Letters from our readers

14 November 2013

The ballad of Brigadier Bill
by Don Franks

(A royal marine murdered an injured insurgent in Afghanistan by shooting him in the chest at close range, a British court martial board found Friday.

According to prosecutors, he told fellow soldiers to hush it up and acknowledged: "I just broke the Geneva Convention."

The board ruled that the commando, who can only be identified as Marine A, was guilty of killing the unnamed man in Helmand Province in September 2011.

"It is a matter of profound regret in this isolated incident that one marine failed to apply his training and discharge his responsibilities," Brigadier Bill Dunham, of the Royal Marines, said in a statement.

"It was a truly shocking and appalling aberration. It should not have happened and it should never happen again.")

The Ballad of Brigadier Bill

Brigadier Bill of the Royal Marines
got up on a normal day
the blackbird sang and postman called
in the usual morning way
Brigadier Bill carefully combed his hair
not yet too thin or too grey

Brigadier Bill of the Royal Marines
showered and went down to eat his egg
his loyal old sad eyed spaniel Spot
rubbed puppy love down his leg
Brigadier Bill opened his facebook page
as Spot gazed up to beg

Brigadier Bill of the Royal Marines
had a horrible wake up call
a royal marine under his command
was not playing the game at all
a trooper known as Marine A
had taken his eyes off the ball.

A trooper known as Marine A
instead of using a drone
or a heat seeking missile or hydrogen bomb
had gone rogue on his own
he'd shot some wog in the chest, not like
the guns of Navarone

This trooper, known as Marine A
had broken the rules
and the Geneva Convention
he'd just killed a fellow earth dwelling chap
with no protocol or pretention

Brigadier Bill of the Royal Marines
blushed to think of his code betrayed
and this shocking aberration
and how God would be dismayed

"I hope this will never happen again"
wept poor Royal Marine Brigadier Bill
"Hiroshima was fine, but this crosses a line
- there's a right and wrong way to kill!"

Don Franks
New Zealand
9 November 2013

On " Obama's Predator joke—no laughing matter "

Brilliant article. Flawless.

Pat F
Glasgow, Ireland
7 November 2013

On " Emergency Manager Orr to Detroit pensioners: Your 'rights are in bankruptcy now' "

The attempt by Kevin Orr to equate provisions of a state constitution with a mere law enacted by a state legislature is an effort to muddy the federal supremacy provision of the US Constitution. The US Constitution states that where a state law is in conflict with a federal law, the federal law will prevail. A state constitution is an entirely different matter. If a state were to attempt to place in its constitution a provision that was clearly in conflict with the US Constitution, that state provision would fail. An example would be if a state were to try to amend its state constitution to reinstate slavery which was abolished by the 13th Amendment of the US Constitution. Where a state constitution seeks to enshrine some aspect of the role of government in civil society and when in so doing that codification of the role of government does not specifically contradict the US Constitution, the state constitution should trump any statute enacted by the Congress.

Attacking the protection of civil servants' pensions within a state constitution by Orr and the Wall Street bankers with

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the bi-partisan blessing of the Congress and the White House is an attempt to redefine the role of government and the civil service, something the federal law supremacy provision of the US Constitution does not specifically endorse.

The protection of pensions within a state constitution is a recognition by the state that pension money represents money that has already been earned by the worker. It is wages foregone up front to be utilized in the future much the way one would put money in a bank account for future use. It is not money that exists for speculative purposes such as loans made to companies and/or governments by private lenders who expect to profit from that speculation. Just as the government FDIC protects the savings of bank depositors as the federal government recognizes that average depositors must be able to place money in bank accounts without fear that the money will disappear into the ether, so public servants are entitled to the security of knowing that money earned by them and entrusted to the government for their future use will be there for them at the time of their retirement.

The pension money of civil servants is different to that of private sector workers as the relationship of these workers to their employer, i.e. some tier of government, is different than that of private sector employees. All private companies have as their primary raison d'etre making money to enrich the owners of the private company. The good or the service the company provides is merely the means to that end, i.e. profit. Their employees are the tools for producing that profit. Government exists to enhance the quality of life for its citizens. Public servants provide the means for government to deliver goods and/or services to enhance the lives of its citizens. Public servants not being employed to merely make profits for private owners, state governments have sought to enshrine this special relationship by protecting pensions in state constitutions. For Kevin Orr & Co. to attack the Michigan Constitution's protection of pensions of public servants is thus an attempt to equate the role of government with that of a for-profit private sector company. It is the embodiment of Maggie Thatcher's famous pronouncement that "there is no such thing as society."

The US Constitution opens with the words "we the people of the United States." It does not include references to we the bankers or we the private speculators. Those opening words of the US Constitution are a recognition by the founders that governments are instituted to enhance civil society by ensuring that all citizens are viewed as equal both in their inalienable human rights and in their protection under positive law as enacted by government. In over-riding the Michigan Constitution, Orr and his Wall Street cronies seek to overturn a human rights tradition that has been evolving since the days if the Enlightenment in the 18th century and to replace it with court sanctioned plutocracy. This is a chilling reminder of the moral bankruptcy of capitalism.

Diane A
Michigan, USA
5 November 2013

On " School District of Philadelphia considers selling off artwork to cut deficit "

An adaption of Emily Dickinson's poem *Before I got my eye put out* (circa 1862) in honor of the working people of Philadelphia and Detroit:

Before I got my art sold off,
I liked as well to see
As other creatures that have eyes,
And know no other way.
But were it told to me, to-day,
That I might have Modigliani
For mine, I tell you that my heart
Would split, for size of me.
The Matisse's, mine –
The Mannerists, mine –
All Eakins – stintless Surrealists
As much of Modernism as I could take
Between my finite eyes
The motions of Brueghel's birds
The Cubist's jointed road
For mine to look at when I liked,
The news would strike me dead!
So, "safer", guess, with just my art
Upon the auction block
Where billionaires put their eyes,
Incautious – of the working class.

http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182805

Randy R
Arizona
8 November 2013

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