

# nl117 – draft text

## front page

[CO Day pic]

### EDM brings in new support ...

Four out of five of the MPs who have signed our Early Day Motion (a kind of parliamentary petition) since we reported on it in the last newsletter are supporting **conscience** for the first time.

Early Day Motion 836 – Conscientious Objection to War was tabled by Valerie Davey, MP for Bristol West and has been signed by 34 MPs in total. Ten of these are MPs who have not previously supported **conscience**, so congratulations are due to our member lobbyists in Caernarfon, Carmarthen East & Dinefwr, Calder Valley, Hammersmith & Fulham, Leeds West, Newport West, Norwich North, Shrewsbury & Atcham, St Albans and Tayside North.

### ... but we still need help

The twenty five existing supporters who signed the EDM represent only half of our identified support in the House of Commons. Some are unable to sign EDMs because of their position as party spokespeople or members of the Government, but many did not sign because they were not asked by a constituent. Whilst the **conscience** office writes to every supporting MP when we launch a new EDM, many MPs will only sign if asked to do so by one or more of their constituents. Even if your MP has appeared for many years on the list of those who support **conscience**, it is still important to write to them and remind them about the **conscience** message. It is lobbying by members of **conscience** that persuades MPs of the strength of our case and it is only lobbying by members that can keep them involved in the campaign.

Parliament has now risen for the summer recess and this EDM is closed, but we will be launching a new parliamentary initiative in the autumn – look out for details in our next newsletter.

## campaigns news

### war tax resistance

The increasing awareness of the fact that your taxes are being used for the preparations of war, particularly in the last year since 11 September 2001, has meant that **conscience** has spent more time working on war tax resistance this year than in the recent past. The last **conscience** newsletter reported the cases of a number of war tax resisters, this year's annual event is focusing on the issue, we have produced a new lobby briefing on the issue and we have been working with a new organisation to investigate the legal aspects of war tax resistance.

Peacerights is a new non government organisation established in September 2001 to provide a strategic legal service on international human rights and weapons/arms issues. Peacerights provides a free legal service to activists in the UK. **conscience** and Peacerights have been trying to establish how the two organisations can best work together to achieve the ultimate aim of **conscience** – a change in UK legislation that would enable those who have a conscientious objection to war to have the military part of their taxes spent on peacebuilding initiatives.

In May 2002 **conscience** set up a meeting to bring together Peacerights and a number of past and present war tax resisters. Each of the individual war tax resisters had a different story to tell about their own individual war tax resistance and it was a very useful meeting for all involved. The two organisations are continuing to work together to find a way to test the new Human Rights Act on this issue.

If you are thinking about war tax resistance then please take a look at the lobby briefing enclosed with this newsletter and do contact Jackie at the **conscience** office.

### **conscientious objectors remembered**

At 12.00 noon on Wednesday 15 May a crowd of people gathered in the sunshine around the commemorative stone in Tavistock Square for International Conscientious Objectors' Day. This day has been recognised as such since 1982.

The event was steered by Denis Cobell, of The Right to Refuse to Kill group (020 7237 3731), through speeches, songs, poetry, laying of flowers, one minute's silence and dancing. A song that was specially written for this event was performed by Sue Gilmurray and accompanied by Tony Kempster on his guitar. Jeremy Corbyn MP gave a moving address and good wishes were announced from Ken Livingstone. A performance of music and poetry by children from Greenwich Millennium Primary School were a welcome addition to this year's event. Flowers were laid and one minute's silence was observed to remember Conscientious Objectors, past and present, throughout the world. Towards the end of the ceremony we were all invited to join in participatory Dances of Universal Peace led by Shân Rees.

International CO Day is an opportunity to show international support for Conscientious Objectors in countries where they are imprisoned for demanding their rights to object to military conscription. Even in "democratic" Britain, conscription and subsequent harassment of Conscientious Objectors continues. All that has changed since the 1950s is the nature of the conscription process itself. Today's draft is of taxes rather than taxpayers, with no right to conscientious objection. The intolerable dilemma faced by pacifists of paying for war or breaking the law remains unrecognised by Parliament.

### **Britain in the World consultation**

In March 2002 the Labour Party published the consultation document **Britain in the World**. The preface to the document states that its purpose is to explore the key issues around the subject and the challenges Labour in government will have to face. It is a 'platform from which to consult with the British people.' Submissions to this document will form part of the process that will help shape Labour's next election manifesto. Although the second round of consultation and the adoption of the final document at Labour Party Conference are only for members of the Labour Party, anyone can make a contribution to the initial consultation.

The section entitled 'Working for peace and security in an uncertain world' poses the following questions for discussion:

1. how can we best contribute to building a more peaceful and stable world?

2. after September 11, how do we defend our homes, families and interests against the new threats of international terrorism, including the potential for terrorists using weapons of mass destruction?
3. are we prepared to see increases in defence expenditure to achieve security at home and abroad, as well as providing the resources needed for our armed forces to carry out vital tasks?
4. what should be the criteria that underpins military intervention by UK armed forces?

If you are interested in having your say then please contact Jackie in the **conscience** office for more information. You can also view consultation document as an Adobe Acrobat (PDF) file at <http://short.com/dufreneprihefi> or <http://www.labour.org.uk/consultingonpolicydocuments>. The public consultation period for this document ends on 3 October 2002.

## **members news**

### **staff changes**

Jackie Hoskins, our Campaigns & Parliamentary Officer since October 1999 is leaving us in September to train as a teacher. Jackie has made a huge contribution to raising the profile of **conscience** with her work on the non-military security network and the peace exchange events at Labour Party conferences over the past three years. Her networking skills, hard work and infectious enthusiasm will be missed. We wish her all the best in her new career.

Our new Campaigns & Parliamentary Officer is being appointed as we go to press and should start in September. We are also contracting some of our finance work out to finance expert and EC member Roy Prockter to give the staff more time to focus on campaigning and membership support.

### **membership questionnaire results**

A record response to this year's membership questionnaire gave overwhelming approval to most proposals, with many members joining the list of lobbyists or offering their time to help **conscience** in other ways.

Over 300 members returned their questionnaire with over 85% approving the accounts, the appointment of the Executive Committee and the plans for the year. The two changes to the Terms of Reference proposed by the EC were both agreed. The new wording of our aim to include direct reference to conscientious objection was approved by 83% to 4% with 9% actively abstaining and 4% not answering. The renaming of the Development Committee as the Management Committee was approved by 53% to 7% with 31% actively abstaining and 9% not answering.

### **Labour Party conference**

We have again been given a share of a free stall at Labour Party conference in Blackpool and are helping to organise the popular Peace Exchange event. This year's Peace Exchange will be held on the evening of Sunday 29 September at the Savoy Hotel. If you are a delegate to the conference, we look forward to meeting you at the event or on the stall. Members who live near Blackpool are also welcome to attend Peace Exchange, please contact the office for more details.

## **data protection notice**

Just a reminder that **conscience** keeps your details on our database in order to administer your membership. We do not sell or pass on this information to other individuals or groups.

If you have any questions about our data protection policies or if you wish to request a copy of the details we hold (there is an administrative fee for the latter), please contact Jon.

## **diary**

### **4-19 august**

#### **Trident Ploughshares international summer disarmament camp**

Confronting the nuclear weapon bases In Scotland. At Peaton Wood, Coulport (38 Miles from Glasgow)

**For more information and a briefing pack call:**

08454588366 (from overseas +441259 753815)

Mobile: 07876593016 E-mail [tp2000@gn.apc.org](mailto:tp2000@gn.apc.org)

Website: [www.tridentploughshares.org](http://www.tridentploughshares.org)

## **international conference**

### **11 september**

Oxford Research Group seminar on conflict transformation followed by an evening concert "Transforming September 11<sup>th</sup>". Both at the Royal Opera House theatre, Covent Garden. For more details contact rose e rose@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk t 01865 242819

## **PBI orientation weekend**

## **centrepeace**

QPSW article about Iraq

## **letters/?**

(Xmas?) Cards advert

## **review**

Adam Simon reviews Trident on Trial by Angie Zelter

[People's Disarmament](#)

In June 1999 three middle-aged professional women temporarily rendered a significant part of the UK nuclear arsenal inoperative by swimming across a Scottish loch, boarding a barge and throwing computers overboard. They then unfurled banners explaining their purpose and waited patiently for arrest. That they were easily able to bypass military security is one story. That they were subsequently acquitted of all criminal damage by the Scottish court is another. This book is the personal, ethical and legal story of "The Trident Three". I commend it as an inspiration. Whether you just dip into its anecdotes, or read it from cover to cover, as I surprised myself in doing, you will be impressed, inspired and moved.

This action was part of the "Trident Ploughshares" campaign of "peoples' disarmament". What marks this out from a "protest movement" is that actions are not designed with publicity in mind but as a genuine and effective attempt to disarm the nuclear threat. Participants are expected to have attended a two day workshop on non-violence and adhere to the principle that all actions are non-violent, open, peaceful and fully accountable.

The legal argument is based on the simple premise that nuclear weapons can never be used defensively and therefore as weapons of mass destruction they are contrary to agreed and ratified international law. It is justifiable (perhaps even an obligation) for any citizen to prevent a crime being committed, and to take necessary actions even if they cause what would otherwise be criminal damage. Angie Zelter gives us a blow by blow account of the legal debate as it progressed. What we might expect to be a dry and complex text is in fact riveting reading. Throughout the book, as in the court, she insists on debunking legal jargon and using ordinary language.

Interspersed between the legal debate are personal stories and photos from other activists - all very different and very convincing. Stories of simple actions which delay Trident missions; stories of giving flowers to military police during arrest; and of the blockades of Faslane in February 2000 and 2001, which included MPs, MEPs, a QC and many senior church ministers, closed the base for many hours and stretched the whole of the UK military police force near to breaking point. What particularly struck me was that these were not the stereotypic "hippies" of the road protests nor the "brown bread and sandals brigade" of drop out idealists. These are brave and thoughtful people from all walks of life, many of retiring age and all prepared to argue their case in court and to spend time in prison.

This is all very inspiring for the anti-nuclear movement but what, you ask, is the significance for "Conscience"?

Conscience is now contributing to a challenging and important debate - to suggest alternatives to military force for which we will happily pay our taxes? This book points to some possible answers.

Some years ago I found an inspiring little book in the back shelves of my meeting house. It was written between the wars and outlined a practical alternative to armed security. It proposed a standing "army" of several thousand; equipped and trained to the same high standard of fitness, skill and discipline as a conventional army, but with additional skills in printing and debate and mediation; and they would be unarmed. They would parachute into a conflict zone, peacefully disrupt society and ferment civil disobedience amongst the population, making the country ungovernable by either a despot or an invader. There would inevitably be casualties, it was argued, but so there are in armed conflict.

Trident Ploughshares is putting this sort of logic into practice, and showing that it might just work.

Trident on Trial, Angie Zelter, Luath Press, 2001 isbn 1-84282-004-4 £9.99

**available for review**

People, Peace & Power – Conflict Transformation in Action, Diana Francis