



conscience update

issue 132

spring 2006

newsletter of **conscience** THE PEACE TAX CAMPAIGN

PeacePays - and war costs

conscience's latest project, PeacePays, was launched on 1 March in central London. The event was well-attended, with the chance to meet all involved in the project and to see the new website up on big screens along with music and videos.

By producing an attractive, fun and informative website, **conscience** is reaching out to the mass of people, particularly young people, who are 'anti-war'. Our challenge is to help those people become



Tax doesn't have to be taxing... **on your conscience**

'pro-peace' by providing access to information and ideas about how to stop violent conflict developing; how to halt violence once it has started; and how to build a lasting peace after violence has died down. The amount of our tax the government spends on these areas, compared to its spending on fostering further violence through military spending, is crucial.

PeacePays takes a Human Security approach to violent conflict which focuses on the security of individuals and communities rather than 'national' security. Human Security considers a broad range of structural threats to people, including poverty, malnutrition, disease and environmental degradation as well as direct physical violence. The

solutions to these threats, therefore, are equally broad and require action at all levels by governments, NGOs, communities and individuals. Most importantly, however, a programme of investment is required to fund these non-violent peacebuilding initiatives: investment which could come from the £33 billion of your taxes which the government currently pours into the UK military.

As well as information and ideas, the PeacePays project encourages action by supporters. Through the Get Involved pages of PeacePays.org you can send a message to the Chancellor which calls for much greater investment in non-violent peacebuilding initiatives with your taxes; you can send a photo with a 'PeacePays!' message to take part in the photo petition; and you can write a personal message to your MP.

You can still get involved if you don't use the Internet though! Just cut out and send the message to the Chancellor on page 3 of the Campaigners Pack (which you should receive with this newsletter); send a printed photo to the **conscience** office for uploading to the website petition, and write to your MP at the usual address.

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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EDM 1658

This EDM (reproduced below) was tabled by Linda Riordan MP on 15 February and marks the 90th anniversary of conscription and the right to conscientious objection. At time of writing 24 MPs have signed, including 3 MPs new to **conscience**: Katy Clark (Lab, N. Ayrshire & Arran), Mark Durkan (SDLP, Foyle) and Nick Harvey (Lib Dem, N Devon). Many thanks for all hard work by **conscience** lobbyists. It is still not too late to ask your MP to sign. Write to your MP at House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

- You can find out if your MP supports **conscience** by visiting www.conscienceonline.org.uk

stop DESO

Campaign Against Arms Trade has launched a new campaign to shut the Defence Export Services Organisation (the part of the MoD which helps UK companies sell their military equipment overseas) Former Cabinet Minister and **conscience** supporter Claire Short has said: "DESO is funded by taxpayers to promote arms sales. British Ministers are briefed to push all such

sales when they travel. This dishonours our country, distorts our economy and wastes the talent of our engineers. This must stop, which means DESO must be closed." **conscience** has signed the Close DESO statement. You can do so yourself at www.caat.org.uk

keep up-to-date via email

Important news doesn't always fit into the quarterly cycle of our newsletters. We have therefore launched an email list to send occasional updates to members. We will not send more than one email per month and you can opt in or out whenever you like.

- If you would like to subscribe, simply send an email to: listserv@conscienceonline.org.uk with the subject as "subscribe conscience_news"

annual review

With this newsletter you will find our Annual Review covering our achievements in 2005 and our plans for the future. For the last few years we have sent a questionnaire with the Annual Review. This is currently being overhauled and will appear with the next newsletter.

EDM 1658 Conscientious Objection from Taxes for Military Purposes

"That this House notes that on 2nd March 1916 all unmarried men aged 18 to 41 years were deemed to have enlisted in the British Army as a consequence of the Military Service Act 1916 which simultaneously introduced compulsory military service and the right to conscientious objection to military service to Great Britain for the first time; recognises that all taxpayers currently contribute a portion of their taxes to the military with no means to object on grounds of conscience; believes that 90 years after the right to withhold one's physical service to the military was first recognised by Parliament at the height of the First World War, a system to enable conscientious objectors to war not to contribute financially to the military via their taxes should be established; supports the principle of conscientious objection as a basic human right; and therefore believes the military portion of tax contributions from conscientious objectors to war should be directed to a Government-controlled fund specifically for promoting peace and security without violence."

members' news

diary

thanks!

A very big thank you to everyone who has responded so generously to our Spring Appeal to 'help us to show that peace pays'. Many of your replies are enthusiastic about the PeacePays website. If you are still intending to respond to the appeal, thank you in advance. Every donation will help us to increase public awareness of the many workable alternatives to war.

new staff

We are very pleased to welcome two new staff: Paula Hollings, our Office Co-ordinator, and Nick Wilson, our Communications and Fundraising Officer. They will share the work previously done by Jon Nott. Paula is a long-standing member of **conscience** and comes to us from Green Alliance. In the rest of her week she teaches Alexander Technique. Nick has a background in grassroots peacebuilding in the Balkans and mediation in the UK.

We are very grateful to Kat Barton for the cover she provided during the last few months. She now returns to her work at Friends House and Peace News.

office times

Because our four staff are all part-time and often need to be at work at the same time, the **conscience** office will now be closed on Fridays. We will still reply to any messages as soon as we can.

changes to our newsletter

You will have noticed that this newsletter is shorter than usual because we have been recruiting new staff. The next newsletter will return to the normal length. Later in the Summer, there will be a more permanent change in look, from A4 to A5 size, similar to our Annual Review. This is because all postage will soon be calculated by size, not weight, and we want to save your donations for campaigning.

sorry!

Apologies to the few members who recently had to send replacement cheques. The originals disappeared in the Royal Mail system while being forwarded to our finance worker. We hope to avoid this in future by moving finance work into the office.

17 June

Peace News 70th Birthday

Day event: 11-5
Workshops, discussions, NVDA games, banner-making & cake!

Evening event: 7-12pm
Music, films, food & drink

Entry by donation.

Phone for venue.

t 020 7278 3344

w www.peacenews.info

17-23 July

Farnborough International arms fair

For protest details contact Campaign Against Arms Trade, 11 Goodwin St, Finsbury Park, London N4 3HQ

t 020 7281 0297

e enquiries@caat.org.uk

w www.caat.org.uk

26-29 October

International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns

Woltersdorf, Berlin, Germany.

For more details contact infos@peacetax-2006.com

or contact the **conscience** office

contacting the office

general enquiries

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Simon Heywood



The Peace Tax Seven

Peace Tax Seven result

On 4 May, the Appeal Court refused the Peace Tax Seven permission for further appeals to the House of Lords. Peace Tax Seven member, Simon Heywood, reports.

There are a small number of central points in the case. Firstly, taxation is, in the jargon, a ‘general measure.’ The argument goes that nobody’s rights are violated when they’re expected to do what everyone has to do, i.e. pay tax.

The Treasury Barrister is in the middle of a speech in praise of taxation as a ‘general measure’, when suddenly he is interrupted. “Are you saying,” asks the judge, “that there would be a legal obligation to pay tax to Hitler, in the knowledge that some of the money would go towards concentration camps?” The thunderstruck silence is broken by the barrister spluttering that there would not, of course, be any legal obligation to pay tax under such circumstances.

Also, there is an argument that we aren’t paying tax towards the military at all because it’s technically impossible to follow your individual tax pounds through the system until you watch them falling into the pocket of generals and arms manufacturers. Apparently we could conclude that all our taxes pay for schools and not a jot goes to the military.

The refusal for a judicial review is based on decisions made in Strasbourg around 20 years ago which set a “coherent and consistent” line of argument, according to the Judges. But in the same breath they state that “in some respects the reasoning may be legally and logically unsound”.

It would appear that so long as the reasoning is consistently legally and logically

unsound the law will remain unchanged. At least until a small band of underfunded conscientious objectors challenge it again. The way is now open to bring a case with Europe-wide implications to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

tax ‘down the drain’

One of the Peace Tax Seven avoided the bailiffs by paying some of his military tax under protest on 5 May. Robin Brookes and thirty supporters marched through Swindon with placards declaring ‘Taxes for War: Immoral and Theft from a World in Need’, ‘Money Down the Drain’, then posted cut-outs of more useful expenditures, such as goats, down a fake drain outside the tax office.

On 23 May, Liverpool doctors Lis Davidson and Janet Price and their supporters also publicly posted banknotes based on our ‘£10 note’ leaflet down a mock drain as Lis paid under protest.

join conscience today

- I/we want to join **conscience**
- I/we want to renew my membership

please PRINT your details below

name(s) _____

address _____

_____ post code _____

telephone _____

email _____

MP/constituency _____

suggested membership donation

£1 per £1,000 of annual income up to £15,000, plus
£2 per £1,000 of annual income over £15,000

**If you would like to pay by standing order
please call Nick on 0870 777 3223**

- I/we enclose a cheque for £ _____
(payable to **conscience**)

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