

Bush commutes prison sentence of convicted perjurer and Iraq war conspirator I. Lewis Libby

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President Bush's commutation of the 30-month prison sentence of I. Lewis Libby, the former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, is a monument to the lawlessness of the Bush administration and the utter corruption of the American ruling elite.

It is one more expression of the government's brazen contempt for both the law and the American people. A recent poll showed that 72 percent of the population opposes a pardon for Libby.

Bush issued his order of presidential clemency within hours of a ruling by the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit rejecting Libby's appeal of a decision last month by the trial judge in his perjury and obstruction of justice case. Judge Reggie B. Walton had ruled that Libby could not remain free while he appealed his jury conviction. Monday's appeals court ruling meant that Libby was to begin serving his sentence within weeks.

In a cynical and perfunctory statement, Bush outlined the objections to the judge's sentence leveled by right-wing supporters of the administration and fascistic bloggers and talk radio hosts who have been conducting a "free Libby" campaign to demand that Bush pardon Cheney's former top aide.

The character of the forces whipped up in the campaign for Libby was indicated in an extraordinary statement by Judge Walton at last month's hearing on Libby's bail request. Walton said he wanted to put on the record the fact that he had received threatening letters.

Since his sentencing of Libby, Walton announced, he had received "angry, harassing, mean-spirited" letters and phone calls "wishing bad things on me and my family." He added that he had decided to keep copies for investigators in the event that he became the victim

of foul play.

In his clemency statement Bush declared, "I respect the jury's verdict," even as he unilaterally countermanded the penalty it required. "But I have concluded," he continued, "that the prison sentence given to Mr. Libby is excessive. Therefore, I am commuting the portion of Mr. Libby's sentence that required him to spend thirty months in prison."

In reality, Bush acted to keep his co-conspirator in the invasion of Iraq and other criminal actions out of jail as a quid pro quo for Libby's silence. Bush's intervention confirms the widely held belief that he and Cheney had struck a deal with Libby prior to his trial to squelch any prison sentence that might result from his indictment by Special Counsel Patrick J. Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald, the US attorney for northern Illinois, was named special counsel in December of 2003 to investigate the disclosure the previous July of the CIA identity of Valerie Plame Wilson, the wife of former ambassador Joseph Wilson.

In July of 2003, Joseph Wilson published a column in the *New York Times* exposing Bush administration lies during the run-up to the March, 2003 invasion about alleged Iraqi nuclear weapons programs. Eight days later, syndicated columnist Robert Novak, citing high administration sources, disclosed Valerie Plame Wilson's CIA status. The leak was part of a "dirty tricks" operation aimed at smearing Wilson and intimidating critics of the Iraq war.

Libby was convicted last March of lying to Federal Bureau of Investigation agents and the grand jury convened by Fitzgerald about discussions he had with reporters and Bush administration officials concerning Plame Wilson's CIA identity. Libby did acknowledge

to investigators that among those with whom he discussed Plame Wilson's identity were chief White House political adviser Karl Rove and Cheney.

Numerous witnesses in the trial, including prominent media figures, flatly contradicted statements Libby had made about discussions he supposedly held with them. The sentence handed down by the judge corresponded to federal sentencing guidelines.

In its ruling Monday, a three-judge panel of the DC Circuit appeals court said Libby had "not shown that the appeal raises a substantial question" under federal law that would merit letting him remain free. Judge Walton, in turning down Libby's request to remain at large, said last month that "the evidence of guilt was overwhelming" and arguments by Libby's lawyers for his release were "not close."

Bush brushed aside the court decisions and the will of the jury for two primary reasons: first, to placate his far-right and fascistic political base—an increasingly small minority of a US population overwhelmingly opposed to the war and Bush himself—and, more immediately, to prevent more revelations from emerging about the illegal actions of the White House and the office of the vice president.

Libby, as Cheney's chief of staff, played a major role in fabricating and disseminating phony intelligence about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and supposed ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda in order to drag the American people into an unprovoked war of aggression. He was a party to the police state measures implemented under the cover of the "war on terror," including the gutting of due process rights, kidnappings and torture, the assertion of unchecked presidential powers, and illegal domestic spying operations.

Any war crime trial of those who conspired to invade, occupy and devastate Iraq would include Libby among the defendants.

But Bush was full of compassion for Libby in his clemency statement, declaring: "My decision to commute his prison sentence leaves in place a harsh punishment for Mr. Libby. The reputation he gained through his years of public service and professional work in the legal community is forever damaged. His wife and young children have also suffered immensely. He will remain on probation. The significant fines imposed by the judge will remain in effect. The consequences of his felony conviction on his former

life as a lawyer, public servant, and private citizen will be long-lasting."

As Bush well knows, wealthy administration supporters will more than compensate Libby for the \$250,000 fine he must pay. There can be little doubt that the convicted felon will be feted and well cared for, to the tune of millions of dollars.

The "law and order" president has no such compassion for the hundreds of thousands of people, overwhelmingly poor and working class, who are herded into America's vast prison system to serve punitively long prison terms, in many cases for non-violent offenses. According to a recent report, the US prison population today stands at two million—the largest of any advanced industrialized country.

Nor did Bush evince any trace of compassion when, as governor of Texas, he presided over the execution of more than 130 people—the highest number for any elected official in US history.



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