

nl116

enough is enough for war tax resisters

A number of people have this year decided that enough is enough. Completing their annual tax return forms this year some people have decided that now is the time to make a stand.

Gideon Burrows is refusing to pay 10% of his taxes over the bombing of Afghanistan. Gideon says in an open letter to the Inland Revenue; "withdrawing financial support for the war seems to be my only means of objecting to the bombing... Every week, civilians including children are maimed or killed by unexploded cluster ordinance left in Kosovo by American and British forces more than two years ago. Their use over Afghanistan is unforgivable, and I won't pay for it... Any consequences will be uncomfortable for me, but it will be nothing compared to the Afghan mother who buries her young child thanks to a conflict she has nothing to do with."

An Oxford doctor is refusing to pay 7% of her tax bill to the British government in protest over the effects of sanctions in Iraq. Instead she is paying the money to Medical Aid for Iraqi Children, a UK charity.

A **conscience** member in Llanbedr, Wales has written to the Inland Revenue explaining why he has sent 7% of his tax payment to the Department for International Development. "I do not object to paying taxes – in fact I approve of them – and I understand that, in a democracy, some of them will fund things which wouldn't have been my personal priorities. But the funding of military conflict and the preparations for war is fundamentally different from everything else... I've been particularly sickened that UK taxes have recently been used to bomb innocent people in Afghanistan."

A Manchester peace activist who was last year acquitted of conspiracy charges is to face civil action after withholding tax payments for reasons of conscience. River, an Open University law student, was acquitted, along with Sylvia Boyes, on 15th January last year by a Manchester jury of conspiracy charges relating to their plans to disarm one of Britain's nuclear submarines. A year and a week later, River was back in court - this time in the County Court which shares the same building as the Crown Court.

River explained: "From the time I first became involved in Trident Ploughshares, it seemed nonsensical to me to be trying to disable Trident in my spare time while continuing to finance its construction through my taxes. Like many people most of my income is taxed through PAYE, but I usually have a small additional contribution to make once I hand in my tax return, which I have been withholding since 1998. HM collector of taxes is now suing me for £3 owing from 1997/8 and about £200 from more recent tax years. Ideally of course I'd love to get a promise that my tax monies would not be spent on Britain's preparations for nuclear warfare, but I have in fact tried to be more conciliatory than that. All I am asking the Revenue is that when they account for my tax to the Treasury, they include a note of the total income tax paid by me as having been paid under 'burden of conscience that it should not be spent on nuclear weapons'. Apparently even this reasonable request is too political for the Inland Revenue as an organisation."

District Judge Rawkins declined to accept that any of the defence arguments had enough weight even to be put before a hearing.

[BOX]

Inside you will find this year's membership questionnaire. It costs you nothing but your time to return it – please take a few moments to have your say in how conscience is run.

campaigns news

new EDM

Valerie Davey MP, a long time **conscience** supporter has put down an early day motion for us. A kind of Parliamentary petition, an early day motion gauges opinion within the House of Commons. Please write to your MP and ask them to sign the EDM. If your MP is on the list below of those who have already signed, please write and thank them. A letter from a constituent is much more effective than a letter from our office.

If you want to join our list of regular lobbyists, please contact Jackie in the office.

EDM386 Conscientious Objection to War

That this House condemns the violence and devastation that occurred in the United States of America on 11th September and extends sympathy to all those who have been bereaved or injured; calls upon the Government to pursue, through international co-operation, every diplomatic means available in bringing the perpetrators of these terrorist acts to justice under the law; and to pursue means of addressing the root causes of global terrorism by means of a long term programme of concerted international action; supports the principle of conscientious objection as a basic human right; and therefore believes that those who have a conscientious objection to war should have the legal right to have the military part of their taxes spent on peace building.

John Battle, Leeds W

Harold Best, Leeds NW

Michael Clapham, Barnsley West & Penistone

Tony Clarke, Northampton S

Harry Cohen, Leyton & Wanstead

Frank Cook, Stockton N

Jeremy Corbyn, Islington N

Ann Cryer, Keighley

Valerie Davey, Bristol W

Ian Davidson, Glasgow Pollok

Paul Flynn, Newport W

Andrew George, St Ives

Neil Gerrard, Walthamstow

Ian Gibson, Norwich N

Kelvin Hopkins, Luton N

Lynne Jones, Birmingham Selly Oak
Nigel Jones, Cheltenham
David Lepper, Brighton Pavillion
Elfyn Llwyd, Meirionnydd Nant Conwy
Alice Mahon, Halifax
Paul Marsden, Shrewsbury & Atcham
John McDonnell, Hayes & Harlington
Kevin McNamara, Hull N
Alan Meale, Mansfield
Nick Palmer, Broxtowe
Kerry Pollard, St Albans
Alan Simpson, Nottingham S
Simon Thomas, Ceredigion
Hywel Williams, Caernarfon

new network

A major conference held in Brussels at the end of January saw the launch of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights. Jackie Hoskins, our parliamentary and campaigns officer, and Marian Franz, director of the US peace tax campaign, addressed the conference. Supporting campaigns for the right to conscientious objection to military taxation is one of the seven aims set out in the conference's final communiqué.

new CPTI Geneva rep

Conscience & Peace Tax International have appointed Derek Brett as their new representative at the UN in Geneva. Derek lives in Geneva and will be able to build CPTI's profile year-round. CPTI's other representatives will continue to travel to Geneva for special events such as the Commission on Human Rights, held in March (see article on page 4).

members news

have your say

Enclosed with this newsletter is your annual membership questionnaire. This is your chance to have your say in how **conscience** is run. We value members input and would be grateful if you would take a few moments to fill in and return the questionnaire. And remember – it's free to post back.

Berlin conference

The 9th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns will be held in Berlin on 5-9 September. The registration fee will be between £75 and £125 depending on whether you stay on for the post-conference events. To save you the bank charges for transferring money to Germany, we will take payment in pounds and then make a single payment on behalf of all the UK delegates.

If you are interested in going, please contact the office for a set of registration forms, or tick the box when returning your membership questionnaire.

annual event

Following successful events in Newcastle, Oxford and Brighton, the **conscience** annual event is returning to London this year. Featuring speakers and workshops on the theme of war tax resistance, it will be held at Hampstead Friends' Meeting House on Saturday 27 July.

For further details, contact the office or tick the box when returning your membership questionnaire.

thank you

Many thanks to all those members who responded to our last appeal which raised over £4,500 pounds.

diary

15 May

international conscientious objectors' day, London and Cardiff

12 noon, Tavistock Square, London. Ceremony at the CO Stone.

For details of Cardiff event, contact XXX on ZZZ

1 June

Musicians Against Nuclear Arms Jubilee Concert, London

Wynchmore Strings, featuring Geoffrey Elkan (clarinet), conducted by Ron Rappaport perform works by British and Commonwealth composers. 7.30pm United Reform Church, Fox Lane, London N13. £6/£5.

27 July

conscience annual event, London

For further details, contact the office or tick the box when returning your membership questionnaire.

5-9 September

Ninth International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns, Berlin

Please contact the office if you would like registration forms. See article for more details.

centrepeace

Conscience and Peace Tax International at the UN Commission on Human Rights

Dirk Panhuis, Secretary of CPTI, reports on events in Geneva.

At the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in Geneva (March-April) “conscientious objection” is a permanent subject on the agenda under item 11: “Civil and Political Rights”. While organizations like War Resisters’ International, Quaker UN Office, and International Fellowship of Reconciliation deal with conscientious objection to military service (COMS), ***Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI)*** specifically addresses the question of conscientious objection to military taxation (COMT). CPTI sees COMT as an extension of COMS. In this view it makes little difference whether one participates in war or whether one pays somebody else to participate in war. There is no moral or legal difference between the two, only a difference of direct physical action versus indirect fiscal complicity. CPTI’s aim is *“to obtain recognition of the right to conscientious objection to paying for armaments and war preparation and war conduct through taxes”*.

Founded in 1994 with an international board, incorporated in 1996 in Belgium, and recognized in 1999 as an NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN, CPTI advocates the right to COMT in international peace conferences and in international bodies like the UN in New York and Geneva. CPTI representatives Dirk Panhuis (Belgium), Bart Horeman (Netherlands), and Derek Brett (U.K./Switzerland) were in Geneva at the 58th Session of the CHR explaining their concern to other NGO’s and to the CHR through an oral statement. They discovered that many people have never thought about their own participation in the military through the tax system. After hearing some explanations many NGO’s found COMT to be a logical extension of COMS.

In its oral statement to the UN CHR, CPTI asks governments to list their civilian peace agencies, to provide the UN CHR with the yearly budget for these agencies as compared with the budget for the military, and to explore the ways in which tax contributions could be paid to these agencies in fulfillment of a taxpayer’s fiscal obligations.

Last and this year’s oral statements, as well as the basic written statement (E/CN.4/2001/NGO/101) can be found on the web site: www.cpti.ws (go to Documents).

**Oral Statement of Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI)
UN Commission on Human Rights, 58th session, agenda item 11
Geneva, April 2002**

Dear Mr. Chairman,

My name is Dirk Panhuis and I speak on behalf of *Conscience and Peace Tax International*.

Our organization represents thousands of people around the world who feel obliged to contribute to peace, but are forced to pay for war. Their moral or religious conviction and their conscience tell them not to engage in war, neither physically with their bodies, nor fiscally through their taxes. But tax laws force them to pay for war or war preparations by governments. Because of their conviction they suffer hardship when they decline to pay taxes for war. Every year we hear of seizures of property, sequestrations of income, court cases, appeals to court cases, etc.

Of course, many people voluntarily pay for peace by giving financial support to peace movements. But in the framework of tax system of the State, it seems that, at present, people committed to peace have no way to pay for peace according to their conscience. In our view, they have their basic human right denied, viz. the right not to pay for war and their duty to pay for peace. That's why, Mr. Chairman, we turn to this Commission. In the context of life and death, of peace and war, this Commission has upheld the right to conscientious objection to military service. Could it also uphold the right to conscientious objection to being an accomplice to war by contributing to war financially? Could you help us out and provide a way to pay our full tax obligation without violating our conscience? Could you help us to pay taxes entirely for peace?

We are looking for ways to pay for nonviolent conflict resolution and civilian peace building, nationally or internationally. We believe in the creative possibilities of civilians to tackle problems before these problems turn into armed conflicts. Some governments are cautiously envisaging some forms of civil conflict resolution and peace building. We would love to heed the call of our conscience and to send our tax contribution to such agencies. Would governments accept our endeavor for peace and our abhorrence for war?

Mr. Chairman, we ask this Commission to recognize our human right not to pay for war and death and our duty to pay for peace and life. In furtherance of this right and this duty, we ask this Commission to call upon governments

- a) to list their civilian peace agencies and programs for nonmilitary peace building (both for national purposes and for intergovernmental regional or international action);
- b) to provide this commission with the yearly budgets for these agencies and programs as compared with the budgets for the military;
- c) to explore the ways in which tax contributions could be paid to these agencies and programs in fulfilment of a taxpayer's fiscal obligations.

We are anxious to work with you to find a way for persons, who seek to live up to the highest good that they know, to pay their taxes entirely without violating deeply held beliefs about killing.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your attention.

plans for 2002

This year looks like being an exciting one for **conscience**. January saw the first war tax resistance case under the human rights act and we have already been joined by as many new members as in the whole of 2001. Here is an outline of our plans for the rest of the year.

in celebration

The organisation we now know as **conscience** was founded twenty five years ago by Stanley Keeble, as the Peace Tax Campaign of the Peace Pledge Union. We have come a long way in 25 years. What started as a one-man campaign run from home has become an organisation of 2,500 members, with two paid staff and over one eighty supporters in various parliaments. We have put several bills before the House of Commons, had hundreds of questions asked and, through our involvement in Conscience & Peace Tax International addressed the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Whilst we are saving the big celebration for the day that a Peace Tax Bill is passed in parliament, we will be holding an event in the autumn to celebrate the contribution of all those involved in the successes of the campaign so far.

in parliament

Our work in parliament continues with Valerie Davey's early day motion (see page 2) and we will be working with the new All-Party Group on Peace and Conflict Resolution, which holds its second meeting in May. Members' involvement in lobbying will, as always, play a key part in raising the issue with MPs.

We will also be attending party conferences and policy consultation events.

in court

We are working with Peacerrights, a new organisation set up to provide a free legal service to peace and justice activists. Their strategic advice will help war tax resisters to get the best from any future court cases. We hope that with all the new war tax resistance going on (see page 1), and the continuing witness of some long-time resisters, there will be several test cases during the coming year.

in London

Our annual event goes from strength to strength and we hope to build on recent successes with this year's. Full details on page 3.

in the office

Our renewed advertising strategy is paying off already (see page 3) and if this success continues we will be investing in a new campaigning leaflet in the autumn. Continued membership growth increases the numbers lobbying for the right to conscientious objection to taxation for military purposes and gives us the financial security to provide the support those campaigners deserve.

internationally

Our German sister organisations are hosting the ninth International Conference on War Tax and Resistance Peace Tax Campaigns in Berlin this September (see page 3 for details). This important conference is the first to be held in Europe since **conscience** hosted the 1996 conference.

on the web

We have been saying for several years that we are looking to make use of the internet, by establishing a website and this year it looks like it will finally happen. The Executive Committee in February took a decision to reprioritise staff workloads to enable the website to be launched this summer. There will be more details in the next newsletter.