



Common Sense



Issue IIII News Round-Up

[All summaries are written by Common Sense, links to source material can be found at Opednews.com]

Bush Throws Muscle Behind Overtime Cuts, Congress May Cave

After the administration announced it was planning, through the Labor Department, to change the guidelines governing overtime pay, stripping millions of Americans of time-and-a-half pay for hours over 40, both houses of congress passed legislation blocking the move, despite extreme pressure from the administration. Now the administration has made it clear to congressional Republicans that he will veto any such legislation, and under intense pressure and political intimidation from the White House, enough Republicans have signalled that they may give in and drop the legislation.

The new labor rules being pushed by Bush would immediately strip pay from 2.5 million workers, and would give corporations leverage to shift another 5.5 million employees into a new category of employment, thereby stripping their pay as well- 8 million workers altogether. The labor department has already received over 100,000 letters protesting the changes, and constituents of Republican congressman have reportedly expressed tremendous opposition, which is what originally prompted the congressmen to vote against Bush's changes.

President Bush, who has never vetoed a bill, has threatened to veto only one other bill. That bill, also still pending, would undo new FCC rules which allow for much greater media concentration in the hands of only a few media moguls. If Bush vetoes that bill, it will ensure hundreds of millions of dollars in new profits for these few corporations as they takeover thousands of local outlets.

To express your stance to your Representatives and Senators visit www.Congress.org.
See *Economic Policy Institute*

Troops Return Home to Lack of Health Benefits

A headline from the *Army Times*, an official military publication, reads "An Act of Betrayal: In the midst of war, key family benefits face cuts". The article refers to "a string of actions by the Bush administration to cut or hold down growth in pay and benefits, including basic pay, combat pay, health-care benefits and the death gratuity paid to survivors of troops who die on active duty."

See *Army Times*, November 11, 2003
Karen Jower

Jessica Lynch Says Military Used Her

"They used me as a way to symbolize all this stuff... It hurt in a way that people would make up stories that they had no truth about" Lynch said in an interview on NBC. She has denied many aspects of the story relayed by the military and the administration, confirming that her story was embellished for PR purposes. Her authorized biography confirms that she did undergo heroic hardships, and she has thanked as heroes those who rescued her, although she has pointed out that the rescue did not go as portrayed. She was dismayed that the military brought cameras to the rescue, which would not have been necessary if not for the PR value, and which are virtually never taken on such missions. Many pundits have expressed admiration for her willingness to tell the truth and reject the part she was given,

See *Chicago Tribune*, October 24, 2003
AP

White House Bars Coverage of Military Funerals

The administration has restricted the media from any substantive coverage of funerals at Arlington Cemetery, where soldiers dying in Iraq are being buried. The White House has already arranged for injured soldiers to be airlifted out of Iraq between 2:00 and 3:00 am, and has restricted media access there as well. The President does not attend the funerals of returning soldiers.

See *Washington Post*, November 14, 2003
Steve Vogel. A24

CIA Report Says Iraqis Losing Faith, Window Closing for Success

A recent CIA report on Iraq suggests that Iraqis are beginning to grow frustrated with the occupation, and that something must be done quickly to keep the situation from quickly deteriorating. "It says that this is an insurgency, and that it is gaining strength because Iraqis have no confidence that there is anyone on the horizon who is going to stick around in Iraq as a real alternative to the former regime," one American official said. A new Gallup Poll of face-to-face interviews with Iraqis shows that 94% say security is worse now than under Saddam Hussein, and 84% say anarchy would erupt if the US were to leave "any time soon". 86% said that at some time in the past 4 weeks they or their family members had been afraid to go outside at night, and 60% said the same of the day.

***Without fanfare, the administration has begun requests for draft board employees, leaving many to wonder if a draft is intended as the only way to maintain troop levels.
See *Gallup Polling*, *Toronto Star*,
New York Times, 11/13/2003 *Douglas Jehl*

Leak Investigation Produces Nothing After 7 Weeks

The Justice Department investigation has still produced nothing in its search after five weeks. There have been several reports of a widening gap and increasing hostility between the White House and the CIA, who feel betrayed by the leak and by the manipulation of intelligence prior to the war.

See *Salon*, November 8, 2003 *Mark Follman*

Bush Lays off Tens of Thousands of Forest Service Workers in Favor of Privatization

Bush has laid off forest service workers to be replaced by corporate agencies with little explanation. In many cases it has been demonstrated that the original workers perform the same duties for as little as half the price of the corporations, but have been given no opportunity for appeal.

See *San Francisco Chronicle*
November 14, 2003 *Robert Gehrke*

Opinion

Transforming the Middle East... or Hogwash?

A Common Sense Editorial

With its stated reasons for going to war kaput, namely the MIA WMD and the utterly unsubstantiated link to Al Qaeda, the administration has launched a new PR campaign, attempting to frame the war in Iraq as part of Grand Plan to democratize the Middle East. To those in Washington who had followed the run-up to war, this rhetoric sounds distastefully familiar. It echoes the ideology of the so-called Neoconservative movement, which has been spearheaded by a handful of prominent and behind-the-scenes think tanks, most notably the Project for a New American Century, or PNAC. PNAC has been calling for war in Iraq for many years, deep into the Clinton presidency, and obviously well before 9/11. Their roster has included Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Perle, and perhaps a dozen other high-ranking administration officials. Don't believe us? See for your self at:

www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm

A handful of commentators have dared entertain the obvious possibility that the war was motivated by this ideology, and not by the WMD that the administration harped on for over a year. This sort of bait-and-switch would be dastardly enough. To sell the American people on sending their sons and daughters to kill and die on anything short of the real and true rationale is an act as abhorrent as any an American president could undertake. Does *Common Sense* think that this is the case, and that some Grand Plan for democracy in the Middle East was the real, secret motivation for the war? No. We think it is worse than that.

Let us take a good look at the Middle East and evaluate whether such Grand Plans are at all realistic. When political movers and shakers speak of the Middle East, they are implicitly speaking of one country above all others: Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia provided 15 of the 19 hijackers for 9/11, and is by far the greatest breeding ground for anti-American fundamentalism. It also holds 1/3 of the world's oil underneath its sands. A

dangerous combination.

So what would happen if we were to bring democracy to this nation, whose citizens hold approximately a 2-3% approval rating of the US? Robert Baer, a former CIA analyst in the Middle East provides one answer: "Osama bin Laden would be elected in a landslide". If there were free elections, fundamentalists would be easily elected, and could then use their mind-boggling oil reserves as a powerful political weapon. America's posture of domination in the region would come to an abrupt halt, and the threat of the Saudis destroying their own oil infrastructure, thereby crippling both the American and world economies, would be a threat equivalent to a nuclear bomb. Especially to an administration which includes 41 oil executives.

So if there are such Grand Plans, the administration better find a way to fence democracy out of Saudi Arabia. Same goes for the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. In fact, throughout the Middle East, even in Syria, the populations of those countries are far more hostile to American interests than are the dictators. Does Mr. Bush really mean to say that he will allow fundamentalists to take control of all of the Middle East oil reserves, and that he will allow them to have fully functioning armies, perhaps including chemical and biological weapons?

No, he doesn't, and that is why his talk of Grand Plans includes not a single iota of new policy. And are we really to believe that while they were busy crafting grand plans to instill democracy across the entire region, they simply forgot to lay out a plan for how they would do that in Iraq. Don't forget, there was no plan. Nothing.

Well, that's not exactly true. There were indeed detailed plans for protecting the oil infrastructure. And with the Saudi Arabian royal family teetering on the brink of being overcome by the fundamentalists in their mists, the real motivation for the war might be apparent.

Faced with the coming possibility that Saudi Arabia would be taken over by fundamentalists, the administration was faced with two possible options:

1) Begin a genuine attempt to win the hearts and minds of the Arab people. If democracy is ever to come to the region, and certainly we all hope it does, then at some point the only tactical option to prevent those nations from becoming fervent enemies of the

United States would be to befriend those people, to win their trust, and to gradually bring them into the free human family.

2) Begin a fierce campaign to dominate the Middle East. Invading Iraq secured as much as 20% of the world's oil under US control with Halliburton equipment. As Robert Kagan, a leading neoconservative said, "We will probably need a major concentration of forces in the Middle East over a long period of time... When we have economic problems, it's been caused by disruptions in our oil supply. If we have a force in Iraq, there will be no disruption in oil supplies." The war would also establish an intimidating military presence, ready to pounce if things got out of control in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere.

The administration took the second option, and unfortunately it will be very difficult to change course now. It would be nice if they could restrain themselves from giving their cronies billion dollar contracts (the GOP recently stripped an anti-profiteering amendment from the \$87B Iraq spending bill), but it is even more important to shift perspectives. The administration is now in over its head, it needs to ask for help, and it needs to change course.

Above all though, it is time to start leveling with the American people. By posing as some sort of Churchill, visionary figure, and by pretending that they did not sell the war on an imminent threat, they insult the American people and disgrace the brave men and women who have put their lives at risk without receiving an honest reason for doing so.

Common Sense certainly does not begrudge the people of the Middle East their freedom. If we felt Bush's words were in earnest, we would certainly applaud them. But we also recognize that largely because of the Iraq war and other unilateral arrogance, combined with a dangerous fanaticism that borders on mass brainwashing, the people of the Middle East harbor a tremendous hatred for the US. We recognize that a democratic Middle East, even just a democratic Saudi Arabia, would truly be a grave threat to American security. We also believe that Dick Cheney and George Bush understand this as well, which is why we are convinced that President Bush's rhetoric is insincere. We want and need to trust our president in a time of crisis, please allow us to do so.