

US antiwar protesters face \$10,000 fines for travel to Iraq

Jeremy Johnson
18 August 2003

The Bush administration has moved to prosecute US citizens who traveled to Iraq in February and March as part of a campaign to deter the bombing of hospitals, schools and critical civilian infrastructure there. Loosely organized by the London-based group Human Shields and by the Chicago-based Voices in the Wilderness, about 300 people from some 30 countries participated, including as many as 20 from the United States.

Earlier this month, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control demanded that several of the Americans pay fines of up to \$10,000 each for violating government sanctions against travel to Iraq. The travel ban was imposed before the first Gulf War as part of a brutal sanctions regime initiated by the US and endorsed by the United Nations. The sanctions led to the deaths of over 500,000 Iraqi children and hundreds of thousands of others in the 12 years between the two American-led onslaughts.

The penalty for violating the sanctions can be an "administrative" fine of up to \$275,000 per violation—against which there is no right to appeal or to a hearing—or, if criminal proceedings are undertaken, a fine of up to \$1 million and a jail term of up to 12 years. Two of those being fined, Faith Fippinger, a 62-year-old Florida woman, and Ryan Clancy, a 26-year-old record store owner from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have publicly refused to pay.

Fippinger told CNN on August 11, "I will not contribute any money to the continual buildup of America's weapons of mass destruction, which, as far as I know, far exceed the weapons of all other nations combined, and, in fact, have escalated the buildup of weapons everywhere."

The retired teacher of visually impaired children had arrived in Iraq on February 20. She spent most her time there living with an Iraqi family in workers' housing on the site of the Daura refinery some 30 kilometers south of Baghdad. The refinery supplied fuel for the nearby Dora Electrical Power Plant, which in turn provided power to a third of Baghdad. Both sites had been destroyed by US bombing during the first Gulf War.

Once US troops overran Baghdad and the bombing

slowed, rather than leave the country along with most of the remaining human shields, Fippinger volunteered at a Baghdad hospital overwhelmed with civilian casualties. Lacking any medical training, she was sometimes assigned to hold down patients as they were having limbs amputated—without anesthetic due to supply shortages—and then to dispose of the amputated limbs. She told of one Iraqi man watching his wife die in hospital after just losing their six children in a bomb attack.

For this work, Fippinger now stands accused of "giving her services to the Iraqi government." However, as she told the *Washington Post* in an interview last May, "We never went in support of Saddam Hussein. Never, ever. The goal and the purpose was the protection of the innocent Iraqi people who have had many wars and years of sanctions and are tired and devastated."

Both during the US/British bombardment and soon after her return home on May 4, the retired schoolteacher publicly proclaimed her antiwar views in appearances on ABC's "Good Morning America" and on National Public Radio, as well as in newspaper interviews with the *Daily Telegraph* of Sydney, Australia; the *San Francisco Chronicle*; the *Irish Times*; the *Times* of London; and the *Washington Post*.

Ryan Clancy spent three weeks at a food silo in a rural area northwest of Baghdad. He worked with children while he was there, bringing crayons and construction paper—items that were banned under the sanctions—to encourage younger children to draw stories of their lives. He played soccer in the streets with the teenagers. During his stay he was interviewed by Dan Rather for CBS News and by the *Wall Street Journal*.

Just before the bombing started, he went to Jordan to get enough cash to make sure he could get out again quickly, but Iraqi officials refused him permission to reenter. When he returned to the US a week later, customs agents subjected him to a lengthy grilling, photocopying every piece of paper in his possession. For several months afterwards he found himself on a list of people banned from commercial air travel in the US.

In addition to the individual fines, the US Justice Department filed suit on June 20 in federal District Court to force the collection of a \$20,000 fine imposed on Voices in the Wilderness. The fines were imposed last year for two 1998 violations of sanctions against the importation of medicine to Iraq without permission. The organization also refuses to pay the fine.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Ryan Clancy about the Treasury Department's actions against him. "I got a phone call a week ago Monday [August 4]. That was the first I heard about the fine," he said. "They warned me that if I didn't pay, I could be subject to criminal charges with penalties of up to \$1 million and 10 years in jail—but they never promised that if I went ahead and paid the fine, that they would not hit me with criminal charges anyway."

He said that while he asked the agency to send him charges, penalties and other information in writing, he received only a one-page fax with a case number and a telephone number. "They don't want to put anything in writing because they know I will just turn it over to the press," he said.

The Milwaukee native said the government agents had threatened to seize the assets of his store, leaving him bankrupt.

"While I can't say I want to face criminal charges, I would at least welcome the opportunity to have my day in court," Clancy told the WSW. "I am worried about what is going to happen to me, but I am even more terrified and appalled that this kind of thing can happen in this country. They are also going after a 62-year-old retired schoolteacher!"

"The charge against me is giving aid and comfort to the enemy, but I was giving aid and comfort to elementary school and high school students," he said. "There is no way that these children were the enemy." He said that he also chose to stay at a food silo to ward off an attack that could leave even more Iraqis facing starvation.

Clancy charged that the government is singling out those who were most outspoken against the war for punitive fines. "Other people traveled to Iraq, who ended up supporting the war; they have not been fined," he pointed out. "Even some Senators and Congressmen made a trip there. When they get fined or jailed, I'll take my place right there with them!"

An August 7 report in the *Los Angeles Times* revealed yet another irony about the Bush administration's policy. While issuing large fines and threatening criminal action against ordinary citizens for seeking to protect Iraqi civilians, Bush recently signed an executive order banning any legal action, either civil or criminal, against individuals and corporations involved in exploiting Iraq's oil wealth, now under American control.

Executive Order 13303 states in part, "any attachment,

judgment, decree, lien, execution, garnishment or other judicial process is prohibited, and shall be deemed null and void, with respect to ... all Iraqi petroleum and petroleum products, and interests therein, and proceeds, obligations, or any financial instruments of any nature whatsoever arising from or related to the sale or marketing thereof..."

Legal experts consulted by the *Los Angeles Times* insisted that the broad language of the order granted immunity for actions ranging from criminally negligent oil spills to gross human rights abuses.

While Saddam Hussein's regime fell months ago, many of the sanctions—including the travel ban for US citizens without prior State Department authorization—remain in force. In fact, on July 31 George Bush issued a one-year extension of the "national emergency with respect to Iraq" first declared by his father on August 9, 1990 under the initial executive order imposing sanctions.

The *World Socialist Web Site* also spoke with Judith Karpova, a 58-year old writer who stationed herself at the Daura Refinery along with Faith Fippinger before the bombing began. She is also the subject of a Treasury Department inquiry, but as yet has not been fined.

Commenting on the ongoing sanctions, Karpova said, "They represent a further criminal action by the US. They are still trying to break the spirit of the Iraqi people. They used sanctions, they used depleted uranium, they used 'shock and awe' to get the Iraqi people to submit to a murderous assault on their country. Even now the occupation forces are putting the screws to neighborhoods where they think there are snipers, cutting off water and other services. That means more children dying. But the spirit of a people cannot be broken in this way."

Ms. Karpova is urging supporters of Faith Fippinger and Ryan Clancy to demand that the Treasury Department drop their cases. Letters of protest may be sent to:

US Department of the Treasury
Office of Foreign Assets Control
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW (Annex)
Washington, DC 20220
Attn: Mr. David H. Harmon, chief, Enforcement Division



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact