
National News

Wal-Mart Case Goes to Grand Jury

A grand jury in Pennsylvania will meet Dec. 11 to consider a case against the largest U.S. employer, accused of violating immigration laws by knowingly using illegal immigrants to clean floors in its stores. U.S. Assistant Attorney Wayne Samuelson, whose office in Williamsport, Pennsylvania is prosecuting the case, said that "it's going to take a long time" for the grand jury to decide on any indictments against Wal-Mart officials. He declined to comment on what charges the government is seeking.

Janitorial companies hired by Wal-Mart were the focus of a 21-state raid by Federal agents of 60 Wal-Mart stores on Oct. 23. About 250 workers were arrested, ten employed by Wal-Mart itself. Some of the workers have sued Wal-Mart, alleging that it and the contractors carried out a criminal enterprise that violated the civil rights and wage protections of immigrants who cleaned Wal-Mart stores—treating them, in effect, as indentured servants. The lawsuit, filed in Federal court in New Jersey, seeks class-action status for thousands of immigrants who were hired by companies providing janitorial services for Wal-Mart.

Ashcroft Dragnets Yield Few Terror Cases

In the two years since the 9/11 attacks, Federal investigators have recommended the prosecution of more than 6,400 people on charges related to terrorism. However, actual charges were filed against only 2,000, and of these, 879 were convicted. For those categorized as "international terrorists," the median prison sentence was 14 days! Only five were sentenced to 20 years or more.

In fact, says the special report from Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) released on Dec. 7, the number of individuals sentenced to more than five years in prison on terrorism charges ac-

tually fell after 2001. What has risen, is the number of individuals convicted, but sentenced to little or no prison time; this is true even when taking the more serious category of "international terrorism." Which means that people picked up on "terrorism" charges are being prosecuted for minor infractions.

A spokesman for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said "This punches a huge hole in the hype the Justice Department has been engaged in. They are calling people terrorists, on a massive scale, who aren't terrorists."

The same report shows that the Eastern District of Virginia (the Federal court known as the "rocket docket") is by far "the Justice Department's favorite venue when it comes to terrorism." In the past two years, the Eastern District has heard nearly 20% of all terrorism prosecutions in the nation. Of the 90 judicial districts in the country, the next highest, in North Carolina, had less than 4%. The Southern District of New York, where the World Trade Center is located, had less than 2% of all such prosecutions.

Video Game Ordered, 'Kill All Haitians'

On Dec. 9 the makers of the popular, violent "shooter" video-game Grand Theft Auto agreed to remove from the game, a command to "kill all Haitians." The Haitian community in New York, in an uproar, pressured New York's Mayor Bloomberg to speak out against the game company, New York-based "Take-Two Interactive Software," whose publisher is Rockstar Games. The company is the second largest publisher of video games in the United States.

Last February a group of young men in San Francisco were arrested for robbing dozens and killing five people. The group "got high" during the day playing "their favorite game . . . Grand Theft Auto," according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Rockstar executives defended themselves saying that they market their games "responsibly" by submitting each game to the Electronic Software Rating Board (ESRB).

Also on Dec. 9, Democratic Presidential

candidate Sen. Joe Lieberman boasted that one of his major accomplishments in Congress was authoring the legislation which created the ESRB. In contrast, the wife of Democratic Presidential candidate, Lyndon LaRouche, Helga LaRouche, called for the banning of such violent video games, after German schools were struck with a wave of video-game-inspired killings in 2002.

Halliburton Iraq Gas Scandal Doubles

New documents obtained by the *New York Times* on Dec. 10 show that the scandal of the prices paid to Halliburton, for bringing inadequate supplies of gasoline from Kuwait into Iraq, is worse than previously known. It was already the subject of a call for investigation by Reps. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and John Conyers (D-Mich.).

The U.S. government is paying Halliburton an average, not of about \$1.60 as previously thought, but \$2.64 a gallon to import gasoline and other fuel from Kuwait into Iraq—two to three times what others are charging for the same fuel. Iraqi's state oil company, SOMO, pays 96¢ per gallon for imported gasoline. The Pentagon's Defense Energy Support Center pays \$1.08 to \$1.19 per gallon for the gas it imports from Kuwait, Congressional aides said.

Halliburton has the exclusive contract to import fuel into Iraq for the American occupying forces. Halliburton subcontracts the work to a Kuwaiti firm, but gets 26¢ on every gallon, which includes a 2¢ fee and 24¢ in markup. Under the terms of the contract with the Army Corps of Engineers, Halliburton will receive an additional 14¢ per gallon retroactively, if the Army is satisfied with Halliburton's administration of the contract. The \$2.64 a gallon is only an average. In recent weeks costs have risen, and Halliburton was charging as much as \$3.06 per gallon in late November. The money for Halliburton's contract has come principally from the United Nations Oil For Food program thus far. Soon, it will begin to come out of Congress's \$87 billion "Iraq reconstruction" appropriation.