

Military Resistance 9L15



**Fallujah Residents Burn U.S. And Israeli Flags As They Celebrate The Departure Of U.S. Occupation Troops From Iraq:
Demonstrators Hold Up Banners And Placards Inscribed With Phrases Like “Now We Are Free” And “Fallujah Is The Flame Of The Resistance”
“The First Annual Festival To Celebrate The Role Of The Resistance”**





Fallujah residents burn U.S. and Israeli flags and demonstrate in celebration of the departure of US troops from Iraq, on December 14, 2011. AFP/Getty Images

[Thanks to David McReynolds for posting.]

Dec 14, 2011 Agence France-Presse & Dec 15, 2011 By Fadhil al-Badrani, Reuters
[Excerpts]

FALLUJAH, Iraq — Hundreds of Iraqis set alight U.S. and Israeli flags on Wednesday as they celebrated the impending pullout of American forces from the country in the former insurgent bastion of Fallujah.

Shouting slogans in support of the “resistance,” the demonstrators held up banners and placards inscribed with phrases like, “Now we are free” and “Fallujah is the flame of the resistance.”

Surrounded by the Iraqi army, demonstrators carried posters bearing photos of apparent insurgents, faces covered and carrying weapons.

They also held up pictures of U.S. soldiers killed and military vehicles destroyed in the two major offensives against the city in 2004.

“We are proud to have driven the occupier out of Iraq, at the cost of enormous sacrifice,” said Khalid al-Alwa, the local leader of the Islamic Party.

The demonstration, which was held in Al-Khadra Mohammediyah Square in the centre of Fallujah, was dubbed the first annual “festival to celebrate the role of the resistance.”

Ali al-Falluji's building lies with its ceiling collapsed, debris spilled over the Falluja city roadside just as the Iraqi businessman left it seven years ago when American bombs punctured its roof.

The last U.S. soldiers are finally leaving Iraq. But Falluji says he will never rebuild his business:

It must stay that way, he says, as testimony to America's violence.

Falluja, once the heart of Iraq's insurgency and witness to some of the war's bloodiest fighting, has become more than any other Iraqi city a symbol for the brutality of the war after the 2003 invasion.

Now Falluja is recalling its past, bitter memories resurfacing of lost relatives and of the overwhelming violence visited on the city on the banks of the Euphrates river.

"This scene must remain like it is as a testimony to the brutality of the Americans. For me, this scene is more beautiful than any other,"

Falluji said outside the building that once housed apartments and a car parts business.

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta flew into Baghdad on Thursday to officially announce the end the U.S. war in Iraq, staying briefly to watch American soldiers lower the flag.

A day earlier in Falluja, several thousand Iraqi residents rallied in celebration of the withdrawal. Some burned American flags; others waved Iraqi flags, and pictures of relatives lost during the years of conflict.

It took two incursions into Falluja in 2004, and weeks of house-to-house fighting to subdue the city.

"I feel how my son Ibrahim grieves. He was injured in his head by a U.S. bullet in April 2004, and it paralyzed him," said Mudhafer Ali, a retiree.

"The Americans have left, but they left us for our sorrow, pains and destroyed the future."

Now, many buildings in Falluja have been reconstructed. But while their facades are rebuilt, their side walls are still pockmarked with bullet holes.

New bridges have been constructed, but other buildings sit with collapsed roofs. Two hotels and a mosque used by insurgents to target American patrols near the river are still in ruins.

"Today I have been assured that the U.S. withdrawal is real, I feel that I breathe pure air and I feel that I am a free man," said Hamid Abdullah, a university student.

MORE:

**“We Thought The Americans
Would Bring Us A Better Life,
But They Brought Us Nothing
But Suffering”**

**“They Throw Candy At Our
Children, Then Laugh At Them
When They Fight Over It”**

**“Only Good Things Can Happen
Once They Leave”**

**“She Longs For The Days Of Hussein,
When At Least It Was Safe On The
Streets And Her Husband Had Steady
Work”**

December 17, 2011 By David Zucchino, Los Angeles Times [Excerpts]

Taha, 34, has yet to recover from the U.S. invasion and occupation.

He rebuilt his nursery, only to see it damaged year after year by rocket fire and roadside bombs. He abandoned the business in 2009, when Iraqi security forces lined the highway with massive concrete “T-walls,” the gray, monolithic barriers that now define the landscape of Baghdad and cut the nursery off from its customers.

Taha fled his neighborhood, Saydiya, now considered the most dangerous in Baghdad and still a hotbed for insurgents. He took a job as a mechanic, but longs for his prewar days as a successful businessman.

He resents the Americans who searched his home at night, terrifying his wife and young son.

“If their departure makes Iraq more secure, it’s a good thing,” he says, stepping over dusty pots and overgrown plants at his abandoned nursery. But “they invaded our city and changed everything about our country. Nothing good can come of that.”

American soldiers shot an Iraqi army captain and left his body to rot in Suhad Khadim's garden. Wild dogs feasted on the corpse.

That is Khadim's memory of the April 2003 fall of Baghdad.

And then things got worse.

The American invasion so disrupted the country that she and her family were forced to abandon their home.

Their fine house, with its rose-studded garden, is home to someone else now. The Khadim family, after fleeing to Syria, returned to Baghdad and squatted in a drafty, two-bedroom apartment in an abandoned doctor's clinic.

Once, they were solidly middle class. Now they live like vagabonds, their two boys and two girls crammed into dank, dark rooms. They live in fear of roving gunmen. They keep the curtains closed and the door locked.

Suhad Khadim blames it all on the Americans. She is a woman who speaks her mind. It is rare for Iraqi men to defer to their wives, but Jalal lets Suhad do the talking.

"We thought the Americans would bring us a better life, but they brought us nothing but suffering," she says, biting off the words.

The Americans allowed terrorists to pour into Iraq, she says.

They propped up a corrupt and incompetent government.

They insulted ordinary Iraqis and sometimes killed civilians without being held accountable.

"We greeted them with flowers, and now they laugh at us," she says. "They throw candy at our children, then laugh at them when they fight over it."

As a Shiite, she says, she expected to benefit from the Shiite-dominated government that emerged from elections made possible by the ouster of the Sunni-led Hussein regime.

But she feels diminished and powerless.

She longs for the days of Hussein, when at least it was safe on the streets and her husband had steady work.

She is not certain life will get better now, but she is convinced it can't get any worse.

"Only good things can happen once they leave," she says bitterly.

She grows angrier, waving her arms and thrusting her forefinger into the air. Her husband nods and murmurs his assent.

“Really, I feel so sorry for my country,” she says. “We have gone back 1,000 years.”

MORE:

**In Iraq, The Last To Fall:
David Hickman, The 4,474th U.S.
Service Member Killed:
“There Were Days On End Where Me
And Hickman Would Be Sitting In His
Room, Being Like: ‘Why Are We Even
Here? What Are We Doing?’”
“I Totally Agree With Hickman’s Friends
And Family Who Are Mad. We Had No
Reason To Be There Anymore”**



Army Specialist David Hickman’s unit, the 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry from Fort Bragg, performed honor guard duties for his burial at Lakeview Memorial Park on Nov. 26, 2011, in Greensboro, N.C. Photo: JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ/GREENSBORO NEWS AND RECORD -

December 17 By J. Freedom du Lac, The Washington Post Company [Excerpts]

GREENSBORO, N.C. — To find Army Spec. David Emanuel Hickman on the morning after his unit returned to Fort Bragg from Iraq, you had to drive 100 miles north, to his home town.

Up Highway 29, less than two clicks from the northeast Greensboro cul-de-sac where he grew up, Hickman was in Lot 54 in the Garden of Peace at Lakeview Memorial Park Cemetery.

Freshly turned red soil covered his coffin, which went into the ground two weeks and a day before he was due home. There were two shriveled carnations on the damp dirt. There was no marker yet, no indication that this was a soldier's grave.

Hickman, 23, was killed in Baghdad by a roadside bomb that ripped through his armored truck Nov. 14 — eight years, seven months and 25 days after the U.S. invasion of Iraq began.

He was the 4,474th member of the U.S. military to die in the war, according to the Pentagon. And he may have been the last.

With the final U.S. combat troops crossing out of Iraq into Kuwait, those who held Hickman dear are struggling to come to terms with the particular poignancy of his fate.

As the unpopular war that claimed his life quietly rumbles to a close, you can hear within his inner circle echoes of John F. Kerry's famous 1971 congressional testimony on Vietnam:

How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?

"Thank God if David is the last one to die, because that means nobody else will have to go through this," said Logan Trainum, one of Hickman's closest friends.

"But it's crazy that he died. No matter your position on this war — if you're for or against it — I think everybody thinks we shouldn't have been over there anymore."

U.S. combat operations in Iraq officially ended months before Hickman's unit shipped out from Fort Bragg in May. His platoon spent most of its deployment on "presence patrols," walking through Iraqi neighborhoods to remind insurgents that the U.S. military was still there, said Spec. Zack Zornes, who served in Hickman's platoon.

Hickman liked the military, Zornes said. "But there were days on end where me and Hickman would be sitting in his room, being like: 'Why are we even here? What are we doing?' We were just doing police work. I totally agree with Hickman's friends and family who are mad. We had no reason to be there anymore."

"The Last Time Hickman Called Home"

The last time Hickman called home was Nov. 13, a Sunday. He was at Joint Security Station Muthana, the small operating base in Baghdad that housed his platoon.

He told his family he was excited to be coming home before Christmas, according to friends.

The following day, shortly before midnight, Army officials showed up in Greensboro to tell Hickman's parents that their son had been killed by a makeshift bomb.

Exactly four weeks later, Veronica Hickman sat quietly in her living room, wearing a T-shirt with her son's military photo printed on its front.

The aftermath of his death had been a drawn-out series of emotionally wrenching events:

The candlelight vigil at the Northeast Guilford High School football stadium, where he had been a team captain and an all-conference linebacker.

The solemn Thanksgiving Day arrival of his remains. The open-casket funeral, where friends said they could not get over the swelling in his face. The ceremony at Fort Bragg for Spec. David E. Hickman of the 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.

And now, another ceremony at Fort Bragg loomed, to mark the end of the war that claimed Hickman's life. His family had been invited to meet privately with President Obama before his address to the troops.

Inside the home that Hickman's mother, Veronica, shares with his father, also named David, a withered flower arrangement was on the coffee table, with a candle from the vigil poking out of the shriveled spray.

The folded U.S. flag presented to the family at the funeral sat in a triangular wooden box at the end of the sofa; military ribbons were pinned inside, along with expert infantryman and parachutist badges.

Neither Hickman's father nor his younger brother, DeVon, was home. His wife, Calli, also wasn't there; in fact, until Hickman died, his family and most of his friends had not heard of Calli, let alone known that she had married him at a courthouse shortly before his deployment.

Olivia Pegram, a high school friend, showed up and parked near Hickman's white Chevy Impala with the radio that never worked.

"How are you?" she asked.

Veronica shrugged. "I'm just running and gunning, in and out, in and out, keeping busy."

She was watching "Gordon Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares." It was the first time since her son's death that she had turned on the TV. She'd been avoiding the news. Stories about troops coming home and military casualties were emotional triggers she did not want to squeeze.

But the news arrived anyway. Lyndsee Mabe, another of Hickman's close friends, was at the house and mentioned that a Marine from the nearby town of Ramseur had been killed in Afghanistan.

"Is that where David was?" Veronica asked.

"No," Mabe said. "Iraq."

"Oh," Veronica said, stroking her son's military ID tags. "I thought that was in Afghanistan."

But the grief always finds its way home.

The war in Iraq began in March 2003, when Hickman was a freshman at Northeast. By the time he graduated, in 2006, nearly 2,500 members of the U.S. military had died in the war.

Hickman, the son of an Air Force veteran, was a gym rat with the sort of sculpted physique that he only half-jokingly said would make the gods jealous. He also held a black belt in taekwondo. In 2009, he decided to enlist.

"He didn't sign up to get his life on track," his friend Trainum said. "He wanted to be a physically and mentally elite soldier."

"It seemed like the perfect David job," Pegram said. "It was basically a huge workout." He eventually hoped to join the Special Forces, his friends said.

When he was deployed, around Memorial Day of this year, the U.S. death toll was nearly 4,450, but the casualty rate had dropped significantly.

Still, the country remained dangerous.

Fifteen Americans were killed there in June, the bloodiest month in two years. But if Hickman feared for his life, he hardly let on, instead projecting an aura of invincibility that was notable even in the macho culture of the military.

"He always seemed like Superman," said Spec. Morgan Corbett, who became one of Hickman's best friends during basic training. "Everyone looked up to him."

Trainum said Hickman had joked about death: "He said, 'If I die, I want you to invite every girl. I want hot girls crying at my funeral.' But we never talked seriously about death or dying. We always talked about what would happen later in life. I don't know that he even thought about dying. I just know it never crossed my mind that he wasn't coming back."

One of the first things Hickman planned to do upon returning was to have a blowout party. They would get limos, book a VIP table on the roof at Greene Street Club, drink gallons of beer.

“He said we were going to have a music video night,” Trainum said. “David really wanted to live it up.”

“For The 4,474th Time In America’s Iraq War, A U.S. Service Member Was Pronounced Dead”

On Nov. 14, Hickman spent the afternoon at Camp Taji, a major base north of Baghdad, Zornes said. He ate chicken fingers dipped in barbecue sauce for lunch, bought parmesan Cheez-Its at the post exchange and suffered through “Confessions of a Shopaholic” with most of the rest of the platoon.

“It was a lame chick flick,” Zornes said. “But we all sat there and watched it.”

Just after 6 p.m., the convoy left for JSS Muthana, with Hickman in the lead truck, a heavily armored International MaxxPro. Zornes was right behind him, he said.

About 25 minutes later, Zornes said, a bomb exploded on the side of the road, near Hickman’s truck.

Helicopters swooped in to take the casualties away.

After the smoke and chaos cleared, the convoy returned to Camp Taji. At a briefing, Zornes said, the soldiers learned from an Army officer that Spec. David E. Hickman had suffered broken ribs, a shattered wrist and lacerations on his leg and face.

“And then he said he had internal brain bleeding,” Zornes said, “and that they were able to stabilize him before he left, but that when he landed at Victory Base Camp, they weren’t able to stabilize him.”

And then, for the 4,474th time in America’s Iraq war, a U.S. service member was pronounced dead.

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN MILITARY SERVICE?

Forward Military Resistance along, or send us the address if you wish and we’ll send it regularly.

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AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

LCpl. Jacob Levy Dies After Being Shot On Patrol In Afghanistan

Dec 12, 2011 Written by Teresa Ostuni, WFMY News 2

Landstuhl, Germany -- Lance Corporal Jacob Levy, a 21-year-old Marine from the Triad, died Saturday evening in Germany, his stepfather told WFMY News 2 Sunday morning.

Levy was shot in the head on Wednesday by small arms fire while conducting an unpartnered, dismounted patrol in the Kajaki district of the Helmand Province in Afghanistan.

Levy's stepfather, Kevin Sheek, said Levy was evaluated on the scene in Afghanistan and taken to Forward Operating Base Edinburgh. From there he went to Kandahar for a neurosurgery evaluation and eventually had surgery there.

After surgery, Levy was taken to a military hospital in Germany, where he passed away Saturday night.

Levy is survived by his mother, Amanda Sheek, stepfather Kevin Sheek, father Chris Levy and three brothers, Payne Sheek, 14, Elijah Sheek, 9, and Thunder Levy, 11.

Levy was originally from Greensboro and moved to Ramseur when he was 14. He was an ROTC student from seventh through 12th grades and a member of the wrestling and cross country teams at Eastern Randolph High School.

He entered the Marine Corps through the Delayed Entry Program after graduating in 2009, his family said. Kevin Sheek told WFMY News 2 Levy's death is "bittersweet, because Jacob died doing a job he was willing to die for. ... He was an awesome man and an awesome Marine."

Sheek also told said Levy was an organ donor and that "people will remember Jacob and live a long life because of him."

Levy's cousin, Tabitha Polanco, said Levy was proud of his Lumbee Indian heritage and had a fighter's spirit from birth.

"He was born a warrior," Polanco said. "He fought with his mom for about 36 hours while she was in labor. And he came out fighting and continued to do so. He was always a protector."

Characteristic of his spirit and reputation, Polanco says Levy earned the highest possible honor for a Native American: the Eagle Feather.

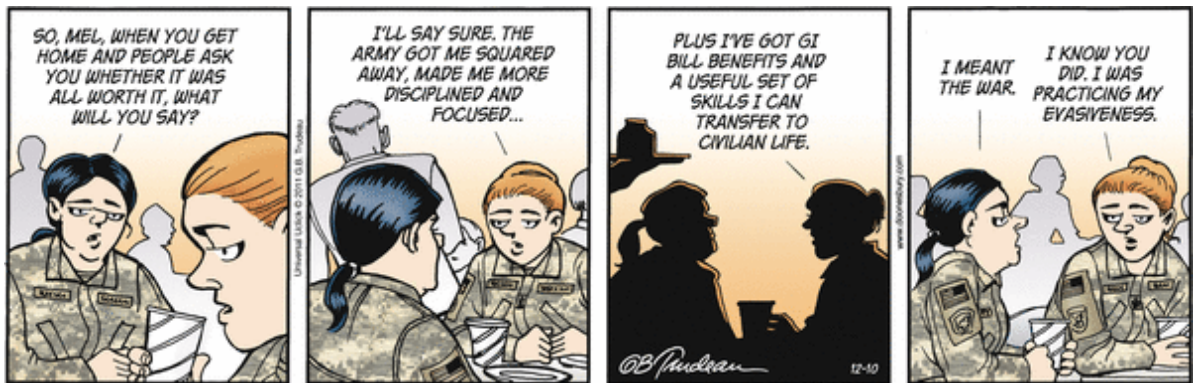
“You see someone who is making a sacrifice, you see someone who has done a good job, you see someone who is excelling,” Polanco said. “And that is the highest way we can say to them, ‘Thank you for what you’ve done. You deserve this.’”

Funeral arrangements are not yet finalized.

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

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

MILITARY NEWS



**“Many Service Members Remain
Loath To Admit They Suffer Post-
Traumatic Stress Disorder Or Have
Suicidal Thoughts”**

**“Vets Are Telling Me That If You Fill The
Form Out Truthfully And You Want To Be
A Career Soldier, Your Career Is Over”**

Dec 16, 2011 By Patricia Kime - Staff writer, Military Times [Excerpts]

Even as military officials continue to work on easing the stigma of seeking help for mental health issues, many service members remain loath to admit they suffer post-traumatic stress disorder or have suicidal thoughts, according to a study published recently in the Archives of General Psychiatry.

A review of post-deployment screening questionnaires completed by an Army brigade combat team found that those who were allowed to complete the forms anonymously reported depression, PTSD and suicidal thoughts at rates two to four times higher than those who had to put their names on the forms.

And more than 20 percent of the soldiers who screened positive for depression or PTSD said they were uncomfortable reporting their answers honestly in routine post-deployment screenings.

“Current post-deployment mental health screening tools are dependent on soldiers honestly reporting their symptoms. This study indicates that post-deployment health assessment screening process misses most soldiers with significant mental health problems,” wrote the authors, eight physicians stationed at military bases and the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, Bethesda, Md.

“The study shows that more needs to be done,” said Dr. Harry Croft, a San Antonio psychiatrist who says he has screened more than 6,000 veterans in the past decade.

“Vets are telling me that if you fill the form out truthfully and you want to be a career soldier, your career is over.”

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March and Demonstration At the Gate of Fort Meade, Maryland: For The Second Day Of Bradley Manning’s Preliminary Hearing; Marchers Send Manning Happy Birthday Greeting

By John Grant, Veterans For Peace, Philadelphia [Excerpts]



12.17.11: Manning supporters insist on not staying on the sidewalk and fill up one lane of the street on the march to the second gate. [Photo: John Grant]



12.17.11: Michael Patterson, Iraq Veterans Against The War [Photo: John Grant]

“Veterans’ Joblessness Is Concentrated Among The Young And Those Still Serving In The National Guard Or Reserve”

“Nearly 65 To 70 Percent Of Employers Will Not Now Hire National Guard And Reserve”

[Thanks to Alan Stolzer, Military Resistance Organization & Sandy Kelson, Veteran & Military Resistance Organization, who sent this in.

[Sandy Kelson writes: “Soldier: Can’t find a job when you get out of the military? Find an Occupation in a city near you. Your military skills, discipline, courage, tenacity, and team effort are needed.”]

December 18, 2011 SHAILA DEWAN, New York Times [Excerpts]

Veterans’ joblessness is concentrated among the young and those still serving in the National Guard or Reserve.

The unemployment rate for veterans aged 20 to 24 has averaged 30 percent this year, more than double that of others the same age, though the rate for older veterans closely matches that of civilians.

Over a decade of war, the requirement that companies restore reservists to their old jobs has placed a heavy burden on businesses, said Ted Daywalt, who runs VetJobs.com in Georgia.

“Nearly 65 to 70 percent of employers will not now hire National Guard and Reserve,” he said. “They can’t run their business with someone being taken away for 12 months.”

Troops Invited:

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.

-- Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”

Jesus -- A Jewish Revolutionary Opposed To Roman Tyranny:

“A Figure Of This World Who Opposes Kings And Oppressors, And Who Promises His Followers Real Material Benefits In This Life”



Jesus casting money lenders from the temple. Socialist Worker

December 14, 2011 By Phil Gasper, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

AT A forum held in an Iowa church in late November, most of the leading Republican candidates for president fell over each other to proclaim their Christian beliefs.

According to the Financial Times, “The candidates...vied to illustrate how God had led them into politics and was motivating their run for the Republican nomination.”

But how close are the views of contemporary right-wing politicians--who want to slash spending that benefits the poor and cut taxes on the rich--to those of the historical Jesus Christ?

The answer to this question will be obvious if we examine the origins of Christianity.

We have evidence that Jesus was a real historical figure not only from Christian writings such as the four gospels of the New Testament, but also from the 1st century Jewish historian Josephus and the early 2nd century Roman historian Tacitus.

He was probably born in Nazareth (not Bethlehem) around 4 BCE and was crucified by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea (one of the provinces of Palestine) sometime between 26 and 33 CE. During his life, he was a religious leader with a group of devoted followers.

Beyond that, however, we can say very little about Jesus' life with much certainty. The gospels are unreliable as detailed records of events.

The early Christians were mostly illiterate, and stories about Jesus were passed on orally--thereby growing in the telling. They weren't written down until at least 40 years after Jesus' death, and often much later. Moreover, in subsequent decades, the gospels were repeatedly edited--"three times, four times and many times" according to the 2nd century Greek philosopher Celsus.

The gospels offer two different pictures of Jesus.

On the one hand, there is the divine being who preaches salvation in another world.

On the other hand, there is a Jesus in the tradition of Jewish popular revolution--a figure of this world who opposes kings and oppressors, and who promises his followers real material benefits in this life.

There is plenty of evidence that the first of these pictures was a later elaboration.

For example, the earliest of the New Testament gospels, Mark, does not describe Jesus' birth or infancy. The story of the virgin birth is found first in Matthew and Luke, who were attempting to show that Jesus' birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, and thus that he was the messiah--the promised leader who would free Jews from the Romans. (The title "Christ" means "the anointed one.")

Luke repeatedly identifies Joseph as Jesus' father, evidence that the story of the virgin birth was inserted into the gospel later.

Luke also says Joseph was descended from King David, from whose line the messiah was supposed to come, and includes an elaborate story of a Roman census so he can claim that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, David's birthplace.

We know the story was an invention because there is no record of a census at that time, and the idea that the Romans would require people to return to their place of family origin to be counted is absurd.

In any case, the first three gospels never claim that Jesus is divine.

It is only in the Gospel of John, written last and rejected by some Christians as late as the 3rd century, that Jesus is represented as a deity.

Meanwhile, the second picture of Jesus fits with the social and political circumstances in which he lived.

Palestine was a colony of Rome from 63 BCE, ruled either indirectly by local kings under Roman control, or directly by Roman governors.

A priestly aristocracy and the very rich, the Sadducees, collaborated with the Romans.

They were opposed by the Pharisees, the mass of the population, led by rabbis. The most radical patriots were the Zealots--the poorest of poor, who had the strongest desire for a messiah.

Josephus says that Zealots continually “persuaded the Jews to revolt...inflicting death on those who continued in obedience to the Roman government...and plundered the houses of the great men.”

These revolts, often led by self-proclaimed messiahs, were all defeated by the Romans. Josephus refers to “deceivers and impostors, under the pretense of divine inspiration fostering revolutionary changes...persuaded the multitude to act like madmen.”

One of these agitators was Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. Josephus explains what happened to him:

“When others too joined the crowds about him, because they were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons, Herod became alarmed. Eloquence that had so great an effect on mankind might lead to some form of sedition....

“Herod decided therefore that it would be much better to strike and be rid of him before his work led to an uprising, than to await for an upheaval...John, because of Herod's suspicions, was brought in chains to Machaerus...and there put to death.”

All the evidence points to Jesus as one of the self-proclaimed messiahs fighting to end Roman occupation, and for an egalitarian society in which the division between rich and poor has been erased.

According to Celsus, Jesus was a “ringleader of sedition.” The Sadducees and Pharisees are repeatedly criticized in the gospels, but the Zealots are not. One of Jesus' followers, Simon, is identified as a Zealot.

And despite all the later editing, many radical statements by Jesus survive. For example: [“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” -- American King James Version]

The Kingdom of God is repeatedly said to be at hand.

According to the historian Archibald Robertson:

“The earliest strata of the Gospels...point back to a revolutionary movement led first by John the Baptist and then by Jesus...aimed at the overthrow of Roman and Herodian rule in Palestine and the establishment of an earthly ‘kingdom of God’ in which the first would be last and the last first, the rich sent empty away and the poor filled with good things and given houses and land.”

If this is what Jesus was fighting for, it is little wonder that the Romans crucified him, and that his followers were persecuted.

And, of course, it is the polar opposite of what today's Republican Party stands for. Many of the early Christians practiced a form of communism.

Acts of the Apostles tells us, "The believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need."

The roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE did away with the base of Jewish revolt. With the defeat of the national hopes of Jews, Christianity became more and more a religion not of a revolutionary Jewish messiah, but of a universal messiah whose kingdom was not of this earth.

At the end of the 1st century, Rome was defeated by Germanic tribes, preventing further imperial expansion. With the supply of slaves cut off, the empire went into slow decline. By the end of the 3rd century, it was descending into chaos. The emperors Diocletian (from 284 to 305) and Constantine (from 306 to 337) were forced to completely reorganize the empire into a society based on impoverished serfs, bound to the land, producing food for powerful landlords.

Christianity represented one of the few challenges to the status quo--it had to be crushed or co-opted. Diocletian tried repression. When this failed, Constantine tried the other tack, converting to Christianity and subordinating the Church to imperial rule.

Some Christians revolted against ideas of alliance with empire, but many saw advantages to the Church in the new situation. Most prominent of these was Augustine (354-430), the Bishop of Hippo, a city in North Africa.

Augustine formulated the ideology of a new alliance between Church and state that shaped the next thousand years of Western history. The cosmology he developed, of an eternal, infinite, perfect God, separated from a finite, degenerate earth, reflected the social realities of the late empire--an Emperor with godlike powers and subjects with no autonomy.

Augustine believed that God has subjected humanity to an ever-increasing burden of evil and misery as punishment for Adam's original sin. He held that God's justice is shown "in the agonies of tiny babies."

The bottom line was that the evils of this world had to be simply endured, an idea he borrowed from the Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers. The only hope lay in faith in salvation in the next world.

But there was also opposition to Augustine's views, and the arguments were not mere theological debating points. In Egypt and North Africa, the Donatist movement among Christians led opposition to the empire and the alliance of Church and state.

Donatist peasants and agricultural workers attacked landlords, tax collectors and creditors, freed slaves, and destroyed rent rolls and land titles. The Donatists controlled many churches in North Africa, and Rome's imperial legions were unable to defeat them on their own.

Augustine--"the hammer of the Donatists"--played a crucial role in crushing the revolt. He used the Church's resources to attack the leaders of the Donatist "heresy." The Donatists were eventually defeated by a combination of the first Catholic inquisition and imperial troops.

But the Roman victory was to be short-lived. After sacking Rome, the Vandals conquered North Africa in 430, the year of Augustine's death.

They took over the vast landed estates and forced much of the empire's population into serfdom.

According to one historian:

"With the collapse of the empire in the west, Augustine's cosmology was adopted by Christians in the following millennium. This view of a world created out of nothing, steeped in sin and misery, and rightly ruled by the harsh authority of Church and State, was perfectly fitted to the petrified society of the self-sufficient landholders, who needed neither merchants nor philosophers nor scientists.

"They required only a religion that would encourage serfs to accept their lot.

"Augustine's world, like that of the paganism the peasant previously knew, was a world with a yawning gap between heaven and earth, an earth peopled by demons and spirits, witches and devils. As Roman society retreated toward the level of primitive and impoverished agrarianism, so Augustine's cosmology retreated toward the magical, irrational world of myth."

As the Church grew in wealth and influence, it ceased to be democratic in its internal structure.

Power of bishops increased, and the Bishop of Rome became dominant over the other bishops.

Church property was no longer the common property of the Christian community, but belonged to priesthood.

The Church even opposed abolition of slavery--every parish priest had the right to have one male and one female slave. Monasteries also had great numbers of slaves, and the Church continued to own slaves into the Middle Ages.

All this was a far cry from the description of Jesus in the gospels: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands."

But the radical strand in Christianity has been revived many times in history, when social movements fighting against oppression have tried to find an ideology to justify their aims.

These movements range from the peasant rebellion in Germany in the early 16th century, led by Thomas Munzer; to the radical sects of the English Revolution in the

following century; to the role of Black churches in the civil rights movement and liberation theology in the recent past.

Socialists identify with all these radical movements, but we do not do so uncritically. The history of Christianity, including the periodic revival of radical currents within it, actually illustrates very well what Marx argued about religion.

Here are Marx's famous words from his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right:

"Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

"The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up the condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion."

Religious beliefs have social causes.

Their appeal lies partly in the fact that they offer a solution--albeit an imaginary one--to the suffering and exploitation of class society. It follows that religious beliefs will likely exist as long as class society exists and will only disappear if class society--"the condition which needs illusions"--is abolished by socialist revolution.

But the elimination of religion certainly does not mean its suppression by the state. Engels argued vigorously against those who argued for the suppression of religion during the Paris Commune of 1871, pointing out that the result would merely strengthen religion.

Rather, as the inequalities characteristic of class societies are progressively removed, the need for religion will gradually diminish.

Religion, like the state, will wither away. But both now, and under workers' power, socialists have to defend the freedom to practice religion as a fundamental right.

Religion is at the same time "the expression of real distress and a protest against real distress." Typically, religions both project a solution to social contradictions in heaven or the afterlife, and at the same time, offer within existing society a tiny realm in which those contradictions can be briefly evaded.

As we have also seen, in some contexts, religion can also become the vehicle of political and social struggles whose ideological justification is the attempt to build heaven on earth. But ultimately, even radical religious movements are utopian. They provide no satisfactory strategy for achieving their long-term goals, and the only strategy that can deliver is based on a class analysis of society which taken to its logical conclusion undermines the basis for religious belief.

That said, however, any genuinely revolutionary socialist party welcomes both believers and non-believers into its ranks if they genuinely want to fight against capitalism.

As Lenin argued, atheism should have no place in the political program of a socialist organization. Unity in the fight against capitalism is more important than agreement on theological questions. The theological issues will be resolved not so much by theoretical argument as by revolutionary practice.

In the face of the rampant commercialism that engulfs us at this time of year, it's common to hear religious figures telling us that it's time to revive the "real spirit of Christmas."

If that means reviving the radical egalitarianism of the early Christians, whom Frederick Engels called "a dangerous party of revolt," then socialists are in favor of it.

But we need not just the spirit of the early Christians, but a revolutionary strategy based on class politics that can actually build the kind of society that they wanted.

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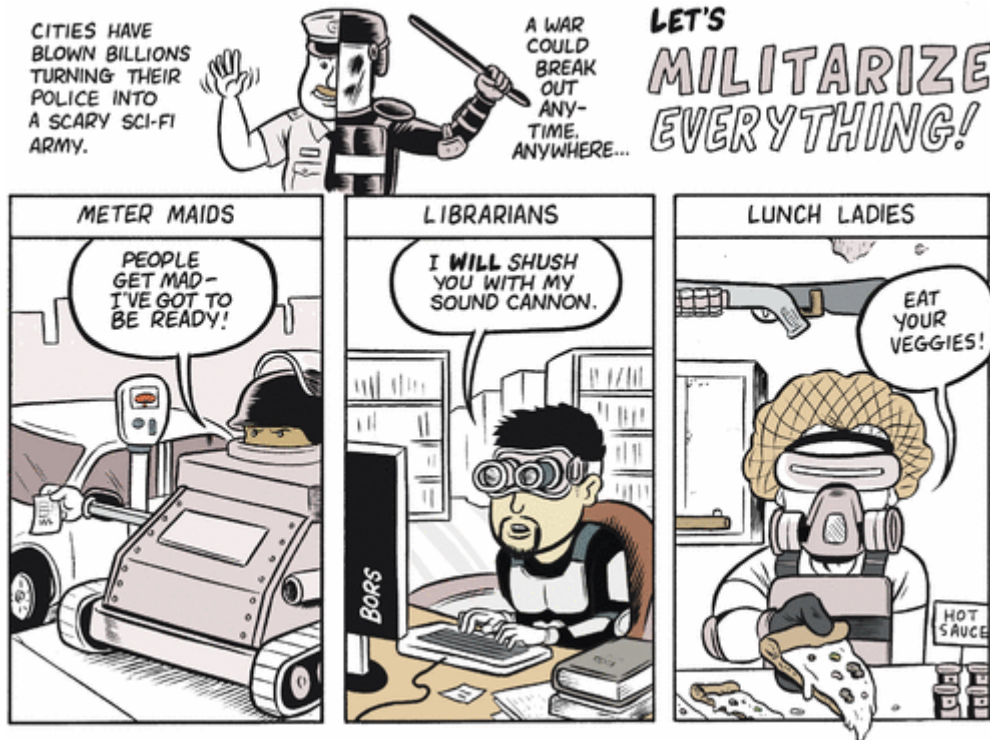
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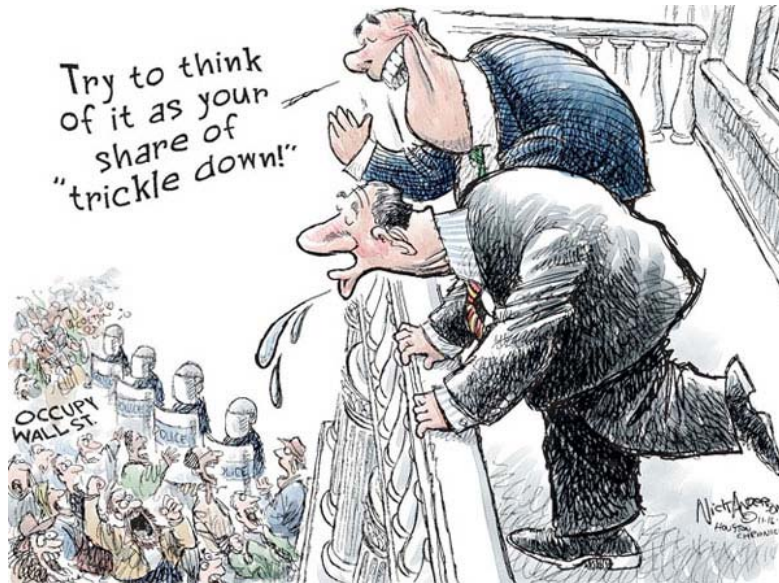
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CLASS WAR REPORTS



**“The SWAT Teams And The Police
Here Are Acting Like They’re
Crime Organizations, Not Police
Forces”**

**“We Will Defend Our Farmland To
The Death!”**

**“13,000 Residents Of This Seacoast
Village, A Warren Of Cramped Alleys
And Courtyard Homes, Became So
Angry That Their Deeply Resented
Officials — And Even The Police — Fled
Rather Than Face Them”**



Relatives carried a picture of Xue Jinbo, killed in police custody after villagers chose him to negotiate a solution to a land deal in Wukan, China. Agence France-Presse - Getty Images

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

December 16, 2011 By MICHAEL WINES, NY Times. Shi Da contributed research from Wukan, and Mia Li from Beijing. Sharon LaFraniere and Jonathan Ansfield contributed reporting from Beijing. [Excerpts]

WUKAN, China — Each day begins with a morning rally in the banner-bedecked square, where village leaders address a packed crowd about their seizure of the village and plans for its future.

Friday's session was followed by a daylong mock funeral for a fallen comrade, whose body lies somewhere outside the village in government custody.

It has been nearly a week since the 13,000 residents of this seacoast village, a warren of cramped alleys and courtyard homes, became so angry that their deeply resented officials — and even the police — fled rather than face them.

“We will defend our farmland to the death!” a handmade banner proclaims, referring to a possible land deal they fear will strip them of almost all their farmland. “Is it a crime,” another muses, “to ask for the return of our land and for democracy and transparency?”

How long they will last is another matter.

As the days pass, the cordons of police officers surrounding the village grow larger. Armored trucks and troop carriers have been reported nearby. On local television, a 24-hour channel denounces the villagers as “a handful of people” dedicated to sabotaging public order, with the names of protesters flashing on a blue screen, warning that they will be prosecuted.

Many here fear this will all end badly. “The SWAT teams and the police here are acting like they’re crime organizations, not police forces,” said Chen Dequan, a 50-year-old farmer and fisherman. “The entire village is worried.”

The dispute that emptied Wukan of its government officials is, on its face, like hundreds — if not thousands — of others that inspire protests here each year: villagers who believe their land was taken illegally take to the streets when their concerns are ignored.

But the suspicious death of a well-liked villager, who was selected to negotiate on the citizens’ behalf, appears to have turned this long-simmering grievance into a last-straw standoff with the authorities.

The land deal inspiring the protests involved one of China’s largest property developers, a Hong-Kong listed company called Country Garden that prides itself on fast-paced construction in mostly suburban areas. Yang Huiyuan, described by analysts as the company’s chairwoman, is often listed as one of the richest women in China.

Here in Wukan, many residents believed that the national government had not yet intervened to resolve matters simply because it had been misled by nefarious local officials to believe that all was well.

So far, however, it seems from inside this locked-down village that government leaders at all levels are flummoxed at their blue-moon, if temporary, loss of control.

Lin Zuluang, 67, a retired businessman who is now the village’s de facto leader, said that officials had approached him to negotiate an end to the protest, but that talks had gone nowhere, in part because the officials would not meet villagers’ demands to return all their land.

In the meantime, life here goes on in an aura of unreality as much as uncertainty, a mixture of grief and optimism and somewhat willful ignorance of the hints of trouble at every police roadblock and on every news broadcast.

Inside the village, citizens hail foreign journalists as visiting saviors, bombarding them with endless cigarettes, bowls of rice-and-seafood porridge and free rides on the backs of scooters.

The villagers bristle at the government’s suggestion that they are being financed by unnamed foreigners, but are convinced that only reporting outside the state-run press will bring word of their plight to leaders in Beijing.

Corruption accusations against Country Garden, the developer, go back for years. In 2007, the Southern Weekly newspaper alleged irregularities in a hotel construction contract awarded to the company by a district government in Zhangjiajie, in Hunan Province. The paper suggested that the government heavily discounted the project’s land cost because most of Country Garden’s payment was secretly diverted to a company in which two Country Garden officials had invested.

In Wukan, two people familiar with the Country Garden proposal said the company planned to buy at least 134 acres of land for villa homes and shopping centers here.

About half of that land is controlled by Fengtian Livestock, a pig-raising firm that holds a 50-year lease issued by the government; the rest is apparently in villagers' hands.

Chen Wenqing, the livestock firm's owner, said Country Garden was negotiating directly with the local authorities last spring when the deal fell through over a difference on price. Country Garden said it had intended to build a project but has signed no agreements.

But Mr. Lin, the retired businessman, said villagers became angry in September when they saw construction work at the pig-farm site. Officials of Lufeng city, a district that controls Wukan, ordered the building stopped, he said, and asked villagers to select a committee of locals to settle the controversy.

Negotiations to return the land to villagers produced little, however.

On Dec. 9, unidentified men abducted one of the negotiators, a 42-year-old leather worker named Xue Jinbo, and four other men from a local restaurant.

The other four soon turned up in nearby jails, accused of inciting villagers to subvert the government.

Mr. Xue was seen only on the night of Dec. 11, when local government officials summoned relatives to view his body at a mortuary.

They said that he had died of a heart attack in a hospital and that medical records of his care would be provided.

But family members say officials confiscated their mobile telephones before allowing them into the funeral home, apparently to prevent them from taking photographs.

Mr. Xue's nose was caked with blood, his body was black with bruises and his left thumb was broken, apparently pulled backward to the breaking point, one of them, a nephew named Xue Ruiqiang, said on Friday in an interview.

Word of Mr. Xue's death brought the villagers into the streets and sent members of the village committee that was involved in the land negotiations fleeing.

Mr. Xue's 21-year-old daughter, Xue Jianwan, said before the service that her father "was a straightforward man who always stood up for people."

"Mom said that if he hadn't been such a straightforward person, he probably wouldn't have ended up like this," she added.

Police Kill 10 Striking Oil Workers In Kazakhstan:

**“Groups Of Angry Young Men
Later Marched On The Mayor’s
Office And Set It Ablaze”**

**“The Headquarters Of Ozenmunaigaz
Oil Company Was Also Set Alight”**

**“Footage Broadcast By Satellite Channel
K+ Showed Men In Worker’s Outfits
Charging A Stage Erected For Festivities
To Mark The 20th Anniversary Of
Kazakhstan’s Independence”**



A protester runs from a burning police vehicle in Zhanaozen. Photograph: Reuters
TV/REUTERS

16 December 2011 Associated Press

At least 10 people have been killed in violent clashes between police and demonstrators in an oil town in western Kazakhstan, where workers have been protesting for higher wages, authorities said.

Prosecutor General Askhat Daulbayev said that the mayor’s office, a hotel and vehicles were set on fire in Zhanaozen, a city of 90,000 in the southwestern corner of the energy-rich nation.

The clashes appear to be some of the worst unrest to hit the former Soviet republic since it gained independence in 1991.

Daulbayev said police officers were attacked as they sought to quell a disturbance in the city centre and were forced to fire their weapons on protesters. He said 10 people were killed.

Roza Teletayeva, who said she was a former oil worker dismissed in June for taking part in a long-standing strike, said that police had surrounded a peaceful meeting of several hundred demonstrators in the morning.

“We had no idea what was going to happen, we were just standing peacefully and doing nothing,” she said.

Teletayeva said police opened fire on the crowd and that she had seen at least five people dead.

She said groups of angry young men later marched on the mayor’s office and set it ablaze.

Footage broadcast by satellite channel K+ showed men in worker’s outfits charging a stage erected for festivities to mark the 20th anniversary of Kazakhstan’s independence on Friday.

Daulbayev said the headquarters of OzenMunaiGaz oil company, where the demonstrators were formerly employed, was also set alight.

A team of Interior Ministry investigators had flown to the town to identify and punish the organisers of the unrest and restore order, Daulbayev said.

Hundreds of workers at an oil facility controlled by the state-owned energy company KazMunaiGas in Zhanaozen have been protesting for better salaries and working conditions for more than six months.

Almost 1,000 workers were fired in the summer for striking, but demonstrations have continued.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev has kept a tight lid on any signs of public discontent during his 20 years of rule.

The apparent scale of unrest in Zhanaozen will come as a shock to Nazarbayev’s government, which has also been facing an unprecedented surge in radical Islamist-inspired violence in recent months.

In a sign that Kazakhstan’s authoritarian government was attempting to contain information on developments in Zhanaozen, internet users reported being unable to open independent news websites or Twitter.

Virtually all domestic media failed to cover the events throughout Friday, as lavish celebrations took place in the capital, Astana, to mark the independence anniversary.

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