

Proposal 1: National WTR Pledge Campaign

[This proposal is from Peter Bergel in Oregon, who has been involved with a group working to create a state-wide peace group there.]

Mount a pledge campaign asking people to pledge to withhold their federal taxes when a large number - say a million - have also signed the pledge. One would have to formulate a maximum of 3 demands to be met by the government to prevent triggering of the tax resistance. With a million participants the risk would be relatively low and the likelihood of success would be pretty high.

I think we need to lean on the ideas that 1) the government has shown that it has no intention of doing what we want it to do in this matter, even though it is a majority viewpoint, so we need to go around them, 2) the IRS does not have the bandwidth to prosecute a million taxpayers, and 3) how long are we going to let them plunge us into unpopular wars before we show some backbone? A PR consultant might disagree and come up with better selling points, though.

Let's be clear on the goal here: to impress the government enough to get them to act, I think we have to threaten their income. 5,000 resisters, especially resisting a token amount, won't meet that criterion.

If you want to propose a several-step campaign that sets increasing goals of numbers of resisters for succeeding rounds of WTR, I can see that. Say: #1 - 5,000, #2 - 20,000, #3 100,000, # 4 500,000 and #5 - a million, for example. That would extend the campaign over 5 years. To keep up interest and morale, the campaign would need to incorporate other actions in between rounds of tax resistance.

And yes, I am thinking of a national campaign, not an Oregon one. I have no idea whether groups inside or outside Oregon would support this. That is a topic that would have to be explored and I think NWTRCC would be the perfect organization to conduct that exploration. Write up a proposal. Run it past a bunch of peace groups seeking both input and support. Come up with a modified proposal based on the input. If you run it up the flagpole and no one salutes, it's back to the drawing board. Assuming we could get a decent number of peace groups to co-sponsor, start a pledge petition and a bunch of PR outreach to pull in interested people. Again: no one takes any risk until the triggering number is reached.

Sometimes outrageous proposals work. In the mid-80s I was part of the founding team of the American Peace Test. We wanted to bring large numbers down to the Nevada Test Site to offer civil resistance to nuclear weapons testing. A couple of us, who were FREEZE Campaign organizers, called the leaders of every state FREEZE organization and asked them to bring a delegation of their folks to the Test Site to risk arrest on a particular day. Astoundingly, it worked! We occupied the Test Site every day for 30 days leading up to the Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Iceland. Every day was populated by people from different states. Can you imagine how weird it would be to be on the receiving end of one of those calls? However, the American Peace Test, launched from that beginning, became the cutting edge of the US peace movement over the next 3 years. At our largest action, in March 1988, we had 5,000 people camping in the desert outside the Test Site and engaging in several days of actions. Over those years, we brought tens of thousands down there. In 1992, Congress cut off funding for explosive nuclear weapons testing.