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The invisible wounds of unjust wars

By Scott Marshall

The terrible mayhem and slaughter last week at Fort Hood Texas shocked us all. All of us feel deeply for the families, the loved ones and the friends of those who were hurt and killed. An ever-growing majority of the American people oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But opposing these wars does not for a moment rob us of our compassion those hurt or killed.

The horror of Fort Hood also brings flashbacks of the war in Vietnam.

My flashbacks are not combat related. Drafted, I only spent a short time in the U.S. Army, most of it in the stockade at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I refused to train for combat, and made it clear I would not go to Vietnam. Some of my stockade time was spent in solitary confinement for trying to organize antiwar discussion groups in the stockade. In solitary we couldn't see the prisoners in the cells on either side of us, but you could shout back and forth. We also saw each other briefly when we were taken out of our cells for exercise. On one side of me was a young draftee who had shot off his big toe in hopes of getting discharged from the Army. On the other side of me was a sergeant who was being court-martialed for



allegedly killing an officer in Vietnam.

The sergeant's story went like this. He was out on patrol when they came in sight of an elderly Vietnamese man riding a bicycle on the other side of a rice field. His lieutenant told him to shoot the old man because he was a fleeing Viet Cong sol-

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dier. The sergeant argued he was just an old man riding his bicycle. The argument got heated. He said the next thing he knew the lieutenant was dead. The sergeant said he had no memory of how it happened.

A friend told me about his son's experience in Iraq. He had tried to talk his son out of sign-

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ing up for the Army, even though my friend had been a career soldier before he became disillusioned with Bush's wars. Later his son called him from Iraq by satellite telephone crying and telling his dad that he just wanted to come home. "Why? Did something happen," my friend asked? His son answered, "Dad, if I have to kick down one more door and watch women and children run screaming and crying from me, I think I'll go nuts."

My fear is that the invisible wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be even worse than those suffered by my generation from the Vietnam war. This is a very different kind of warfare. It seems to me the ratio of innocent civilians killed related to military casualties is much higher in today's wars. Perhaps that's one reason why the Army reported last summer that the suicide rate for soldiers is the highest on record. Fort Hood reported the highest rate of any military base.

The economic crisis just makes the stress worse.

Some studies estimate that as many as 35% of soldiers who fought in Iraq will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Already the number of unemployed and homeless Iraq vets is staggering. This cannot stand. To begin to heal the invisible wounds, emergency measures are needed to get vets off the streets and into safe environments. Emergency government jobs programs, including special measures for vets, are needed. The labor movement's "Helmets to Hard Hats" program is a great effort and needs to be matched with public funding and public infrastructure projects.

A new GI Bill that guarantees education, employment, health care including special mental health approaches is a must.

And we must end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now.



Scott Marshall is a Vice-Chairman of the Communist Party USA.

Difficult victory

By PW Editorial Board

Overcoming intense lobbying efforts of the health insurance-industrial complex and their far-right "tea party" stormtroopers, the American people and their organizations, especially their unions, mobilized and pushed through a bill that can improve the health care system for millions of insured and uninsured people.

The Affordable Health Care for America Act, HR 3962, takes a step on the road of curbing the enormous power that profit-making insurance corporations have over our nation's health care.

Among its pluses are: bans on the much-hated denial of coverage based on preexisting conditions, and lifetime coverage caps; a public insurance option to compete with private plans in a new insurance exchange for people who don't have employer coverage; Medicaid expansion to provide free health care to all Americans with incomes below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

While the bill requires individuals to buy insurance, it also offers subsidies to help households earning up to \$88,000 a year for a family of

four purchase coverage.

The House bill places a surcharge on individual taxpayers who earn more than \$500,000 a year and families who earn over \$1 million, to help pay for the costs. It also cuts the Bush administration's Medicare privatization debacle, called Medicare Advantage, a big giveaway to insurance corporations. But even though the House bill is overall an important step forward, the insurance companies and ultra-right managed to gum it up.

They saddled it with a vicious anti-choice provision. Called the Stupak amendment, after the Michigan Democrat who introduced it, it would bar women who get any federal subsidy for health insurance from getting access to abortion even if it's paid with her own money.

Women and their organizations won't let this stand, as the health reform fight goes into the Senate. But the Stupak amendment clearly complicates further an already tough fight and plays right into the hands of the big insurance companies and the ultra right who are desperate to derail major health reform.



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World Notes

By W. T. Whitney

Iraq: Water shortages weigh heavily

Southern Iraq is so short of drinking water, according to Azzaman News, that the government has prevailed upon Iran to supply fresh water via tanker ships. Water Resources Minister Abdul-latif Rasheed last week inaugurated a massive dam crossing the Khassa River north of Kirkuk, heart of a region afflicted by severe drought. Last month, he urged French businesses to invest and help manage Iraqi water resources.

Australia: Refugees protest conditions

Condemnation of Labor Party policies on refugees burst forth last week when 78 Sri Lankan migrants confined to the customs ship Oceanic Viking began fasting as they refused to disembark for transfer to a prison on Indonesia's Bintan Island. Indonesia never signed UN conventions protecting asylum seekers, and Australia pays Indonesia to detain its excluded, most of whom are from Sri Lanka, Iraq and Afghanistan. Spokespersons for the Australian Workers Union and Australian Council of Trade Union joined in denouncing "scapegoating of people."

Kenya: Good and bad news on malaria

Surveys presented at the Pan-African Malaria Conference last week in Nairobi showed that only three percent of infected African children are receiving effective anti-malarial treatment. Africans make up 90 percent of 900,000 malaria deaths annually. Untreated children under age five will die, doctors say.

Scientists reported that the world's first effective anti-malarial vaccine will be released soon. They caution that pervasive administrative and logistical glitches will curtail its use, unless they are remedied.



Dominican Republic: Corporation sued over toxic waste dump

A civil suit brought Nov. 4 before a U.S. court by 11 residents of Arroyo Barril, DR, some of them now dead, alleges major birth defects and illnesses at the hands of Virginia - based AES Corporation. AES hired a contractor in 2003 to remove 100 million pounds of coal ash from a plant in Puerto Rico to Arroyo Barril, a remote seaside village in the Dominican Republic. Coal ash contains arsenic, lead, cadmium, chromium, and nickel. In 2006 a Virginia court entered a \$6 million judgment against AES for illegal dumping.

Cuba: Debate on socialism under way

Millions of Cubans are engaged in discussion on the future of Cuban socialism. Most of the problems propelling discussion are economic, stemming from severe hurricane damage last year, the world economic crisis, high food costs, idle land, corruption and reduced exports. Observers say opinion is building in support of initiatives introduced last year such as allowing for multiple jobs, removing caps on salaries and encouragement of private farming.

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S K Handtools workers save health care, jobs

By John Bachtell

After a 10-week strike to save their jobs, health care and union, 70 Teamster Local 743 members at S K Handtools voted 3 to 1 to accept the company offer and began returning to work Nov. 6. The strike garnered national headlines after the company dropped health care coverage without notifying the workers, many of whom went into debt for thousands of dollars of medical expenses before they found out.

"These brave sisters and brothers stood together on the picket line 24 hours a day and became the voice of workers in the national health care debate. Political pressure from the governor, several U.S. Congressmen, and U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, along with the informational leafleting at Sears stores, showed SK that the union was serious in its demands," Local 743 President Richard Berg said.

Illinois Governor Pat Quinn (D) was one of many elected officials and supporters who condemned the callous action of the company and joined the workers on the picket line.

In ending the strike, the workers were forced to make the difficult concession of a 20 percent pay cut the first year of the new contract. Small increases accompany the 2nd and 3rd year of the contract.

By preserving their jobs and union the workers win a chance to fight another day and restore the concessions.

"Because we are Teamsters and willing to fight, we're now the only employees at SK with health insurance. This is something that all Americans should have," said Emilio Lunar, SK steward and strike leader.

Las heridas invisible de guerras injustas

Por Scott Marshall

El caos y matanza terrible en el Fuerte Hood en Tejas la semana pasada nos conmovió a todos. Una mayoría creciente del pueblo norteamericano se opone a las guerras en Irak y Afganistán. Pero la oposición a estas guerras no nos roba de la compasión por los heridos ni muertos.

El horror del Fuerte Hood trae recuerdos de la guerra en Vietnam.

Mis recuerdos no están relacionados con el combate. Llamado por el Servicio Militar Obligatorio, yo solo pasé poco tiempo en el Ejército de Estados Unidos, la mayor parte del tiempo en la cárcel militar del Fuerte Campbell en Kentucky. Yo me negué entrenar para el combate, y fui claro que no iría a Vietnam.

Parte de mi tiempo en la cárcel fue en confinamiento solitario por tratar de organizar grupos de discusiones contra la guerra en la cárcel.

A un lado estaba un joven conscripto que se quitó el dedo grande del pie con un tiro para que le den de baja del Ejército. Al otro lado había un sargento que iba para corte marcial por acusado de haber matado un oficial en Vietnam.

Lo del sargento fue esto. Él estaba patrullando cuando vieron a un viejito vietnamita en bicicleta al otro lado de una finca sembrada con arroz. Su teniente le ordenó dispararle al viejo diciendo que era un soldado del Vietcong

huyendo. El sargento se negó diciendo que solo era un viejo en bicicleta. La discusión se calentó. Él dijo que lo próximo que supo fue que el teniente estaba muerto. El sargento no tuvo ninguna memoria de como pasó.

Un amigo me habló de la experiencia de su hijo en Irak. Después, cuando su hijo lo llamó desde Irak por teléfono satélite, llorando diciéndole que quería irse para casa, por qué, "si yo tengo que romper otra puerta y ver mujeres y niños corriendo para huir de mí, gritando y llorando, me voy a volver loco".

Yo temo que las heridas invisibles de las guerras en Irak y Afganistán serán peores que las que sufrieron mi generación de la guerra en Vietnam. Me parece que la proporción de civiles inocente muertos a pérdidas militares es mucho más alta en las guerras de hoy.

Algunos estudios estiman que hasta 35 por ciento de los que pelearon en Irak sufrirán de estrés postraumático.

Ya el número de veteranos de Irak desempleados y desamparados está alto.

Una nueva ley para veteranos que garantice educación, empleo y servicios de salud incluso de salud mental es una necesidad.

Y, claro está, tenemos que poner fin a las guerras en Irak y Afganistán.



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