

Friday August 12, 2016

Craig Scott, "Opinion: Iraq war resisters should be allowed to stay in Canada"

CBC Radio, The 180 – Interview on the situation of US war resisters in Canada - Audio (10 minutes) <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/the180/canada-take-allergies-more-seriously-focus-more-on-growing-sport-and-let-iraq-war-resisters-stay-1.3717193/opinion-iraq-war-resisters-should-be-allowed-to-stay-in-canada-1.3717281>

Some may call them cowardly military deserters. Others may call them brave war resisters.

Starting in 2004, an estimated 200 to 300 American soldiers fled the Iraq War and came to Canada seeking refuge.

About 45 of them sought refugee protection here, as conscientious objectors, but the Canadian government has been actively trying to deport them back to the U.S. to face trial, under a directive called [Operational Bulletin 202](#), put in place by the previous Conservative government.

Today, about 15 remain in Canada, with their cases working their way through the federal court system.

Craig Scott argues the resisters should be allowed to stay, especially since many in the international community have condemned the [Iraq war as illegal](#).

It's not that the resisters have suddenly become pacifists, says Scott.

Rodney Watson has been living in a Vancouver church for seven years after refusing to return to Iraq as part of the U.S. military. (CBC)

"Most of these folks will say war can sometimes be justified, maybe even often, in most cases, but this *particular war*, or the methods that are going on, are just beyond the acceptable moral standards of the international community or of my own faith."

Canada welcomed roughly 50,000 or so Vietnam War draft dodgers starting in the 1960s, but Scott says some of the American soldiers who fled that war and came to Canada did so after objecting to atrocities they witnessed in the field. He says it shouldn't matter that American soldiers volunteered for the Iraq war. Soldiers should have a right to change their mind on moral grounds.

"It's a question of individuals, brave individuals, having a right analogous to whistle blowers, to question whether or not even in warfare there are lines that can't be crossed." - *Craig Scott*

Scott, a law professor at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School and a former MP for Toronto-Danforth, argues Canada has an opportunity to come up with a 21st century policy towards conscientious objectors, who either flee to Canada or are part of our own military, that takes into account real world considerations with moral principles and the rule of law.

"I think we're on the cusp of it mattering whether states like Canada take the lead in re-looking at their own legal systems and how we look at conscientious objection," says Scott.

"International law has now moved so far along that it's not going to be long before everybody says the right to conscientious objection in multiple forms *is* part of international law."

A federal court has given the Liberal government until September 16 to decide whether or not to continue with the previous government's policy towards Iraq war resisters.

Scott says he hopes Canada will do the right thing, and let them stay.

Click the play button above to hear Craig Scott's interview with guest host Stephen Quinn