

And while judges have so far refused to hold the fast-food industry legally responsible for America's growing obesity problem, that hasn't stopped class-action lawyers from attempting to demonize the "junk food" industry in hopes of, one day, hitting the jackpot.

As the industry well knows, it only takes one activist judge to find for one big fat Quarter-Pounder-eating plaintiff, and it's Wendy bar the door. We're talking billions.

And so food purveyors have banded together and are asking state legislators for protection. And here in Pennsylvania, they got it. No thanks to Greg Vitali. He was one of only seven legislators to vote against the act.

(his estimation, not mine) who think it's ridiculous to hold fast-food restaurants responsible for individuals who don't control their own appetites. But he preferred such "frivolous" claims be handled by the court system. As if the courts actually hold lawyers responsible for filing frivolous lawsuits. If they did, laws like this one would be unnecessary.

Greg told me many legislators were buffaloed into supporting this bill because they were afraid political opponents would use their "no" votes against them in "sound-bite" campaigns,

As in:

the meeting, moved ahead with the business at hand.

Vitali defended his action saying, "parliamentary maneuvering is part of the way business is conducted in Harrisburg."

But nobody I talked to could remember any representative member leaving a convened meeting to deny his colleagues a quorum.

Admitted Vitali, "I was pretty creative there."

That's one way to describe it.

*Gil Spencer's column appears Sunday, Wednesday and Friday.
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Iraqi labor leaders stress need for removal of troops

By **BARBARA ORMSBY**
Times Correspondent

UPPER CHICHESTER — Three Iraqi labor leaders, part of a six-member delegation on a 20-city U.S. tour, Saturday called for the removal of American occupation troops, and vowed to oppose any move by foreign governments to privatize their country's oil industry.

Speaking at a luncheon at The Thirsty Bulldog restaurant in Boothwyn, hosted by Jim Savage, an official with the United Steelworkers Local 2-1, the three Iraqis denounced the U.S.-led war in their country.

"We believe our priority today is to end the American occupation of Iraq," said Adnan A. Rashed, executive officer, Union of Mechanics, Printing and Metal Workers. "All Iraq has suffered, but more specifically, labor unions. We were hoping to change the (Saddam Hussein) regime from within, without involvement from a foreign army. That would have been better than having all the destruction the war brought. But war happened and we have to live with it. That was an American choice, not ours."

Rashed was a member of the Workers' Democratic Trade Union Movement that resisted Hussein's Ba'ath Party. In the late 1970s Hussein outlawed unions, forcing union leaders to go underground or into exile. The Iraqi Federation of Labor was born from that underground labor movement and is committed to creating inde-

pendent trade unions and improved conditions for working people.

Rashed said the people of Iraq deserve to be independent.

"We want the democracy that suits us, our own version of democracy," he said.

According to Rashed, unemployment in Iraq is more than 50 percent and most of the factories were bombed or dismantled. He said he and his fellow union members realize they cannot rehabilitate their country on their own and will need the help of the international community.

In his remarks at a news conference before the luncheon, Hassan Juma'a Awad Al Asade, chief of the executive board of General Union of Oil Employees, said one of the main reasons for the American invasion of Iraq was to "get their hands on our oil."

"Our country has huge oil reserves," Al Asade said. "We believe the invasion was the first step, but there will be an economic invasion."

"We have said our resources belong to us and no one should decide the future for us. We wish for the Iraqi unions to go hand in hand with the international community and unions in other countries because we believe workers rights is not an Iraqi issue, but an international issue," he added.

Al Asade pointed out that Iraqi oil workers reorganized just 11 days after the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

"We had our first meeting after the



Times staff / ROBERT J. GURECKI

Iraqi Federation of Labor members, from left, Adnan A. Rashed, Faleh Abboud Umara and Hassan Juma'a Awad at a press conference Saturday in Boothwyn.

invasion, during heavy bombing of the city (Basara)," he recalled.

The third speaker, Faleh Abboud Umara, said he is proud of the fact that the unions led strikes against the oil companies in the past, when Iraq was occupied by the British. He, too, believes the main reason for the occupation of Iraq is for control of the country's oil.

"Oil is the main revenue for the Iraqi people," Umara said.

The Iraqi delegates represent the Iraqi Federation of Labor, the Federation of

Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq and the General Union of Oil Employees. All three organizations are on record opposing the occupation and calling for removal of all U.S. and British occupation forces. They say they are committed to a democratic, secular, and multi-ethnic labor movement and society in Iraq.

The Iraqi tour is sponsored by the U.S. Labor Against the War, which is a national coalition of 112 labor organizations representing more than four million union members.