



conscience update

issue 124

spring 2004

newsletter of **conscience** THE PEACE TAX CAMPAIGN

Government in dock for denying human rights of conscientious objectors

Seven conscientious objectors are preparing to take the Government to court for denying their human rights. The group, calling themselves the “Birmingham Seven” after the venue of their first meeting, have all withheld the military portion of their taxes because their consciences will not allow them to fund killing. Some have been to court for non-payment of taxes - only to see their defences ruled out. One was told that their defence was logical, but not legal.

They have engaged Public Interest Lawyers to act on their behalf in seeking a Judicial Review of the current laws. These make conscientious objectors complicit in killing if they do their civic duty and pay their taxes, or make criminals of them if they follow their conscience and refuse to fund war.

They intend to seek a “pre-emptive costs order”, which would limit their liability for the Government’s costs should the case go against them. Such an order has only been granted once before, when Phil Shiner of Public Interest Lawyers successfully argued that CND’s attempt to stop the government going to war in Iraq was in the public interest and could only proceed if such an order were granted.

Even if a pre-emptive costs order is obtained, the case is likely to cost the conscientious objectors tens of thousands of pounds and they are currently working on plans to raise



photo | Jon Nott/conscience

MPs Adam Price, John McDonnell, Neil Gerrard and David Lepper delivered Peace Tax Returns to the Treasury on Tax Day (see page 2).

funds for the case. The process of seeking and carrying out a Judicial Review is likely to take many months and **conscience** will be working to support the “Birmingham Seven” with their publicity and fundraising efforts throughout this time, including raising the issue in parliament.

Once the Judicial Review process is completed, **conscience** will be working with our parliamentary supporters to put a Bill before the House of Commons.

Even a successful Judicial Review is likely to confirm the view that there is no legal way for conscientious objectors to divert their taxes away from military expenditure. This would greatly strengthen the case for a change in the law and for this reason we are putting back the Bill we originally planned for this spring.

conscience
campaigns for the legal right for those who have a conscientious objection to war to have the military part of their taxes spent on peacebuilding initiatives

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publicity for **conscience**

Peace Tax Return delivery

On 29 January we were joined by four MPs to help us deliver Peace Tax Returns to the Treasury. Up to a thousand PTRs have now been sent and we plan to enable even more conscientious objectors to declare their objection to paying for war this year. After a brief, and cold, photo session with the MPs we took a symbolic bundle of PTRs into the Treasury where we were greeted by an official. In response to our delivery, the Paymaster General, Dawn Primarolo MP, wrote "we have received a large number of similar 'Peace Tax Campaign' returns recently". Good. Let's keep sending them.

new Peace Tax Return

The new, 2004 Peace Tax Return is now available (a copy is enclosed). We are also very pleased to announce that a Welsh language version is also available this year. We are encouraging all our members to complete one and send it to the Treasury or your own tax office. If you would like additional PTRs for your local peace groups, church, friends or colleagues please get in touch with the **conscience** office. We supply multiple copies free of charge, but if you would like a large bundle we would welcome a contribution towards postage.

As before, the PTR comes in two parts. Part A is for people who are taxed at source (those of us taxed under PAYE) and are unable to withhold the military part of their taxes. Part A is also for people whose tax is self-assessed (those of you who fill in an Inland Revenue Tax Return) but do not wish to withhold the military part of their taxes. Part B is for people whose conscience directs them to withhold the part of their taxes destined for military expenditure. If you complete Part B you should send your PTR, attached to your Inland Revenue Tax Return, to your tax office.

adjournment debate

Working with **conscience**, a number of MPs are applying for an adjournment debate on security and conflict prevention. It is difficult to guarantee when the debate will take place (with many things in Parliament it is a lottery) but applications are in for the week beginning 10 May. If it does not take place then it should happen two weeks later in week beginning 24 May.

The adjournment debate on security and conflict prevention provides an opportunity for MPs to discuss problems with the current military approach to security and to explore the possibilities of increased conflict prevention spending and techniques. The government currently spend the equivalent of just 2.3% of the MoD budget on conflict prevention.

Euro elections - 10 June

Elections for the European Parliament will take place this year on 10 June. **conscience** is currently supported by 16 MEPs. We would like to ensure we keep their support and increase the number of MEPs who support us. MEPs are elected on a regional basis - so you are represented by several MEPs.

Please take the opportunity of any hustings which are organised to raise the issues of conscientious objection to war taxes, the amount of money spent on the military and the lack of investment in positive alternatives.

■ To find out who your new MEPs are after the election visit www.europarl.org.uk/uk_meps/MembersMain.htm or call 020 7227 4300.

Networking Progressing

Deanna Douglas's work to increase ties with other NGOs has made considerable progress since the last newsletter. She

has met with the directors of a number of organisations, and increased ties with Quaker Peace & Social Witness (with whom we will hold our annual event on June 5) and other groups. This has led to **conscience**'s involvement in events and publications that have not previously mentioned the campaign.

In particular, Deanna's efforts to dialogue with Whitehall have proven successful. In conjunction with other NGOs, she has had the opportunity to meet or correspond with several government officials on the subject of alternatives to the military model of security. Her aim in these conversations is both to increase the profile of

conscience and the acceptance of nonviolent alternatives.

International conference

The Tenth International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns will be held in Brussels, Belgium, from the evening of Thursday 8 July to lunchtime on Sunday 11 July 2004. The general theme will be our human right to conscientious objection to paying taxes for the military and our human duty to pay taxes for peace and civil conflict resolution.

- Please contact the **conscience** office for further information.

members' news

Annual event

This year's annual event, *Global Insecurity - What is our response?* will take place on 5 June. It will be held, in association with Quaker Peace and Social Witness, in Bull St Friends Meeting House, Birmingham. Speakers will include the nonviolence trainer and author Diana Francis and Marieke Junge of Peaceworkers UK. The annual event is free to attend, but pre-registration is vital so that we have numbers for catering and can send you further details nearer to the event.

- If you would like to register, please use the enclosed leaflet.

going places?

Are you going to an event this summer where you could help **conscience** by publicising the campaign? Or maybe you'd like to run a **conscience** stall. If so, we have leaflets, stickers, new Peace Tax Returns, petitions, war tax resistance guides and newsletters available free of charge.

- Just get in touch with the office and we will send the materials to you.

If you are going to Glastonbury Festival 25-27 June, don't forget to visit the **conscience** stall in the Green Fields.

diary

15 May

International Conscientious Objectors' Day.

Ceremony from 12noon at the Commemorative Stone in Tavistock Square, London WC1. Followed by picnic.

29 May

concert for peace

7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Organised by Musicians Against Nuclear Arms. Wissam Boustany (flute) and Vanessa Lataarche (piano) play Hummel, Mendelssohn, Pierné, Ian Clarke and Fauré. Speaker - Bruce Kent. Tickets £8.50 (£7 concs) t 020 8455 1030

5 June

Global Insecurity

The **conscience** annual event, in Birmingham. See article, left, and enclosed leaflet.

8-11 July

10th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns

Contact the office for further details.

more diary dates at

www.networkforpeace.org.uk

contacting the office

general enquiries

Archway Resource Centre
1 B Waterlow Road
London N19 5NJ

t 0870 777 3223 (national rate)

f 020 7281 6508

e info@conscienceonline.org.uk

campaigns enquiries

t as left - ask for Oliver

e lobby@conscienceonline.org.uk

membership enquiries

t as left - ask for Jon

e develop@conscienceonline.org.uk

security - concrete alternatives

Deanna Douglas continues her discussion of security by taking a closer look at some of the non-military approaches.

In the last **conscience** update, I looked at the general concept of approaching security less violently. One of the initiatives I mentioned was the UK's Global Conflict Prevention Pool, which is a project of the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office, and the Department for International Development.

Together with the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, the Joint Pools represent a small but important development in conflict prevention – and an example of efforts to promote joined up government. The Pools have a budget of £124 million pounds, which isn't much by Defence standards (one 300th of UK Defence spending – and one 1,700th of US spending). But what sorts of projects can the Pools undertake?

Diversity – A positive force

The various methods used to avoid violent conflict are complex and are normally most effective when used in combination. That means that there are no simple quick fixes, but there is real potential for input from different groups and individuals with very diverse voices.

Many people in the UK are aware of the terrible events that have plagued Zimbabwe over the last few years as Robert Mugabe's government has completely deteriorated and people have suffered in countless ways (largely at the hands of the ruling ZANU-PF). Last summer, I spent some time in Zimbabwe and learned many things during my stay there - including the inadvisability of a military attack to deal with the problems.

A Toolbox for Change

Traditionally, we have viewed violent

conflict as something to be addressed using one primary tool (the armed forces – a hammer of sorts – applied directly or, more commonly, through the threat of its use) as well as a few others kept close at hand (e.g. diplomatic efforts). If, however, our society and our government could begin to see the mechanisms to address violence as a fully equipped toolbox, the potential for real (and nonviolent) change increases significantly.

It is obviously more difficult to get a clear picture in our minds of a project that uses varied objects in a large toolbox rather than a job that just uses a hammer and a screwdriver. To that end, I will briefly apply each of the tools below to the current reality in Zimbabwe - one of many global trouble spots. It is not meant to represent a comprehensive list of the alternatives, but to provide a better understanding of the concept.

A Toolkit for Zimbabwe

1. **Civilian Protection**

Trained units of civilian volunteers are mobilized to areas where there is significant tension, an idea that is growing in popularity throughout the world. This would serve to make Mugabe aware that the eyes of the world are on him and his administration.

2. **Control of Arms and Weapons Control**

The UK is one of the world's biggest arms exporters, including to the developing world. Lower sales and greater control would result in less weapons getting into the hands of existing and potential combatants. If the Zimbabwean army had limited access

to everything from torture instruments to planes, there would be a reduced potential for violence. Similarly, if the former military members who commit many of Zimbabwe's political crimes had sufficient incentives to hand in their weapons, lives would be saved.

3. Trained Inspectors

Inspectors are deployed to look for torture, rape, killing, and ethnic cleansing - and report back to the government (or governing body) that commissioned them. Sadly, this would be particularly useful in Zimbabwe as reports of rape, torture, and disappearances are numerous but largely ignored by Western media.

4. Law Enforcement

As demonstrated in the UK involvement in Sierra Leone, a properly trained and supported law enforcement and judicial system can make an enormous difference. In Zimbabwe there is currently no accountability for any political crime, allowing the ZANU-PF militias to act with impunity.

5. Bringing Warlords and Militias Under Control

NGOs, diplomats, properly supported local leaders, and in some cases the armed forces have been effective in bringing such parties to the negotiating table. In Zimbabwe, the primary militias (including the infamous youth gangs) are arms of the ZANU-PF, so discussions must begin there.

6. Back Channel Diplomacy

Back Channel (otherwise known as Track II) diplomacy is the process whereby individuals or NGOs work behind the scenes when traditional, public diplomacy isn't working. In Zimbabwe, the government will not admit to its role in the violence and economic problems, thereby severely limiting efforts to address them. An unofficial dialogue could open the door.

7. Mediation Training

It is important that local people serve to build bridges between official and

unofficial stakeholders. However, in many cases they do not have skills necessary for this challenging task. In Zimbabwe, a great deal can be learned from their neighbours in South Africa – but funding is necessary.

8. Reconciliation Committees

There have been a number of these throughout the world in recent years, including in South America, and famously in South Africa. Once again, with sufficient funding, African training would clearly be available to the victims – and the perpetrators – of violence in Zimbabwe.

9. Support for Civil Society and Opposition to Government

In countries where the problem is, at least to some extent, the government itself, support of civil society organisations and other voices of opposition are key to change. In Zimbabwe, there is a broad diversity of groups that have been victimised for such small acts as feeding people in towns that voted against the government in the last election.

10. A Free Press

Even though we are aware of such problems in this country as the underfunding of the BBC and the existence of media conglomerates, there are alternatives, even if some of them require access to the internet (which is an option for most in the UK). In Zimbabwe, however, the simple act of buying a non-government endorsed newspaper has resulted in severe beatings and the suspicion of militias loyal to Mugabe.

UK government projects have the potential to make a real difference in potential conflict zones. In addition, each of us can take action by learning more about the various tools and the government Pools, writing to our MPs in support of the Pools and advocating a shift in funding from traditional security models - and explaining the toolbox to anyone who is concerned about security, either at home and abroad.

Note:

Oxford Research Group and PeaceDirect recently released *Cutting the Costs of War* by Dr Scilla Elworthy, which is the source of the general concepts above. For further information, see www.peacedirect.org



Lord Kitchenblair's diary

a quarterly round-up of war tax resistance

conscience has been busy over the last few months working with war tax resisters who are appalled to hear in the media exactly how their taxes are being spent. Every day we see further military action in Iraq, as the country continues to descend into anarchy.

After being ordered by Magistrates in Chippenham to pay his outstanding tax, Robin Brookes has continued to withhold payment until he receives an assurance his taxes will not be used for military purposes. He tried and failed to pay his taxes to the Global Conflict Prevention Pool by taking an oversized cheque along to his local tax office - but he got a lot of publicity. A distress warrant was sought by Inland Revenue and now Robin is waiting for the bailiff to visit - but he's ready for them. He has pinned his outstanding tax in £10 notes to a display board for the bailiff to take. He has also alerted the local media, who are ready and waiting with a camera to come and catch the moment the bailiff arrives. I took my hat off to Robin when I heard about the idea. What a fantastic way to make the bailiff face up to exactly what they are collecting money for.

War Resisters International were in City of London Magistrates Court on 9 February. They have been withholding £466.31 of income tax payments at the request of their employees. They explained their reasons for withholding to the court and stated in their defence that their employees' human rights were being violated. Although the magistrates deliberated for roughly 15 minutes, they did not take any of WRI's arguments into account. They declared that nothing could be gained by adjourning the case in order to have a full hearing, which could include a legal discussion on human rights, and issued an order to pay.

Legal action continues in other areas too. In February a distress warrant was applied for against Birgit Voellm in Manchester, and Sian Cwper in Wales is expecting to be called to court soon.

There are also several other cases of war tax resistance that I am aware of (and, no doubt, many more I am unaware of) where people have withheld an amount of tax, only to find that the payments on account they had previously made come to a higher total than the tax due for that period. So they are actually owed money by Inland Revenue. "I must be the only person in Sheffield to be crestfallen at the arrival of a tax rebate" said Simon Heywood.

It just goes to show that war tax resistance is not a straightforward or stress-free process. Get in touch with my friends at the office if you would like any advice.

Over & Out, KB

PS. I'm very excited about the possible Judicial Review (see front page) and wish all my war-tax -resisting friends the best of luck.

Robin Brookes' display of his withheld tax with notices to say how the money could be spent on healthcare, energy and food in poverty stricken and war torn parts of the world.



review

from p8/ *A War on Terror* as a quick, instructive guide to interpreting current realities. Some of it seems less relevant a few years after the fact, and it would perhaps benefit from the removal of some of the more repetitious sections. But its strength is in reminding us of the true nature of America's security predicament in the region, its unwillingness to address that, and the impact on the rest of us makes it well worth the read.

The Ordinary Person's Guide To Empire

Another short collection of essays by a well known author on global issues, Roy's *Guide to Empire* is a strong indictment of the "benevolent hegemony" of the US empire. Michael Moore has been referred to as the ordinary person's Noam Chomsky; she hits even closer to the mark.

Through a study of power and its uses by the current (as well as recent) US administration, Roy provides an accessible portrait of the picture of reality seen by the majority world. She argues against the dualistic perspective (us good, them evil) of the Bush administration and spends a lot of time painting a picture of the systemic oppression and suffering that result from globalisation.

Once again, the book suffers somewhat from the effect of taking presentations that were delivered a few years ago and compiling them together in one unedited text. Again, however, the information and foundational concepts are both interesting and important – and are key to the current international political and economic dialogue.

The book centres around the fact that our "free" global economy is a thoroughly undemocratic system for maximising multinationals profits. She takes on misleading labels used by our political and media leaders such as renaming "corporate globalisation" with the much clearer "imperialism", and rescuing the Iraqi army from being called a "militia".

Her recommendation? To remember that they (the big companies) need us more than we need them. We cannot and will not convince the US administration that their actions are feeding the problem. Instead, we need to realise that we, the people, are in the majority - and it's time we acted accordingly.

The Ordinary Person's Guide To Empire,
Arundhati Roy,
Flamingo, 2004
isbn 0-00718163-9
240pp £8.99

A War on Terror: Afghanistan and After,
Paul Rogers,
Pluto Press, 2004
isbn 0-74532086-4
210pp, £12.99

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REVIEW

Deanna Douglas reviews Paul Roger's **A War on Terror** and **The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire** by Arundhati Roy.

Paul Rogers, well known author and Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University, writes prolifically on the subject of security and related issues. This short and readable book is a compilation of articles Dr Rogers contributed to the independent web journal OpenDemocracy between October 2001 and December 2002.

It is a good read on a number of levels. Obviously, the main reason for reading a book on the war on terror and Afghanistan during that period is to learn about the events that occurred there, to reflect on the participants and their various roles, and their very significant effects on the current political and security environment.

It accomplishes that nicely, and while the week by week analysis method of presentation has its weaknesses (references to events that are no longer in public memory, repetition, lack of natural fluidity), the benefits become

clear over the reading of the text. Principally, the gradual unfolding of events highlights the fact that many of the problems associated with the war on terror and the situation in Afghanistan are directly attributable to the actions of the United States (and to a lesser extent Israel), as well as other world powers – rather than simply to Al Qaida.

There were a number of things to take away; the benefits of a detailed, regular, and professional analysis in evaluating and analysing complex situations and events is important - and all too rare in the mass media. The US strategy from the start of eliminating an enemy (Iraq) - rather than having it meet specific objectives - was sobering. Perhaps most of all, however, the glaring fact that this kind of “war” cannot be fought through the traditional method of attacking any particular nation state came through very loud and clear.

I certainly recommend /to p7

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