

WAR RESISTERS SUPPORT CAMPAIGN

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Att: News Editors

Court Martial of U.S. War Resister confirms that speaking out against Iraq war brings harsher punishment

TORONTO – Today's harsh sentencing of U.S. War resister James Burmeister contradicts a recent Federal Court of Canada ruling that there was no evidence the U.S. military would inflict harsh punishment.

On July 14, Federal Court Justice Anne Mactavish found there was no evidence that U.S. war conscientious objector Robin Long would be treated more harshly for having spoken out publicly against the war in Iraq. Mr. Long was deported from Canada on July 15.

What happened to James Burmeister runs counter to Justice Mactavish's assumptions in her ruling. Burmeister's severe sentence indicates that soldiers who speak out publicly against the war and who have sought refuge in Canada are punished more severely by the U.S. military.

At today's Court Martial at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Burmeister received nine months in military prison and a Bad Conduct Discharge – the equivalent of a felony conviction. He was charged with being Absent Without Official Leave (AWOL).

Evidence of Burmeister's public statements against the use of "bait and kill" tactics in Iraq by the U.S. military – as well as documents showing his public association with the War Resisters Support Campaign in Canada – were submitted by the prosecution to bolster their case against him.

Burmeister, an Iraq War veteran who sustained injuries from a roadside bomb attack was ordered to return to Iraq despite his injuries. He chose Canada as refuge from redeployment because he would not take part in what he deemed an unjustified and unethical use of force. On March 4th he voluntarily turned himself in at Fort Knox.

"The Federal Court decision that led to Robin Long's deportation yesterday was misguided from start to finish," said Michelle Robidoux, organizer with the War Resisters Support Campaign. "By inflicting such harsh punishment on a soldier for being AWOL, the U.S. military confirms that indeed war resisters face harsh and unjust punishment if returned by Canadian authorities."

Canada's Parliament voted June 3 to let U.S. Iraq War resisters stay in Canada. A recent Angus Reid poll found nearly two-thirds (64%) of Canadians want the government to allow war resisters to live in Canada.

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