

Page 1 Front Cover

conscience update
issue 140 winter 2010

Pages 1&2

welcome and season's greetings!

conscience TAXES FOR PEACE NOT WAR works for a world where taxes are used to nurture peace, not pay for war. We also campaign for the legal right of those with a conscientious objection to war to have the military part of their taxes spent on peacebuilding initiatives.

As we approach this festive time of year conscience would like to wish you all season's greetings and remember that whatever your beliefs, at this time of year we all hope for a time where we shall have peace and goodwill towards all people on earth.

conscience

1b Waterlow Road, London, N19 5NJ
tel: +44 (0) 20 7561 1061
email: info@conscienceonline.org.uk
web: www.conscienceonline.org.uk
web: www.peacepays.org.uk

conscience – a year in pictures

Pages 3&4

Thirteenth International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns

Sandefjord, Norway – July 2010

The conference was launched in Sandefjord Church on Friday afternoon, with dancing by Ragnhild Synnøve Bjannes and Marit Gjørme Dalva and a lecture given by Per Ingvar Haukeland: "New Earth, New Peace: Listening to the Voice of Conscience". Later that evening, there was more discussion with Per Ingvar at Skiringsaal College where the conference continued.

Saturday was a full day, starting with update reports from each country represented. A new legal case is currently being put forward by the American *National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund and Peace Tax Foundation*. They plan to put the idea of creating a Peace Tax Fund to one side and rather than providing solutions just look at the idea of conscience itself. As we all know, the right of conscience is already recognised by international law. What the American

group hope to do is legally explore whether or not there is a link between conscience and money. They hope the outcome of this exploration will find that there is a link between conscience and money; therefore, paying for killing is a violation of conscience. This is a very brief summary of a very complex case which is still in its infancy. However we hope to update members as the case evolves. If you would like more information on the American case or information on what other countries are doing please contact Gayle at campaign@conscienceonline.org.uk or call +44 (0) 20 7561 1061.

The country reports were followed by a lecture by Nils Butenschøn, Director of the Norwegian Center for Human Rights at the University of Oslo: "Taxes for Peace, Not War: A Human Rights Perspective". During the lecture Butenschøn tried to address the questions: 'How do we protect human life and what are our rights and duties?' And 'Does a human rights perspective have something to offer the Peace Tax Campaign?'

In answer to the first question he stated that the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) already sets out our rights and duties: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (UDHR Art. 1) The challenge for human rights is not about getting governments to sign any more treaties or charters; it is about getting them to take responsibility for the rights that they are already meant to uphold. Everyone has human rights, and the integrity of them need to be protected by organs of the state. If this cannot happen then it becomes a global problem.

In answer to the second question Butenschøn said that the human rights perspective does have something to offer the Peace Tax Campaign through international law and the right of conscience. The right of conscience is enshrined in the UDHR Art. 18 and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Unfortunately, the European Court on Human Rights ruled in October 2009 that "Article 9, read in the light of Article 4 § 3 (b), does not guarantee a right to refuse military service on conscientious grounds." (See case of *BAYATYAN v. ARMENIA*). Fortunately the UN Human Rights Committee has adopted an opposite stance and sees the right of COs as being upheld under the UDHR Art. 18. The struggle for campaigners and activists is that the UDHR is not legally binding and therefore only soft law. The difficulty is to turn this soft law into hard law; which (for Europeans) could be done through the European court. Some good news is that the Grand Chamber of the European Court has accepted the request for referral in the conscientious objection case of *Bayatyan v. Armenia* and the case is currently being heard at the time of writing.

During the second part of the first day of the conference there was a presentation of the Norwegian Peace Tax Study, based on a new paper written by Alexander Harang of the Norwegian Peace Tax Alliance: "Peace Tax 2010 – The Issue, the History, the Movement".

On the last day of the conference, conferees met to sum up the conference and decide where the next conference in 2012 will take place, for more information on the 14th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns please visit www.peacetaxconference.org.

The conference concluded with the writing of an open letter to governments, all houses of worship and religious organisations, and human rights leaders of the world stating:

A THRIVING DEMOCRACY DESERVES CONSIDERATION OF A PEACE TAX ALTERNATIVE.

2010 is the last year of the United Nations' International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence. It will be an important contribution—for peace building and the respect of all individuals—for our government to respond to the peace tax movement's demand and evaluate and consider the possibility of peace tax.

The peace tax alternative is an extension of the right of conscientious objection to military service:

- based upon Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and
- guaranteed by Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and
- guaranteed by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: "*freedom of thought, conscience and religion*" and
- provided for by the national law.

Working for the right not to pay military taxes has a long history, showing that the issue is of fundamental importance.

We look forward to receiving your response.

Conferees of the 13th International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns.

For a copy of this letter to send to spiritual and human rights organisations please contact the **conscience** office at info@conscienceonline.org.uk or call +44 (0) 20 7561 1061.

Page 5

thank you

At the beginning of this year **conscience** sent out an emergency appeal highlighting the urgency with which we needed more money.

conscience received a magnificent response to our emergency appeal and we would like to give a special thanks to all those that gave generously this year. Seeing the great response from all the people who are behind **conscience** motivated us to push harder for those who truly believe in our campaign.

The appeal has meant that we have been able to continue with our work, spreading our message. This year **conscience** has been demonstrating across London with 'Taxman Tom' and our 'Tax Collector Grim Reaper' at anti-war protests and the Chilcot Inquiry; we have held a discussion at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, hosted a debate on defence spending; exchanged ideas with other Peace Tax organisations across the world, held stalls at festivals, created a brand new website (please take a look at www.conscienceonline.org.uk), we've held open meetings and much more.

In 2011 we plan to continue with our public awareness raising work and also try to raise awareness and influence some of our decision makers about our message of taxes for peace not war. The money that you gave so generously at the beginning of this year made a difference, but we cannot go on making a difference without your continued support. There are many ways to make a donation to **conscience**, either online by visiting www.conscienceonline.org.uk or clicking on the 'donate' button or by sending us a cheque in the post. If you require further information or have any questions please contact Claire at development@conscienceonline.org.uk or call 020 7561 1061 we are always happy to hear from you. Thank you.

Page 6

write to your mp

A new government requires new action – and we need your help. **conscience** is asking all of our members and any concerned person to write to their local MP – whether they are part of the government or the opposition – about where they stand on the issue of non-military security and Peace Tax.

Your MP is accountable to you and will nearly always take the time to respond in person. They may well know very little about the topic covered, but might be prompted to find out more after reading your letter. Remember, you are a voter – your views count! MPs take notice of the letters they get – generally taking each one to represent the views of ten or twenty other like-minded constituents. One of the best ways you can support the right to pay for peace not war is by writing to your MP. They need to know their constituents' views on paying taxes for use by the military and war.

Please send us any responses you receive. You may receive a standard response at first, but please remember that you can always reply to this initial letter asking for a more detailed response to your questions. Help us build a profile of the new parliament, identify possible allies and spread our message to decision makers!

You can send your letters to:

MP's name,
House of Commons,
Westminster,
London.
SW1A 0AA

For a template letter and for tips about writing to MPs please visit our 'get involved' webpage at www.conscienceonline.org.uk/get-involved

Page 7

conscience's open meeting on taxes and the arms trade

At the beginning of November **conscience** joined Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) at their National Gathering in London.

Approximately £1 billion in taxes goes to the arms industry every year - a classic example of when taxes would be better used for peace not war – so we were keen to hear more from CAAT about this important issue.

The National Gathering was a great day with over 100 enthusiastic people attending, determined to end the trade in weapons that kill and maim. Comedian Mark Thomas' key note address was a popular highlight, with his unusual ability of being able to make his audience laugh out loud whilst simultaneously being appalled at shocking stories of the impact of arms on communities around the world.

Celebrities aside, **conscience** had the opportunity to host an open meeting for those interested in learning more about how our taxes are used to fund the arms trade. There was a lot of interesting discussion about questions such as, how we can challenge the assumption that it is acceptable to use our taxes to pay for war and weapons? We all returned to the **conscience** office, encouraged by meeting attended by so many committed people, brimming with ideas for action so watch the **conscience** website at the start of next year for news on upcoming actions and activities that you can participate in.

Page 8

Welcome Gemma

You may already be aware that there have been some changes here at the **conscience** office. Gemma Galloway joined **conscience** in May as Office Coordinator. Gemma comes from a background working in the international aid and humanitarian sector. She has also undertaken some conflict related studies which reinforced her view that we need to shift away from military intervention as the solution to the complex problems modern societies face. "I am really pleased to be here at **conscience** and to be connected with so many other people who believe, as I do, that taxes should be used for peace not war. Military security is ineffective, expensive and has human consequences that are morally unacceptable. I am excited to be working towards restoring our right to conscientiously object and ending enforced economic conscription."

Paula Hollings our former Office Coordinator is continuing as Book Keeper and it is of great benefit to **conscience** that she is still involved contributing her experience and ideas.

Back Page

conscience: TAXES FOR PEACE NOT WAR is looking for new members to join its Executive Committee (EC), which manages the work of **conscience**.

EC membership involves:

- attending EC meetings to discuss and make decisions on matters such as policy, strategy and finance
- working with other EC members and the staff to agree the framework that guides the activities of staff
- sometimes taking on individual ad hoc tasks such as speaking at a meeting or approving new website content

We are looking for someone who:

- is enthusiastic and committed to helping **conscience** achieve its aims of ensuring taxes are used for peace not war
- can bring their skills, experience and new ideas to contribute to the broad range of people that makes up the EC
- can attend EC meetings in London on four Saturdays a year (travel expenses are reimbursed).

If you think you could contribute to the work of **conscience** then we would love to hear more about you. Please contact Gemma Galloway on coordinate@conscienceonline.org.uk or 020 7561 1061.