
THE WAR AT HOME

OPENING THE BORDER TO U.S. WAR RESISTERS

“I am not willing to kill or be killed in the service of ideology and economic gain.” – Jeremy Hinzman

Jeremy Hinzman, 25, and Brandon Hughey, 19, are two Americans who have sought refuge in Canada. They fled north before their U.S. military units were deployed to the war in Iraq, a war that to date has claimed more than 890 American lives.

Canadians overwhelmingly oppose the war in Iraq and recognize the U.S. invasion as illegal under international law. Although the federal government has not stated a position on the case of Hinzman and Hughey, a three-day Immigration and Refugee Board hearing into Hinzman's claim for refugee status is scheduled to begin on October 22.

Maude Barlow, June Callwood, David Suzuki, Naomi Klein, Shirley Douglas, Anne-Marie MacDonald and M.G. Vassanji have drafted an open letter to the Canadian government urging it to give U.S. war resisters safe haven in Canada. Their letter follows:

During the period of 1965-1973 more than 50,000 draft-age Americans made their way to Canada, refusing to participate in an immoral war. At the time, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau said: "Those who make the conscientious judgment that they must not participate in this war... have my complete sympathy, and indeed our political approach has been to give them access to Canada. Canada should be a refuge from militarism."

Thirty years later, Canada is faced with the same moral choice to give refuge to those who refuse to be accomplices in the U.S.-led war on Iraq which many legal opinions have deemed illegal under international law.

There are currently at least two young people who have made their way to Canada in objection to the U.S. government's war on Iraq. Jeremy Hinzman was a soldier in the 82nd Airborne Division. He and his family arrived in Toronto in January 2004 and are currently seeking refugee status. Brandon Hughey, a 19-year-old American soldier, arrived in St. Catharines two months later and is also seeking refugee status.

Regardless of the technical decisions of the Immigration and Refugee Board, we believe Canada should not punish U.S. war objectors for exercising their conscience and refusing to fight. If they are returned to the United States, they face incarceration and possibly even the death penalty. Canada must not facilitate the persecution of American war objectors by returning them to the United States.

The majority of Canadians did not support this war. The Canadian government did not support this war.

We call on the Canadian government to demonstrate its commitment to international law and the treaties to which it is a signatory, by making provision for U.S. war objectors to have sanctuary in this country.

To take action, please join with the more than 3,000 other Canadians who have signed the petition, www.petitiononline.com/resister/petition.html.

Go to www.canadians.org for dates and locations of our Citizens' Inquiry into Canada-U.S. Relations, to be launched at this year's Annual General Meeting. The inquiry will examine, among other issues, the need for independent Canadian foreign and defence policies.



On July 7, Jeremy Hinzman, right, and Brandon Hughey attended a refugee board pre-hearing.

Photo: CPI Darryl James