



conscience update

Spring 2015
issue 147



Peacebuilding in Parliament

conscience launches the 'Taxes
for Peace' bill at Westminster

The People's Parliament with John McDonnell MP

For three decades **conscience** has campaigned for conscientious objectors to have the military portion of their taxes spent on non-military alternatives to security.

This February **conscience** moved one step closer to that goal by launching the public consultation of the 'Taxes for Peace' bill that would prevent people of conscience from being conscripted, through their taxes, into military service. The event was held at the People's Parliament, hosted by Labour MP John McDonnell, a series of events designed to liven up debate in the run up to the election in May.

The committee room was filled to capacity. Speakers on the panel were Dr Shahrar Ali, Deputy Leader of the Green Party, Richard Reeve of the Oxford Research Group, Sir Richard Jolly, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Shaughan Dolan, Campaigns Manager for **conscience**.

After a brief introduction by John McDonnell, Richard Reeve was our



Dr Shahrar Ali gave a very passionate rejection of militarism

first speaker. Richard provided the hard figures on the split in funding between defence, overseas spending, diplomacy, development and military. The 75% of that spending is entirely dedicated to the military and has remained largely static for decades.

After an impassioned rejection of militarism and criticism of the government's position on Trident, Shahrar Ali handed over to Shaughan who pointed out that prevention is always better than cure and that this model could be applied to nearly any problem in existence be it disease, poverty or war.

The final speaker was Sir Richard Jolly who asked the audience the question, "How many countries in the world do you think don't have an army?"

One audience member suggested one, another answered five. To everyone's surprise, Sir Richard replied that there were 23 countries around the world that do not have an army.

conscience appreciated floor contributions from Jeremy Corbyn MP and Lord Phillips of Sudbury and Michael Nelson amongst many other members who spoke during the Q&A session.

With a packed house, **conscience** supporters from all across the UK and distinguished speakers presenting a powerful case for the advantages of alternatives to military security, **conscience** was proud to be holding this event in Parliament. With the election on its way, we are glad to have such powerful voices of reason for making peacebuilding the defining issue of 2015.

Taxes for Peace bill launched

We at **conscience** has now launched our public consultation on our 'Taxes for Peace' bill - and we need your feedback to make sure the legislation is as robust as possible.

We are working with Parliamentarians to have the bill read in Westminster in 2016 on the centenary of the the Military Service Act 1916, when Parliament which gave conscientious objectors the right to exemption from military service on the grounds of conscience. We believe this will provide a powerful symbolic gesture that military taxation is still an unresolved issue for many people of conscience in the United Kingdom.

You can see the full text of the proposed bill on the website www.conscienceonline.org.uk or contact the office for a paper copy.

Please send your thoughts, comments and suggestions to campaign@conscienceonline.org.uk – we want our legislation to represent our members' views as closely as possible.



Conscience launches new peace group

This May, **conscience** will be launching its first ever community group in central London. 'The Peace Agenda' will be a local group with the mission to support pushing peacebuilding up the political agenda.

We will be hosting talks, engaging in debates, watching films, discussing action - all with the aim of providing resources and support for those involved in the peace movement.

We believe that **conscience** will need to become a mass movement if we are to build a public consensus away from military expenditure towards more peaceful alternatives, and building support for our 2016 bill in Parliament.

Key to this will simply be providing the information and providing a platform to share those ideas. On the back of our People's Parliament event we've found a demand, amongst our membership, for a space to discuss and develop our campaigns and to work more directly with our supporters.

We hope the Peace Agenda will be the first of many such groups and



we have already had a request from members for resources to start their own groups outside of London.

We're still at a very early stage of organising our launch event - but if you are interested in joining our group please sign up on our Meetup group: [meetup.com/The-Peace-Agenda-London](https://www.meetup.com/The-Peace-Agenda-London) and we'll make sure you get all updates about what's happening.

- **Want to suggest a film?**
- **Want to give a talk?**
- **Want to be involved?**
- **Just want to find out more?**

Get in touch at Campaign@ConscienceOnline.org.uk

Conscience Campaign Update

conscience has been campaigning on improving and expanding the Conflict Pool - the UK government's primary means of bringing together Whitehall departments to fund conflict prevention in fragile states.

We are pleased to see that, despite a tough fiscal landscape for government finances, peacebuilding funding is set to triple from this May.

The Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) is the successor to the Conflict Pool, and will have a budget of over £1 billion, dramatically increasing the budgets available to on-the-ground NGOs to build sustainable non-military security.

conscience has been at the forefront of working with the government to ensure this money is spent as effectively and transparently as possible. We've met with the teams responsible for the launch of the CSSF at the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to make sure their plans are as robust as possible.

We've been advising them on how to avoid replicating the problems of the Conflict Pool by making sure they

have a clear strategy that is more pro-active than reactive, a funding model that is more transparent and that priorities are based around local needs rather than the ability to generate positive headlines in the UK.

Whilst we recognise this is a step forward, the new CSSF budget would need to be multiplied by 35 just to be equivalent to military spending. **conscience** will continue to campaign until peacebuilding becomes the overriding priority in foreign policy.

We've also been presenting our research on the value of conflict prevention to MPs and have been pleased to gather the support of Nick Harvey MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, John McDonnell MP, Mark Durkan MP and Jim Fitzpatrick MP.



Caroline Lucas MP supported our Early Day Motion supporting the principle of Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation

Further to this we launched our Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation Early Day Motion in the House of Commons which has attracted the signatures of 10 MPs from across the political spectrum.

We've also met with other peacebuilding organisations such as International Alert, Conciliation Resources and Saferworld to discuss best practice in conflict prevention initiatives and we will seek to build a consensus across the NGO sector.

We brought together representatives of the Green Party, Labour Party, the Oxford Research Group and former United Nations staff for our People's Parliament event hosted by John McDonnell.

We had great feedback from our members and recorded interviews with our supporters for our YouTube channel, Taxes4Peace, in which they told us why the work of **conscience** was important to them.

In addition to this, **conscience** has been a voice in the media covering diverse topics such as the glorification of World War One by Sainsbury's, the increasing power of military courts in Pakistan, and how Labour can win the aid debate by learning from the mistakes in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Conscience Campaign Manager Shaughan Dolan meets with John McDonnell MP at the People's Parliament

We also lobbied MPs to ask a half dozen Parliamentary Questions on the Conflict Pool, gave talks to Marylebone Rotary Club, Southwark Labour Party, the Associated Green Parties of London, and submitted resolutions to the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission in partnership with Westminster Rotaract Model UN.

If you'd like to get more involved in our campaigns, organise a talk with one of your local groups or help out in the office contact us at Campaign@ConscienceOnline.org.uk

Volunteer Profile



Name: Zaheer Riyasat

Background: I come from a science background but have had a great interest in International Relations since studying at university. Since leaving university I've worked with the Quilliam Foundation, Britain's leading counter-extremism think tank.

Conscience Comms Volunteer Zaheer Riyasat

Why conscience? conscience interested me because of the work it is doing in promoting conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding which fits right in with my enthusiasm for international affairs.

What's been your experience volunteering at conscience? In less than six months I've had the chance to represent **conscience** at the Royal Society for International Affairs, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development and even interviewed a former United Nations Assistant Secretary General.

Interested in volunteering at conscience? Get in contact at info@conscienceonline.org.uk

conscience in the media

- **On how Labour can win the aid debate** - labourlist.org/2014/09/labour-needs-to-win-the-aid-debate-heres-how/
- **After Charlie Hebdo, we must not sacrifice democratic ideals in the face of fear** - libdemvoice.org/independent-view-44196.html
- **The war of art: how music can foster peace and reconciliation (page 10)** - herecomeseveryone.me/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/ConflictHQ.pdf
- **How Sainsbury's exploited the World War One centenary** - huffingtonpost.co.uk/shaughan-dolan/sainsburys-advert_b_6152996.html
- **Why the West keeps getting it wrong in Iraq** - leftfootforward.org/2014/09/why-the-west-keeps-getting-it-wrong-on-iraq/
- **An Arab EU could be what the Middle East Needs** - libdemvoice.org/the-independent-view-an-arab-eu-could-be-the-answer-the-middle-east-needs-42130.html
- **On the ethics of military taxation (page 9)** - iona.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2015/03/Autumn-2014-Coracle.pdf

Build a peaceful future by leaving a legacy to **conscience**



Your support is what makes **conscience**'s campaigning work possible. I'm delighted that we have such loyal supporters, and it really is a pleasure to receive the generous responses to the appeals that we send you twice each year.

You might have read about the difference that legacy gifts can make, in our last newsletter.

Legacy gifts can actually make a really big difference to how much we can do day to day. For example, one very kind bequest has made it possible for us to increase our staff time by one day a week for a year – which is the sort of practical impact bequests can have. This has enabled us to accomplish so much more, and we are very grateful to the supporter who bequeathed us this generous gift.

Even one legacy gift makes a tremendous difference in what we can do.

We pride ourselves on being efficient and resourceful, and I can assure you that all the gifts we receive are appreciated and that we make them go as far as we can.

You are more than welcome to give at any time in the year that suits you best, and of course we welcome your support when we make our twice-yearly appeals. You can update your will to include a legacy gift at any time, or write a will for the first time. If you wish, you can have a solicitor do this, but if you prefer it is also perfectly legal to write your own will.

For advice and guidance about this, we recommend the Co-operative Legal Services, the UK government website, and the Natural Death Centre as helpful sources of advice.

The best way to support conscience regularly is through a standing order; you can set this up through your bank, or by writing to us for a form, or by completing the form available on our website. You can increase your standing order gift, at any time, in the same way. If you use Paypal, you can also make a monthly gift to **conscience** securely online if that suits you best.

We are currently working on securing funding to attend the conferences of the political parties this autumn, and we're exploring crowdfunding for the first time. If you or someone you know would like to work with us as a volunteer, either simply to help or to learn about how to fundraise professionally, we would be delighted to hear from you. Look out for our Spring Appeal in May, and **thank you for being part of this inspiring campaign.**

"I want to be able to choose not to pay for war. I want to be able to pay towards developing peace."

*Kathy
conscience supporter,
East Sussex*

Get in touch today

Please call 020 3515 9132 or email development@conscienceonline.org.uk, or write to us at:

conscience TAXES FOR PEACE NOT WAR
FREEPOST LON I 8505
London
N19 5BR

Thank you for taking the time to consider leaving conscience a gift in your will.



conscience
TAXES FOR PEACE NOT WAR

Peace needs powerful women

In 2015, violence against women continues to be of epidemic proportions worldwide. Women make up half the world's population and yet represent 70% of the world's poor. We still live predominantly under a patriarchal paradigm, a framework of reference where being born a woman is still felt and experienced as a social and economic disadvantage.

Inequalities between the sexes can be found from the cradle to the grave, depending on the country, religion and the culture in which women find themselves. Some disadvantages are relatively minor such as hitting the economic 'glass ceiling' in the west but others include denial of even the most basic of social and economic rights such as access to education, bank accounts, employment, personal transport and freedom to walk the streets without harassment.

As part of a progressive discourse, it is clear that peacebuilders from the bottom up need to continue to actively facilitate and support empowerment of women so that they can gain the same rights as afforded to men. A more peaceful world will only be achieved when sexual violence against women is no longer a common indicator of impending conflict but rather considered completely unacceptable.

There is an old German proverb which states "When poverty comes in the door, love flies out at the window".



Women to drive Movement by Carlos Latuff

As poverty destroys relationships, the oppression of women further adds to the deprivation of society, reinforcing the negative cycle of dependency and inequality. Any country that finds itself barring 50% of the labour force from participating in the workplace will forever be behind in the global race towards prosperity.

Economic inequality in the UK still exists and this can be considered a significant reason for partners to stay in abusive relationships, as they feel trapped or are unable to achieve what they want to through lack of means.

This predicament in the UK is worsening in low income families due to the new rollout of Universal Credit implemented by the coalition government. Universal Credit is a welfare benefit which replaces six means-tested benefits and is only to be paid to one member of the family. In most cases this will be the man of the household. Consequently it will be even harder for women wishing to leave to have immediate financial access and support from the government.

In the developing world the instance of rape and violence against women is a massive problem. For example, in India according to their National Crime Record Bureau, crimes against women have increased by 7.1% since 2010. It is estimated that in India one woman is raped every twenty minutes. Violence is not just prevalent because of the attitude of men towards women, or just because of the gap between rich and poor but also because women do not tend to appeal to the legal system for fear of recrimination.

One of the more extreme solutions to this has arisen at grass roots level, in the form of the Gulabi Gang in India. They are a women's movement that started in 2006 that are intervening and campaigning on behalf of women in India. Amongst their many functions they help women to set up cottage industries as a way of gaining financial independence. Sampat Devi Pai, the group founder said: "We fight rapists with lathis (sticks). If we find the culprit, we thrash him black and blue so he dare not attempt to do wrong to any girl or a woman again" Clearly this is a desperate response to a series of policy failures that have resulted in the Gulabi Gang being forced to take justice into their own hands.

Violence against women can take many forms. Some of the most influential world leaders marched for peace in Paris in solidarity after the terrorist attacks of January 7th. Some ultra-orthodox Jews decided to photoshop the women out of the march. Although the internet responded to this in many humorous ways, it nevertheless highlights the fact that to some groups around the world, women are still considered to be second-class citizens that don't even have a right to be recognised in the public sphere.

There are many current campaigns and petitions to raise awareness and to bring about an end to violence against women such as the aptly named 'International End Violence Against Women Campaign'. Hearteningly, there is some success and movement towards women gaining empowerment and accessing the help that they need.

Emma Watson said famously in her speech to the United Nations: "**If not me, who? If not now, when?**" Inequality of gender, like that of race, belongs in the middle ages. Let's leave the past where it belongs.



Gulabi Gang by McKay Savage

'Peace needs powerful women'
was written by our Outreach
Volunteer Dominique Lepard.

**We would like to hear your views
on what the priorities for peace
should be.**

**If you'd like to contribute to our
peacebuilding blog get in touch
today.**

volunteer for **conscience**

conscience could not function without the help of its volunteers whose help is vital to the success of our campaigns.

There are a range of volunteering possibilities at **conscience** including:

Help in our North London office

As part of our volunteering programme you could be involved in campaigning, fundraising, political lobbying, membership and general support.

Executive Committee membership

Our Executive Committee meets four times a year to make decisions on matters such as policy, strategy and finance.

Fundraising

You could help us research new funders, and learn about how to raise money from trusts and foundations as well as from individual supporters. Do get in touch to find out more.

Ad hoc help

There are certain times during the year when the office needs additional help with mailings and other activities. Add your name to our volunteer list and help the campaign for half a day a few times a year!

If you are interested in any of our volunteering opportunities please contact us at info@conscienceonline.org.uk or call 020 3515 9132

conscience TAXES FOR PEACE NOT WAR works for a world where taxes are used to nurture peace, not pay for war.

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