

A “CRIMINAL” ACTIVIST RECORD

**ANN WRIGHT ON WHY SHE WAS
DETAINED BY CANADIAN BORDER
OFFICIALS**

I won't soon forget the image of Ann Wright with her head craned out the window of a yellow school bus on August 20. We were en route to Montebello to protest against the SPP, and Ann joined us for the ride, donning a T-shirt saying “We will not be silenced.” When we pulled into the town, with its RCMP-issued cage-like enclosures, Ann started a chant – “Arrest the real criminals, keep them in their cages” – shouting at the lines of riot cops several metres deep, her message directed at the leaders of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, who were meeting behind the gates of the Chateau Montebello.

I had first met Ann the evening before, when she arrived at the Council of Canadians' public forum in Ottawa just a few minutes after the event wrapped up. A prominent anti-war activist and retired U.S. Army Colonel and diplomat, Ann had originally been scheduled to speak at the forum, but she didn't make it in time. She had been held for several hours by Canadian border officials and questioned about her protest activities against the Bush administration. In this article, originally published by truthout.org, she describes her experiences at the Ottawa airport. Ann's story serves as a cautionary tale about violations of civil liberties and restrictions on freedom of movement in an increasingly integrated North America.

– Ariel Troster

It all began when an immigration official who was checking my passport noticed a photo identification band on my right wrist and asked if I had recently been released from the hospital. I said no, it was a peaceful, non-violent protest in the United States. I said I had paid a fine along with 46 others arrested for occupying Congressman John Conyers' office and I now used the wrist bracelet as a symbol of the responsibility of citizens to hold accountable its Congress.

The immigration officer shook his head and then escorted me to a secondary screening area, where another officer typed my name into a computer that accessed the U.S. National Criminal Information Center's (NCIC) computerized data, which include the criminal records of U.S. citizens. Despite international travel to England, Italy, Jordan, Syria, Cuba and twice to Canada in the past two years since my first arrest in September 2005, this was the first time I have joined the ranks of thousands of persons around the world who are subjected to secondary screening.

After looking intently at the computer screen, the officer raised one eyebrow, turned to me and asked, "Have you been arrested more than once?" I replied, "Yes, but all for peaceful, non-violent protests against an illegal war, all misdemeanours." The officer said, "There are six arrests on your record."

Quickly, I was taken into a third room where another officer took over an hour going through my suitcases and backpack. As I was travelling from the national Veterans for Peace conference in St. Louis through Ottawa to speak during the Montebello summit and on to Bush's vacation site in Kennebunkport, Maine, I had with me many T-shirts lettered with a variety of peace and stop-the-war slogans, including "Troops Home Now," "Impeach Bush and Cheney," "Arrest Bush," "Arrest Cheney First," "No War



Christina Riley

**"I TOLD THE OFFICER I WAS SPEAKING AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AND ON SEVERAL PANELS AND MY CANADIAN HOSTS WOULD COMPLAIN STRONGLY IF I WERE NOT LET INTO CANADA."
- ANN WRIGHT**

on Iran" and "We Will Not Be Silent."

The officer took each shirt out of the suitcase, shook it open and read the slogan. She read every document in my notebooks of events of where I had spoken and where I am speaking in the near future. She took the DVD documentary film called "Shut up and Sing" about the run-in between the Dixie Chicks and the Bush administration and viewed parts of it. She was also very interested in the books I had in my backpack: books on the U.S. war on Iraq, torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, and impeachment, among many others.

SILENT AGREEMENT

The immigration officer asked if I knew about Omar Khadr, the only Canadian citizen imprisoned in Guantanamo. Khadr was imprisoned five and a half years ago at age 15. He is charged with throwing a grenade at U.S. soldiers when soldiers overran the compound where

he was living in Afghanistan and killed all of his relatives in the compound. In June 2007, five years after his imprisonment, the U.S. military commission in Guantanamo threw out the charges. The U.S. prosecution has appealed the decision of the commission. Unlike the British government, the Canadian government has not pressured the Bush administration to release Khadr to Canadian authorities so they can review the evidence against him. I told the officer I certainly hoped the citizens of Canada would pressure the Canadian government for the release of Khadr. She was silent, but nodded her head in what appeared to me to be agreement.

After three hours, the immigration officer told me that, because I had a U.S. "criminal" record, and as Canada does not let criminals into the country, I could be put on the next flight back to the United States. I told the officer I was speaking at a press conference and on several panels and my Canadian hosts would complain strongly if I were not let into Canada.

The officer finally acknowledged that if I paid \$200 I could get a three-day, temporary-resident permit, but in the future, if I wanted to return to Canada, I would have to apply for another temporary-resident permit at a Canadian embassy. In the future I could not cross the Canadian border unless I had a temporary-resident permit when I arrived at a border crossing – no day trips to Vancouver by just presenting my passport.

My pleas that all my arrests in the U.S. were misdemeanours and had ended in fines and no jail time, other than during processing following the arrests, fell on deaf ears. No exceptions: if you are listed on the NCIC, you are considered a "criminal" by Canadian immigration and must get a special permit for entry. So I paid the \$200. The officer verbally said that I was restricted to Ottawa, and the protests in the town of Montebello across

the Ottawa River in Quebec were off limits to me.

However, when I looked on the official permit that granted me entry into Canada, no restrictions on travel were listed on it. I decided if the Government of Canada was restricting my travel to Ottawa only, the officer would have had to put the restriction in writing on the temporary permit. She didn't. So, the following day, I joined thousands of protesters in Montebello.

PUNISHING DISSENT

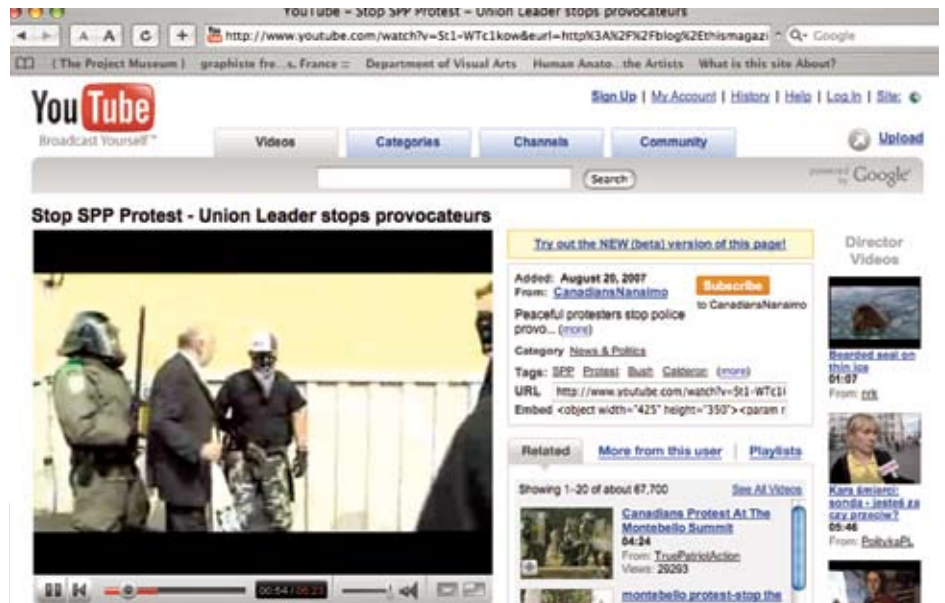
I strongly believe that the inclusion on an international criminal database of arrests of those who disagree with the policies of the Bush administration is meant to intimidate, silence and impede travel for those who dissent and criticize the actions of the Bush administration.

Needless to say, I am requesting through the Freedom of Information Act my "file" from the FBI, and formally protesting the inclusion of my arrests for peaceful, non-violent actions on an international criminal database. I am also demanding these arrests be expunged from international records.

I also am writing to the Canadian government to ask officials to re-evaluate its decision to accept, at face value, the data it is receiving from the FBI and the Bush administration.

To other activists who have been arrested, don't be surprised if you are detained in the future.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the U.S. Army. She was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Mongolia and Afghanistan. She was one of three U.S. diplomats who resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Bush administration's war on Iraq.



EXPOSING THE "PROVOCATEURS"

The Council of Canadians has also been front and centre in exposing the Quebec provincial police's use of undercover "provocateurs" during the protests in Montebello.

As you may have read in the media, the Sûreté du Québec has finally admitted that their officers infiltrated the demonstrations in Montebello on August 20 and 21. This came after Nanaimo Council of Canadians activist Paul Manly posted footage on the Internet of a scuffle between union activist Dave Coles and three masked men, one holding a rock. Manly's video shows that when a crowd of peaceful activists suggested that the masked men were police provocateurs, they quickly shoved themselves behind a line of riot police, and were quietly arrested.

The video spread like wildfire, and soon after, a photo emerged, revealing that the masked "protesters" were wearing the same kind of boots as the riot police. Local activists kept close track of the protesters who were arrested in Montebello, and demanded that the police release the names of the three masked men, whose arrests have not shown up on record, anywhere.

On August 23, the Council of Canadians posted an Action Alert on our website, demanding that Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day get to the bottom of the controversy. Within hours, the SQ made their confession.

The Council of Canadians will continue to follow this story in the coming months, demanding answers from the Quebec police, who claim that their officers did not attempt to provoke violence in Montebello. Manly's footage seems to suggest otherwise.

To view Paul Manly's footage of the police provocateurs in Montebello, visit www.canadians.org.