

American war resister in Canada speaks with WSWs: “The wealthy oil people are making money off of this”

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Early in 2005, Daryl Anderson came to Canada as a deserter from the US Army. He followed the example of Jeremy Hinzman, who became the first soldier to apply to Canada as a political refugee since the beginning of the Iraq war.

Anderson's reasons at the time were simple. He told the *Toronto Sun*: “I was not going back to Iraq to kill innocent people. I couldn't see myself making another decision. I didn't want to live a life where I was hiding in my own country.”

Along with a number of others, most of whom have not gone public, Anderson is awaiting the decision of the refugee board on Hinzman's case, which is expected to be handed down this week. The Canadian government has already intervened to disallow any argument that the illegality of the war in Iraq is grounds for deserting soldiers to come to Canada as political refugees. Nevertheless, the number of US deserters is growing, along with public opposition to the war.

Anderson is from a working class background in Lexington, Kentucky, where most of his family, including his mother and daughter, still live. He joined the military as a way to get medical training in the hope of becoming a physical therapist, but was transferred to combat when he failed to pass the required tests.

After training in Germany, he was posted to Iraq last year, where he spent seven months before coming to Canada. At the age of 22, Anderson was half way through his four-year tour of duty when he heard about the case of Hinzman and decided to follow his example. Since then, Anderson has publicly spoken out against the war.

In late February, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Anderson.

WSWS: When you found out you were going to Iraq, what was the feeling in your unit about going there?

DA: I don't know what their thinking was when they got deployed there. I know when I got there I thought I was going to go defend my country and, you know, do this great thing. When my unit got there, they didn't really think about whether it was right to go over there. They just knew they didn't want to be there. That's the only thing they could really express.

WSWS: You were there for seven months. And then you came back for Christmas?

DA: It was then that...you know, you're just so caught up in the Army thing, you don't really stop and think about what they have you doing, and the whole political view. Like, what am I doing this for? They say “Do this,” and you do this. You don't ask questions.

WSWS: You must have been aware that there was news coming out about Abu Ghraib, the torture going on there, Guantanamo, the torture going on there. What did you make of that? Did you believe that when

it first came out?

DA: Yeah, I believed it totally. The pressure that is being put on these young kids. The people that did that, if you saw them before they joined the military, that would never have been something they would have done.

WSWS: How do you explain why they would do that?

DA: You're over in a desert country for a year or longer. Your wife or your husband leaves you. Your girlfriend leaves you. You're never in touch with your friends or family. Your friends are dying, you could die any day, and you don't really have a life. Seven days a week. There are no days off, and you just go crazy. People do things they wouldn't normally do.

WSWS: Do you think that there's anything in terms of the training or the message that's being given by officers or the leadership?

DA: Well, yes. Whatever they tell you to do, you do. If I wanted to question something, if my superior was making me do something I shouldn't be doing—to question something is serious, it's not even an option.

WSWS: What are you hoping will happen here? Jeffrey House is your lawyer and you applied for refugee status?

DA: The main fight is to get Canada to let me stay, but it's also a fight against the US government and Bush and what they're doing in Iraq, to pull the troops out of Iraq and stop making further advances in other countries. That's the whole idea of the campaign.

WSWS: How would you hope to carry that out? What sort of movement do you see doing that?

DA: To bring people to face up to what is going on over there—I mean rallies, protests. The more people who become aware, the more people who are against it, the better the chance. You can't change the world in a day, but you can't just say we're not going to do anything. At least we're doing something.

WSWS: You realize that the Canadian government has bent over backwards to try and smooth things out with Washington?

DA: That's just the pressure that Bush is putting on Canada. He's just trying to bully them around with the weapons defence programme...I don't think the people want it. The whole thing has got the government distracted, but I know it's not what the people want.

WSWS: If you actually went back into the US at this point, you'd be thrown in jail immediately?

DA: Yeah, I'd be thrown in jail or apprehended, tried and put in jail for a couple of years.

WSWS: How does your family feel about this?

DA: Proud. They're proud that I'm up here doing this.

WSWS: How would the other guys in your unit feel?

DA: I don't know, I have no clue. I know they all liked me and they were all buddies with me, but I can't really talk to them.

WSWS: Do you think they would know why you were doing this? They wouldn't think it was because you were afraid?

DA: No, no, because I got a Purple Heart in combat. I fought in the war. I never got scared once, you know. I stood my ground. So it's not about that.

WSWS: Was there ever any talk in your unit about incidents where civilians were shot?

DA: Before you leave Iraq, you have to sign papers, a government document, saying you will not talk to the media about what is happening over here, the tactics used and all this stuff. So if you sign it, you can't talk about it. You can't go to a political meeting and talk about it.

WSWS: But just between yourselves, if things would happen, would you talk about it?

DA: Yeah. Guys would talk about the fact that they hadn't killed a person before, and they would talk about the struggle with that. But you can't really put your fist in there and say "No." You have to keep your thoughts to yourself.

WSWS: Do you think at this point you may end up making Canada your home?

DA: Oh yeah, definitely, if they let me stay, I'm staying.

WSWS: What about everything you left behind—friends and family?

DA: I've been gone for three years now—Army training, Iraq. I'd be there right now if I could, but I can't, and I'm used to dealing with that. I have a sister there. I have a brother, but I haven't seen him in ten years, maybe fifteen years.

WSWS: When you were in the Army, did you hear about people deserting?

DA: No, they don't tell you about that. I never even knew about people deserting up to Canada until I came back for Christmas. My mom told me.

WSWS: Were you aware of what had happened during the Vietnam War?

DA: A little bit, but not really. In school they didn't teach you that all these people were up here during the Vietnam War. I heard it on "The Simpsons" or something—they mentioned it. But I never really was expecting to meet all these Vietnam-era people, or for it to be such a significant thing. Like the guy who did the piece for the [Toronto] *Sun*, his dad was a Vietnam-era guy, so it runs deep in the people that have a connection.

WSWS: There is some talk that they may be re-introducing the draft.

DA: If they do that, so many people who have a plaque of George Bush hanging on the wall will just automatically not support him. I asked some people, rich people whose kids are in college.

My mom said, "You support Bush, but what if he drafts your kid?" "Oh well, we'll go to Canada." And she said, "It's OK for my son to go over there and die for this, but not your kid? So why would you all of a sudden have a different position, why don't you have it now instead of waiting until your kid goes?"

I had an army buddy, he was going to vote for Bush in the election, and I showed him the video of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and he ripped up his ballot.

WSWS: What do you think about the war on terror?

DA: You go there because of these weapons of mass destruction. But if they had these bombs, why would they have taken all this time, all these years to plan to fly a plane into a building? If they had the

bombs, they would have already used them. They exist, but they're not in Iraq, they're in other places.

What was the main thing in Iraq? Why did we have to go to Iraq? That's the question they can't answer. But all the people who support Bush's campaign and give him money, they're all wealthy oil people, they're making money off of this. They're costing the government money, but individually they're making money off of this.

WSWS: What do you think the alternative is to Bush?

DA: Is there a better alternative? Or is that just how corrupt the government has gotten in the states? Is there really a better alternative?

At the very bottom, where it really starts, the little rallies and the little groups, the Democratic Party people, you know, it's for good, and it's just regular working class people wanting to do better in the world. But, you know, the money comes into play the higher up you get, the money's there, and it gets to be all about money.

It's how everybody bases their decisions—on how it's going to affect them financially. But when you're questioning your morals, the human rights thing, you're going too far for the money. Because it's plain to see, it's not like it's hidden.

Every time they bring this argument up, the Republican Party will just say, "Oh, well, that's just some crazy-thinking person—and that's their only defence. Once a month I see in the paper, "Innocent family fired on." Kids, parents are dead, the kid's got blood on her face and she's crying and the soldier is taking the kid away. Do people just not look at that, or read it? It doesn't bother them because they're still going to work tonight?

You have to do something, and this is the best I can do right now.

WSWS: Do you think this has changed you?

DA: Yeah, I wouldn't be the person I am today if my life hadn't taken this course. I'd probably be at home just playing video games, going to a girlfriend's house, or not even thinking about what's going on in the world. I had to see it for myself, because I always had faith in my country, that's how you're raised up you don't want to question that. So I had to see it for myself.



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