the flag upside down.

"I think it's wrong," said Steigerwald, a former staff member of Marine Military Academy in Harlingen.

"They could protest at the federal building up there in Austin," he said. "They could get people to write (elected leaders), call or e-mail. But putting the flag upside down ... that's not the way to do it." **[And what has standing in front of the federal building and writing letters gotten you?]**

Trying to push for a veterans hospital when a new clinic has just been built in Harlingen, with the promise it will be tripled in size, is bad timing, Steigerwald said.

The government is now in the midst of a financial crisis, he said. **[So bail out the bankers and the rest just have to suck it up, huh?]**

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Resistance Action:

Dec 19 (Reuters) & Dec 21 (Reuters) & By Hussein Kadhim, McClatchy Newspapers & December 22, 2008 Agence France-Presse & By Hussein Kadhim,| McClatchy Newspapers

A bomb wounded three policemen, when it exploded near a police patrol in eastern Baghdad, police said.

A roadside bomb killed two Iraqi soldiers in Mosul on Saturday, police said.

MOSUL - Insurgents killed a policeman on Saturday in the city of Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

A bomber used a "kiss of death" to kill an Iraqi army officer who was guarding a roadblock in the northern city of Mosul yesterday, security officials said. The bomber approached the officer with a big smile and gave him a hug as if he was a friend, then blew himself up, police officer Hamid al-Juburi said. Another two soldiers were wounded in the blast, army colonel Ahmad Saeed said.

A car bomb detonated in Rifaai neighborhood (west Mosul) targeting an army patrol around 4 p.m. One officer was killed and four soldiers were wounded.

Insurgents opened fire on a policeman in Wasiti neighborhood in Kirkuk city. The policeman was injured and he is in hospital for recovery.

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

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

CLASS WAR REPORTS

**AS FINANCIAL CRISIS
SPREADS, ANTI-GOVERNMENT
ACTION FROM BELOW
PICKING UP MOMENTUM:**

#1: Russia:

**“Popular Discontent Is Growing”
Public Anger “Spills Onto The
Streets” In Many Cities:**

**In Barnaul, Senior Citizens “Tried To
Storm The Government Building”
And Forced Government To Meet
Their Demands;**

**The Government "Can Only Control
What's Within The Moscow Ring Road,
But Beyond That Road, Their Control
Collapses"**

DECEMBER 19, 2008 By ANDREW OSBORN and ALAN CULLISON, Wall St. Journal [Excerpts]

BARNAUL, Russia -- Russia's oil-fired economic miracle is unraveling as industry shrinks and job losses mount. Now the first stirrings of social unrest have the Kremlin groping for a response.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Thursday painted a bleak picture of the economy. Since October, more than 7,500 firms have informed the government they intended to lay off people, and 207,000 workers have had their working hours reduced, he said, calling these "worrying signals."

The Kremlin has tried in state media to downplay the impact of the global financial crisis.

Yet popular discontent is growing.

Last weekend, thousands of angry residents in the far eastern city of Vladivostok took to the streets and blocked traffic to protest government plans to raise tariffs on secondhand foreign cars, which are one of the impoverished region's biggest moneymakers.

Similar protests have been attempted in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad, and further demonstrations are planned for Sunday in Vladivostok.

Public anger also spilled onto the streets this fall in the Siberian town of Barnaul, as thousands of pensioners who had lost their right to discounted public-transport tickets staged noisy protests.

The government's response says a lot about the Kremlin's growing angst over the financial crisis.

After several tense days, the pensioners got their discount tickets back, police detained younger protesters who had joined the demonstrations, and state media made little mention of the events.

The prospect of further unrest poses what could be the biggest challenge yet to the authoritarian system built by Mr. Putin.

It also foists a stark choice on the Kremlin: to stifle dissent, or to placate protesters to provide some kind of pressure outlet. For now, the Kremlin has decided on a mixture of both. But the government's options may narrow as its financial reserves shrink.

"They're incredibly scared of this," says Yevgeny Gontmakher, an economic adviser to the Kremlin. "They don't know how to operate in this environment."

Russia is just beginning to feel the impact of a slowdown that economists say could take the economy from nearly 8% growth earlier this year to near recession in the next few months.

Wage delays have already led to a strike by migrant workers on a construction site in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg.

Such social protest has been rare in recent years amid widespread political apathy and fear of government retribution.

Public panic is one of the Kremlin's greatest fears.

"I've already seen how things get worse as the result of an oil-price collapse," says Yegor Gaidar, who was acting prime minister in 1992. "It's dangerous -- but people who have not governed a nuclear-armed country don't quite understand that."

Mr. Putin's party has told lawmakers to report layoffs in their regions, and a draft law would oblige employers to warn the government of problems that might trigger job or salary cuts.

The Kremlin has recently begun to talk publicly about the financial crisis. Before, it was seldom mentioned on state TV.

Members of a Kremlin advisory body that monitors the media say officials told journalists not to use the word "crisis." Last month, regulators chastised Moscow's daily Vedomosti newspaper after it printed an article examining the potential for social unrest, the editor, Elizaveta Osetinskaya, says.

This fall, Barnaul, an ailing Siberian industrial hub some 2,000 miles south of Moscow and one of the last regions to benefit from the oil boom, became one of the first to feel the crisis.

As the credit crunch poisoned Russia's economy, supply chains broke down on a lack of cash and trust, and orders dried up at the town's factories, which churn out diesel engines, heavy machinery and tires.

Three months ago, workers say, several factories sent workers home on reduced salaries until better times. Government data show over 1,000 workers in the region are in the process of being laid off; opposition lawmakers say hundreds more layoffs are likely.

In late October, when authorities revoked subsidized transport tickets for more than 200,000 pensioners in Barnaul, they gave no warning or explanation. When the pensioners -- among the poorest groups in Russian society -- learned the tickets were being axed, they panicked.

On Oct. 26, about 1,500 gathered in front of the regional government building to protest, according to people who attended. The pensioners blocked the town's main thoroughfare, Lenin Avenue, for three hours, and only dispersed after a local government official invited a few of the leaders inside for a chat, promising the tickets would be reinstated.

Still, protesters came back the next day. This time, they numbered only a few hundred but demanded the resignation of the local Kremlin-appointed governor, Alexander Karlin.

In a third protest, a crowd of 2,000 again blocked Lenin Avenue as regional lawmakers debated the decision to do away with the discount. Some demonstrators tried to storm the government building, but police lines held. The governor tried to calm the crowd, but was forced to retreat.

Eventually, the government decided pensioners could keep their discounted transport tickets, while a new system allowing them to choose between cash payments and free transport passes is introduced.

Spokesmen for the local parliament and regional government said that the unrest came about because of a "misunderstanding" and a government failure to adequately explain the reforms to welfare benefits.

But political opponents believe remote regions and towns like Barnaul are the Kremlin's Achilles' heel.

"They can only control what's within the Moscow ring road," says Vitaly Boldakov, a left-wing activist in Barnaul.

"But beyond that road, their control collapses."

MORE:

#2: China: “A Population Increasingly Upset With Job Losses And A Widening Gap Between Rich And Poor” “In Recent Weeks, Worker Protests Have Appeared To Gain Traction”

DECEMBER 19, 2008 By JASON LEOW, Wall St. Journal [Excerpts]

BEIJING -- China's Communist [translation: capitalist] Party leaders, meeting Thursday to celebrate 30 years of market-driven [translation: capitalist] economic strategy, promised more liberalization but warned that an economic slowdown threatened gains and created the need to guard against instability.

"Nothing can be done without stability," said Chinese President Hu Jintao, who is also head of the party, speaking in the Great Hall of the People. He said economic development was key to achieving "enduring peace and stability."

Today, however, Mr. Hu and his government are faced with slowing growth and a population increasingly upset with job losses and a widening gap between rich and poor.

Mr. Hu's calls for "stability" appeared to indicate some anxiety about popular unrest. Across China, protests against local officials and poor labor conditions have gone on for years, but in recent weeks, worker protests have appeared to gain traction.

MORE:

**China: More:
“Rising Public Unrest Has
Bubbled Up In A Series Of Labor
Strikes Across The Country”
"It's Increasingly Untenable To View
Strikes As Unacceptable, There Are
Simply Too Many Of Them And They
Are Everywhere Now"
“Dumbfuck Officials Manages To Insult
Everybody”**

DECEMBER 22, 2008 By SHAI OSTER, Wall St. Journal [Excerpts]

CHAOZHOU, China -- As China's economy stalls, rising public unrest has bubbled up in a series of labor strikes across the country.

A strike by nearly 8,000 taxi drivers in the southwestern city of Chongqing in early November helped spark the recent wave.

Soon after, strikes spread across the country among taxi drivers and workers in sectors from refrigerated food to teaching, with similar results.

The surge in bankruptcies and layoffs has led to an increase in labor arbitration cases in Guangzhou. According to China Daily, a government-owned newspaper, there have been 60,000 cases so far this year, twice the previous year's rate.

That's played a part in spurring the protests and an implicit recognition that workers need some kind of independent representation.

But few have been widely publicized or involved quasi-recognition of independent worker representatives, like the recent taxi-driver strikes have. The country has one official

union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, but it is government-run and has little independence.

Efforts at setting up true unions have always been crushed. Recent protests show that moves in that direction are being tolerated to some extent.

In the southern city of Chaozhou, an export-reliant region that has been especially hard hit by the global economic slowdown, taxi drivers last month decided to hold their own strike after reading newspaper accounts of the events in Chongqing.

On Nov. 17, licensed cab drivers in Chaozhou blockaded city hall, demanding a crackdown on fare-grabbing gypsy cabs and high management fees. The drivers, mostly migrant workers from poorer inland provinces, circulated a list of demands and appointed representatives.

Unsatisfied with the government's response, the taxi drivers struck again 10 days later. More workers turned out this time, and some of the protests turned violent, as strikers damaged cars and clashed with police.

But instead of cracking down, authorities offered taxi driver representatives, including Chen Guoyue, a 24-year-old from Anhui province, a face-to-face meeting. The town's mayor promised to meet some of their demands, including clamping down on unlicensed competition and stopping the expansion of the city's taxi fleet.

However, not all the drivers' wishes were met. Mr. Chen's application to organize an independent taxi-drivers association and a Web site was denied. The government said it would set up an association for drivers but didn't give details.

"It's increasingly untenable to view strikes as unacceptable, there are simply too many of them and they are everywhere now," says Robin Munro, research director at Hong Kong-based labor-rights group China Labour Bulletin. "They're happening whether they're legal or not."

Chinese officials have signaled their new thinking in official statements. "Strikes are just like quarrels between a husband and wife and shouldn't be taken too seriously," said Wang Tongxin, vice-chairman of the Shenzhen branch of the government-run trade union association, according to a report of a speech published in a local newspaper early this summer.

Another reason for the new wave of protests in China is new regulations in certain cities that make it easier to strike. Shenzhen, a special economic zone near Hong Kong, pioneered many of the reforms that transformed China's economy, and has been leading the way since November with new regulations that strengthen workers' rights and legalize collective bargaining.

#3: Argentina:

50,000 March Against Hunger; “The Problem Is The Government; It Doesn’t Want To Re-Distribute Wealth. The Debt It Must Pay Is Its Debt To The People Of Argentina, The Debt Of Hunger, Poverty And Unemployment”

17 December 2008 Written by Fionuala Cregan, Upside Down World [Excerpts]

By early evening the square in front of the Government Palace in Buenos Aires was packed beyond capacity. And yet the people kept on coming. They crammed into the streets and avenues around the square - rows upon rows of them: children, teenagers, students, mothers, fathers, workers, the unemployed and the elderly.

They were from trade unions, social movements, organizations of relatives of the “disappeared,” student groups, political groups, social workers and many more. Some had never met nor marched together before but on the December 12th they united under a common banner and with drums, fireworks, flags, puppets and chants sent a clear message to the Government of Argentina: Hunger is a Crime.

The March was convoked by National Popular Children’s Movement (Movimiento Nacional de los Chicos del Pueblo, MCP), which for the past six years has been mobilizing organizations nationwide behind its “Hunger is a Crime Campaign.”

This year marked the largest to date with well over 50,000 participants representing various provinces and diverse organizations throughout Argentina.

The march comes in the context of brutal threats and attacks against the MCP as well as anger at a predicted increase in unemployment, poverty and hunger as a result of the global economic crisis.

The march also comes as Argentina commemorates 25 years of democracy. In 1983, in the very same square in front of the Government Palace, the brutal military dictatorship which “disappeared” 30,000 people was brought to an end, and the first democratically elected President assumed power.

“What we have seen since ‘democracy’ in Argentina is a continuation of the pillaging of our wealth. The neoliberal economic policies imposed by the Military Generals have continued up until today. These policies introduced poverty, hunger and exclusion into Argentina,” says founder of the MCP Alberto Morlachetti.

“How can it be that in Argentina – a country which is rich and fertile – the majority of its young people go hungry?”

The statistics indeed are alarming. Poverty in Argentina – once one of the world's wealthiest nations – has been steadily increasing over the past two decades. [I]t is estimated today that of a population of 40 million, 14 million people live on or below the poverty line.

Most worrying however is the “young face” of poverty in the country. Half of the poor—in other words 7 million – are under the age of 18.

Two million of these are malnourished and each day 25 children – mostly newly born - die from hunger. That is over 9,000 preventable deaths per year.

It is in the face of these statistics that social justice activists founded the MCP.

The movement consists of hundreds of organizations nationwide, from cooperatives and children's homes to kindergartens working on all aspects of childhood development. MCP launched the “Hunger is a Crime Campaign” in 2002 with the aim of raising awareness of and denouncing child poverty in the country.

In the past six years, the marches organised by the campaign, have crossed over 4,500km of the country and, according to Morlachetti, have “touched the conscience of Argentinesans”

“Our condemnation of hunger is so right and just, it has had an impact. We are condemning the fact that 25 children die a day in a country which is rich with food and so any child that dies of hunger has effectively been murdered,” he says, while emphasising that “our campaign is against hunger, but fundamentally it is a campaign against the system that generates hunger – capitalism.

“It is a serial killer, it is killing children every day.

“As a system, capitalism will continue to produce poverty and to kill children just as it did yesterday and just as it did today. The only way of eradicating hunger, is to fight capitalism and that is at the centre of our campaign.”

The campaign has been so successful, however, that it has also had an impact totally unanticipated by the organisers - threats and repression.

In the past eight months, seven young people associated with the MCP have been attacked and/or kidnapped in the province of Buenos Aires.

The first attack took place on July 24th of this year when a child in Avelleneda, a suburb of Buenos Aires, was kidnapped for a number of hours during which he was told to end the Hunger is a Crime Campaign. Similar attacks took place in September and October, after which Morlachetti and colleagues held a meeting with the Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires and the Minister for Justice to express their concern.

Nonetheless, on November 24th, 27th and 28th there were three further attacks. A young woman and two young men respectively were kidnapped, drugged and left unconscious in different parts of the city. One of the victims is suffering from kidney damage and the other from severe mental trauma.

“The attacks hurt us, they demoralize us, they create fear,” says Morlachetti, “however, what our enemy hasn’t understood is that by attacking us like this they are converting the movement into a strong political force, something we never intended it to be.

“We started out as a movement of people denouncing hunger and now what we have noticed in the past few weeks since the attacks and in the run up to the march on December 12th is that we have become a political force with the capacity to convoke and unite hundreds and thousands of people from diverse organizations. This is something our enemy didn’t calculate.”

This is reiterated by Hugo Yasky, the General Secretary of the Argentinean Workers Central (CTA), a joint organizer of the December 12th march. “A multitude of organizations from different sectors joined together today. It is the first time that we have participated in this march, and we have done so to show solidarity with the young people in the MCP. Our participation represents our commitment: we will never stop supporting and embracing our young people.”

Yasky believes the march represents a historic moment for his organization as well as for social movements in the country as it represents a new socio-political space. “All the organizations and individuals who have gathered here today must begin to construct unity, to build bridges, bridges of gold, bridges that will be unbreakable. Together we will continue to fight, to organize and mobilize throughout the country until structural poverty, exclusion and hunger have been eliminated,” he says.

In front of the 50,000 strong crowd who filled the square and lined almost 10 blocks of the avenue leading to it, Pablo Michelli, joint Secretary of the CTA, stated that with just a third of the interest that the Government was paying on its so called foreign debt, hunger amongst young people could be eliminated.

“The problem is the Government; it doesn’t want to re-distribute wealth. The debt it must pay is its debt to the people of Argentina, the debt of hunger, poverty and unemployment.

“We will continue to fight. We are here outside the Government Palace to shout out loud and clear that ‘Hunger is a Crime.’”

Troops Invited:

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe. Phone: 917.677.8057

RECEIVED

December 23, 1961: The First KIA: Vietnam



James Davis

[Thanks to LW, who sent this in.]

Carl Bunin Peace History December 17-23

James Davis of Livingston, Tennessee, was killed by the Viet Cong, the insurgents in South Vietnam, and became the first of some 58,000 U.S. soldiers killed during the Vietnam War.

Lyndon Johnson later referred to him as “the first American to fall in defense of our freedom in Vietnam.”

Over two million Vietnamese would die before the end of the war.

"Lyndon Johnson told the nation
Have no fear of escalation
I am trying everyone to please
Though it isn't really war
We're sending fifty thousand more
To help save Vietnam from Vietnamese"

“Merry Holidays”

This comes by U.S. mail from Comrade Tribune, Vietnam Veteran, Ohio, with these Holiday greetings:

**“Merry Holidays
Kwanzaa
Christmas
Chanukah**

**It’s all good –
Unless you are some poor fucker stuck in Iraqnam or Afghanistan”**

Some of you younger troops might not recall that John Hinckley was a seriously deranged individual who shot President Reagan in the early 1980’s.

Hinckley was obsessed with movie star Jodie Foster. He was extremely jealous, and in his twisted mind, loved Jodie Foster to the point that to make himself well known to her, he attempted to assassinate President Reagan.

There are news reports that indicate Hinckley may soon be released as having been rehabilitated.

You might find the following letter from John McCain that the staff at the mental facility treating Hinckley reports to have intercepted this past weekend.

To: John Hinckley

From: John McCain

My wife and I wanted to drop you a short note around the holiday season to tell you how pleased we are with the great strides you are making in your recovery. In our fine country’s spirit of understanding and forgiveness, we want you to know there is a nonpartisan consensus of compassion and forgiveness throughout.

My wife Cindy and I want you to know that no grudge is borne against you for shooting President Reagan.

We, above all, are aware of how the mental stress and pain could have driven you to such an act of desperation. We are confident that you will soon make a complete recovery and return to your family to join the world again as a healthy and productive citizen.

Best Wishes,
John and Cindy McCain

P.S. While you have been incarcerated, Barack Obama has been banging Jodie Foster like a screen door in a tornado. Just thought you should know.

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

Telling the truth - about the occupations or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance to Imperial wars 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 Veterans Against the War to end the occupations and bring all troops home now! (www.ivaw.org/)



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

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

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

GI Special issues are archived at website <http://www.militaryproject.org> .

The following have chosen to post issues; there may be others:

<http://williambowles.info/gispecial/2008/index.html>;

http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/;

GI Special distributes and posts to our website copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in an effort to advance understanding of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. We believe this constitutes a "fair use" of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law since it is being distributed **without charge or profit** for educational purposes to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for educational purposes, in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. **GI Special has no affiliation whatsoever with the originator of these articles nor is GI Special endorsed or sponsored by the originators. This attributed work is provided a non-profit basis to facilitate understanding, research, education, and the advancement of human rights and social justice.** Go to: www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml for more information. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

If printed out, this newsletter is your personal property and cannot legally be confiscated from you. "Possession of unauthorized material may not be prohibited." DoD Directive 1325.6 Section 3.5.1.2.