



conscience update

issue 125

summer 2004

newsletter of **conscience** THE PEACE TAX CAMPAIGN

The Peace Tax Seven are Go!

The Peace Tax Seven, a group of conscientious objectors and war tax resisters, have sent their “Letter before Action” to Gordon Brown; the first step on the long road to a Judicial Review. The Seven are seeking a Judicial Review of current tax law, which makes them complicit in killing if they carry out their civic duty and pay their taxes or makes them criminals if they follow their conscience and refuse to pay taxes for war and war preparations.

The “Letter before Action” informs the government of their intention to seek a Judicial Review and sets out their reasons for doing so. The government has 28 days to respond to the letter. Once they have this response the Peace Tax Seven can move on to the next step of the process, which is to seek a pre-emptive costs order. If the Judicial Review goes against the Peace Tax Seven, they would be liable for the government’s costs as well as their own; if they are granted a pre-emptive costs order this will place a cap on their liability for the government’s costs.

They will argue that it is in the public interest that the Judicial Review takes place and that they could not undertake it if they were liable for unlimited costs. The first order of this type was granted to a group of organisations including CND and the Green Party, when they tried to stop the government going to war in Iraq. Their solicitor Phil Shiner, who is also representing the Peace Tax Seven, successfully argued that it was



photos | Oliver Haslam/conscience

The **conscience** “Peace Tax Collectors” set up their office at the Glastonbury festival this year (see page 2 for the full story).

in the public interest that the legal case against the war be heard and that the groups taking the case should not have to risk bankruptcy for this to happen.

If the Seven are also successful in persuading a judge that their case is in the public interest, they will be able to proceed to the full Judicial Review application. Even to get to this stage will cost a significant amount of money and for legal reasons **conscience** cannot underwrite the cost. The Peace Tax Seven have therefore launched a separate appeal to cover the costs of the case and we are pleased to enclose a copy with this newsletter.

Read more about the Peace Tax Seven in *Lord Kitchenblair’s Diary* on page 6.

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**

adjournment debate

Many thanks to all those members who wrote to their MP about the adjournment debate we planned in May.

Unfortunately none of our supporting MPs were successful in the lottery to allocate such debates and we are now working with some other groups and a larger number of MPs to try to secure a debate on security and conflict prevention in the autumn. We will publish more details in the autumn newsletter and contact lobbyists directly.

- If you would like to join the list of lobbyists, please contact Oliver in the office stating whether you prefer to be contacted by post or email.

Peace Tax Return

Thousands of Peace Tax Returns have been distributed this year and hundreds have already been submitted to the Treasury.

We expect many more to be returned when people complete their tax returns in September and still more in the run up to the final deadline in January.

- If you would like some Peace Tax Returns to distribute at events in the autumn, please contact the office.

Glastonbury Festival

We took a stall to the Glastonbury Festival for the first time this year and it was a roaring success. Hundreds of Peace Tax Returns and letters to MPs were completed and thousands of leaflets were distributed.

Our "Peace Tax Inspectors" with their pinstripe suits and bowler hats certainly stood out against the mud as they distributed "£10 notes" and Peace Tax Returns to festival-goers.

European election

June 10 saw a generally good result for **conscience's** supporters in the European Parliament. Both Green Party MEPs were re-elected as were both Scottish Nationalist Party MEPs (with Alyn Smith replacing Neil MacCormick), along with both of our Liberal Democrat supporters. Plaid Cymru lost one MEP due to the reduction in the total number of MEPs elected and, despite a poor result overall for Labour, all of our Labour supporters who stood were re-elected.

Please consider writing to congratulate our supportive MEPs in your area on their re-election and to any new MEPs you have to tell them about **conscience** and our campaign.

- If you would like to write to your MEP about **conscience** you can find their address at www.europarl.org.uk or in your local Library.

Supportive MEPs

Scotland

David Martin (Lab)
Ian Hudghton (SNP)

North East

Stephen Hughes (Lab)

North West

Terry Wynn (Lab)

Eastern

Andrew Duff (LibDem)
Richard Howitt (Lab)

Wales

Jill Evans (PC)

South West

Glyn Ford (Lab)
Graham Watson (LibDem)

South East

Caroline Lucas (Green)

London

Jean Lambert (Green)

We currently have no supportive MEPs in Northern Ireland, Yorkshire & the Humber, East Midlands or West Midlands.

members' news

diary

annual event

This year's annual event, *Global Insecurity - What is our response?* was postponed from June due to major rail engineering works and will now take place on Saturday 9 October. 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 registration fee is £6.50, which includes lunch.

- If you would like to register, please use the enclosed leaflet. The last date for registration is Wednesday 15 September.

have your say

Our annual membership questionnaire was sent out recently with the annual review.

- If you did not receive your copy, please contact Jon in the office and he will send you one.

office closed

Please note that the office will be closed from Thursday 12 August to Monday 30 August inclusive.

change is afoot

Deanna Douglas, who spent a year with us on a placement from the Mennonite Church in Canada, has returned home – you can read a report of her work on page 5. Deanna has achieved far more than we dared think possible when we started the project and we will miss her contribution to the office.

Fortunately, we have secured funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to continue this work and from September Sarah Graham-Brown will be working three days per week as Networking Officer.

We are also very pleased that in September Simon Heywood will be starting his one-year placement as a Quaker Peace & Social Witness Peacemaker. Simon will be working on outreach and promoting positive security alternatives.

thank you

Thank you very much to all those who contributed to our appeal to fund the work that conscience is doing to support of the Peace Tax Seven.

- If you have previously opted out of appeals and would now like to receive them, please contact Jon in the office.

9 October

Global Insecurity

The **conscience** annual event, in Birmingham, postponed from June. See article, left, and enclosed leaflet for further details.

14-17 October

European Social Forum, London

A giant gathering for everyone opposed to war, racism and corporate power, everyone who wants to see global justice, workers' rights and a sustainable society.

t 020 8809 5347

w www.fse-esf.org

30 October

Concert for Peace

7.30pm at St James's Church, 197 Piccadilly, London W1. Organised by Musicians Against Nuclear Arms. The MANA Chamber Orchestra, lead by Nona Liddell and conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras play Mendelssohn, Bartok, Britten, Dvorak and Schubert. Speaker

- Chris Nineham, European Social Forum. Tickets £7-12

t 020 8455 1030

more diary dates at
networkforpeace.org.uk

contacting the office

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e lobby@conscienceonline.org.uk

membership enquiries

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e develop@conscienceonline.org.uk

international conference

Oliver Haslam reports on the 10th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns

The 10th International Conference took place this July in a beautiful old convent in suburban Brussels.

The first plenary session was led by a journalist in the anti-globalisation movement. It took me a while to work out what this had to do with peace tax and war tax resistance but this soon became clear. The thrust of the presentation was that there is a huge people's movement against the negative aspects of globalisation - and that we, as campaigners for the right not to pay for the military, form part of that movement. Civil society across the globe is realising the connections between poverty, militarism, multinational corporations, environmental destruction, diminishing natural resources and human rights and responsibilities. It was a fascinating introduction and made us all think about the context within which we are working.

Over the weekend there were a variety of workshops and Q&A sessions. Deanna and I led several workshops on communicating with the public and press, lobbying and dialogue with government, and what we really want for a safer world: a non-military approach to security. There was great interest in the work that we are doing to promote non-military security (NMS) in the UK. At first people had reservations and wondered why we were putting energy into NMS rather than overtly



peace tax issues. Our one-line answer is that if governments realise there are alternatives to war it makes the goal of all peace tax campaigns easier to achieve. By the end of the weekend the coin had dropped and we were told by representatives from several countries that they would take the idea home with them and start working on it themselves.

Everyone was interested in the legal approach the Peace Tax Seven are taking forward with their judicial review. We learned about a number of different approaches being taken at the moment in other countries: some focus on freedom of religion, some on the unethical investment of tax money, some on where our taxes should be spent and others on where they should not be spent.

Conscience & Peace Tax International (CPTI), the international organisation, which lobbies at the UN in Geneva and New York for the rights of conscientious objectors to taxation for military purposes, told us of their recent activities with the NGO Working Group on Conscientious Objection. Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) representatives told us of their plans to introduce a resolution on peace tax in the Council of Europe. It was good to see that action is being taken at the international level too.

At the end of the weekend representatives from Ghana, /to page 5

in dialogue with the government

conscience has been instrumental in establishing the Peace & Security Liaison Group

In the Autumn of 2003, **conscience** launched a pilot project to bring together a group of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in peace and security issues for meetings involving related offices in government. Over the course of the year the project has come together and is now known as the NGO Peace & Security Liaison Group; a dozen NGOs have been gathered and a variety of meetings have been held at Whitehall.

We are very pleased to announce that the project has now received two years' funding from Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to allow it to continue. Deanna Douglas, a Mennonite volunteer working for **conscience** to launch the project, was only able to devote one year to get it underway and has now returned to her job in Canada. The support from Rowntree has enabled us to employ Sarah Graham-Brown to work for the continued success of the Liaison Group.

It has been an interesting process, and one that has enjoyed a lot of support from members of the UK peace community. Because of the decision to use a dialogue-based approach (rather than a more typical campaigning focus), we kept the number of groups involved

from page 4/ India and Colombia also spoke of the situations in their countries. Military spending in western countries, currently at a frightening all-time high, has deep repercussions worldwide. It is all too clear that the taxes of one nation can serve to militarize another.

For me, the most inspiring part of the conference was simply meeting other people who work on peace tax and war tax resistance and hearing how

small enough for round table discussions. The Liaison Group is a collection of policy-driven, membership-based, and field organisations with an interest both in research and in engaging in a series of talks with government staff under the Chatham House Rule (which enables more frank and open discussions).

So far, the meetings have been with the Cabinet Strategy team studying countries at risk of instability, the Counter Proliferation Department, policy research staff, and a number of sessions (including a half-day policy forum) with conflict prevention staff from the Ministry of Defence, Department for International Development, and the Foreign Office. There are a number of future opportunities being investigated as well, including working with a new joined up government unit that will focus on post conflict work.

It has been a particularly exciting project because we have been able to come together as a group and agree on an approach - as well as some common objectives - while connecting with more people. Being able to bring that to government has been worthwhile, and hopefully will be a fruitful enterprise in the long run.

things are done in their home countries. One of the key lessons which came out of the conference was the need to publicise our campaigns more. It is not so much that people in the wider world are not persuaded by our arguments but that all of our campaigns are still quite small because most people simply have not heard of conscientious objection to military taxation. We will continue to work on that.



Lord Kitchenblair's diary

a quarterly round-up of war tax resistance

THE PEACE TAX SEVEN

Brenda Boughton



Robin Brookes



Joe Jenkins



Sian Cwper



Birgit Voellm



Roy Prockter



Simon Heywood



The Peace Tax Seven's campaign to gain public support and raise funds for their Judicial Review is now well underway. The Seven (see left) come from various parts of England and Wales and are united in their belief that their human rights are infringed because they are required by law to pay for the military via their taxes.

With the assistance of Phil Shiner from Public Interest Lawyers, they are seeking a Judicial Review of the law and will argue that forcing conscientious objectors to pay military taxes interferes with their basic human rights and is disproportional to the needs of society. It simply is not necessary to make those with a conscientious objection to killing pay for military activity when there are all sorts of more effective and cost-effective alternatives available. Please support my friends in the Peace Tax Seven in whatever way you can: **w** www.peacetaxseven.com **e** info@peacetaxseven.com

War Resisters International, the international pacifist group, are expecting a visit from the tax man to collect their employees' withheld tax. This appears to indicate a change in heart from Inland Revenue, who had previously said they would no longer personally collect withheld tax. After a court appearance in February this year, in which WRI was ordered to pay the full amount plus expenses, they continued to refuse to act as war tax collectors.

Diverters beware! Recent intelligence suggests (though as you well know, you can't always trust 'intelligence') that Inland Revenue are sneakily banking cheques made out to 'Inland Revenue Department for International Development Account', as suggested in **conscience's** briefing for war tax resist-

ers. After talking to my **conscience** friends, I recommend that you do not write the words 'Inland Revenue' anywhere on your diversion cheque.

Two Liverpool doctors, who appeared in these pages last winter, are continuing their tax resistance. In addition to withholding the military percentage of their tax they are also refusing to pay the interest charged by Inland Revenue on their withheld tax. By keeping their withheld tax in a Triodos Bank account all the interest they earn goes straight to Amnesty International. As they have not personally benefited from the interest, other than the satisfaction of supporting a good cause, I think they have a strong argument - but I am sure Inland Revenue do not quite agree.

Remember, if you are a war tax resister you can join the WTR-UK email support group which enables contact with other war tax resisters for support, advice and ideas. To join, please contact Oliver (contact details on page 3).

You can also find information on war tax resistance, legal actions and many other things on the new **conscience** website www.conscienceonline.org.uk. It's taken a while, but finally they have it! I rarely meet someone who does not agree with **conscience's** aims - it's just they haven't heard of the campaign. Let's hope the website means more people will hear of **conscience** and give the campaign a louder voice in future.

Finally, I received an interesting note by carrier pigeon the other day. It suggested that those who object to paying for war could withhold just £1 from their tax payment. Not a huge amount but certainly a symbolic spanner in the works! Worth a go? (Let me know if you try.) *Over & Out, KB*

review



from p8/ in the illegal occupation. War Tax Resisters would pay their taxes if they receive a guarantee that they will not be made complicit in killing – that their taxes will be spent on non-military means of security.

War Tax Resistance is based on pacifism and the established right to conscientious objection; it is usually a “total refusal”, but there have recently been attempts by individuals to withhold taxes based on an objection to the illegal war on Iraq. Here the parallels are even stronger.

Selective refusal, War Tax Resistance and Selective War Tax Resistance are only possible in countries where the right to conscientious objection has become normative. In and of themselves they are a personal solution – a salvaging of one’s own conscience – and do not address the larger problem.

It is only when individuals come together and act in concert that the true power of these actions can be realised. An individual conscript’s selective refusal will not stop the occupation of Palestine, but the current movement of 2,000 resisters (equivalent to 10,000 British soldiers refusing to serve in Northern Ireland) has a significant impact in Israel. Similarly, an individual war tax resister has no impact on the military budget, but a movement of thousands, demanding to pay only for peaceful methods of improving international security could make a real difference.

The inspiring stories of these Israeli refuseniks will lead many to examine their own contribution to a state which is constantly preparing for war and maybe some will decide that in Britain too, “There’s a limit.”

special offer

If you set up a standing order to **conscience** of £3 per month or more, or increase an existing standing order by £2 per month or more, we will send you a free copy of *Refusenik!*

You can use the form below to set up a new standing order or to replace an existing instruction to your bank – they will cancel your current payments and use the new amount you specify.

Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience,
Peretz Kidron,
Zed Books, 2004
isbn 1-84277-451-4
122pp £12.95

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REVIEW

Simon Winton discusses the implications of Peretz Kidron's **Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience**.

Refusenik! is the story of those Israeli soldiers who have refused to serve in missions on occupied Palestinian land and is mainly told through the testimonies, letters and stories of some of those individuals.

The movement began after the 1967 "Six Day War" when individual soldiers refused orders to serve in the newly occupied territories. Only two decades after the Holocaust and the Nuremburg trials these soldiers knew the horror and the penalties of "just following orders" and they could not participate in the oppression of others. These isolated acts of conscience lead to the formation of Yesh Guv (Hebrew for "There's a limit"), an organisation which provides solidarity and support to those soldiers who became refuseniks.

Those who refused to serve in the occupied territories made it clear that they were not pacifists, that they were happy to do their duty in the defence of

their country, but they also had a duty to obey illegal orders – and orders given in illegally occupied Palestinian areas were by definition illegal. The philosophy behind these actions has become known as "selective refusal".

This is a significant development in the arguments relating to conscientious objection. The Israeli refuseniks are all conscripts or reservists who are called up to one month in twelve, but they do not refuse to serve in the army, only to serve beyond the 1967 borders.

This has interesting parallels with those who have a conscientious objection to taxation for military purposes. Both groups recognise the right of the state, in one case to raise an army, in the other to raise taxes, but both also claim the right of an individual to have the leadings of their conscience recognised and respected. Refuseniks would serve if they were given a guarantee that they would not be made complicit /to p7

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- I/we want to renew my membership

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