



# Why Isn't Everyone Who's for Peace a War Tax Resister?

## Answers to Common Concerns

Peace activists have been tireless in their efforts against war — petitioning, leafletting, marching in demonstrations, writing analyses of current events, lobbying, getting arrested in civil disobedience actions, risking the displeasure of friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family because of their views. Yet there has been a reluctance to sever the one direct connection that most people have to war — their tax payments to the IRS. Why?

### FEAR AND PERSONAL ISSUES

- *It's hard to take on something new with a lot of uncertainties when I'm not forced to. Life is complex enough now.*

We all have more than enough things to do and must decide which issues are worth tackling and which need to be put off. Some war tax resisters, so horrified by U.S. militarism, feel compelled to ignore their fears and go to great lengths to sever their connections to the war-making machinery. Despite personal discomforts that may result from engaging in war tax resistance, war tax resisters

reason these personal problems are minor compared to those of people suffering because of U.S. military actions.

- *It would create problems with my spouse/parents/employer (security clearance, financial, stress).*

It is unlikely that anyone will be harmed because of your war tax resistance. In many instances, relatives have been very supportive though unwilling to participate in a similar way. Worrying about what others think, though important, could paralyze progress. How far would Thoreau have gotten if he worried about what Emerson thought?

- *I'll go to jail.*

It's not going to happen . . . at least not for refusing to pay war taxes. Of the couple dozen war tax resisters jailed in the last 60 years — out of tens of thousands of resisters — the reason has not been for refusal to pay taxes, but rather because they persistently refused to give information to the IRS (or “falsified” the tax forms). Only one person was actually jailed for war tax resistance and that was in the 1940s. Three persons jailed in 2005 were connected to a small business that did not withhold for employees who refused to pay war taxes.

### FINANCIAL

- *With interest and penalties, they'll end up collecting more.*

If the IRS collects, it probably will add interest at the prevailing rate and penalties. However, the penalties and interest usually do not offset the IRS's costs of collection. Though some war tax resisters just accept this as one of the burdens of war tax resistance, others have joined the War Tax Resisters Penalty Fund. As a result, they are in less danger of losing money because of interest and penalties.

- *The IRS might take my house or car.*

The IRS can seize property whose titles are held by war tax resisters. This, however, is very rare,\* and the resister will be given opportunities to pay up and stop the seizure, or redeem the property from the buyer after it is sold. There are many ways to protect your property. For example, some war tax resisters have put their property in the name of close friends or relatives. Also, if your resisted taxes are in an alternative fund, that money could be pulled out to help pay for the recovery of your property.

\* From 1992 to 2002, the IRS seized only one house and two cars from war tax resisters.

*Continued on reverse...*

*For more information and to find a War Tax Resistance group or counselor in your area contact:*

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■ *It'll call attention to me, and the IRS may invalidate my deductions and credits.*

War tax resisters are rarely audited, because the IRS usually chooses to send resisters' returns directly to the collection division. However, many war tax resisters welcome the attention of the government so officials know why resisters are refusing their taxes.

■ *I might lose my job.*

It's unlikely that an employer will fire an employee who gets a levy. Some resisters have quit their jobs rather than allow the IRS to successfully seize the war taxes.

■ *I need my 401K/pension/IRA/Social Security to live on when I am older.*

Currently, the IRS can automatically seize no more than 15% of Social Security checks. Also, it is highly unusual for the IRS to seize 401K, pensions, or IRAs. Many war tax resisters put their resisted taxes into escrow accounts or alternative funds with the provision of getting that money returned if the IRS succeeds in collecting from another source.

■ *It'll hurt my credit rating.*

This is the intention of the IRS. Despite IRS liens and levies, war tax resisters have been able to get credit cards, and loans, as well as make purchases on credit.

■ *It might jeopardize my ability to get student financial aid or loans.*

War tax resisting families have been successful submitting an accurate FAFSA form and talking directly to the school's financial aid office. They want proof of your income level, so provide the clearest information possible with the application.

## PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL

■ *This isn't my battle. Rather than spend the time and energy needed to deal with the IRS and the court system, I prefer to do constructive work for change elsewhere.*

As mentioned earlier, it is up to each of us individually to decide where we will focus our efforts and which projects will get our attention. Resistance to injustice is constructive, particularly when that resistance is coupled with rerouting of taxes into community (and other) programs. War tax resisters do not claim that tax resistance is the best or only way to protest militarism, just one among many options.

■ *If everyone were to pick and choose, that would be unfair.*

If people are willing to nonviolently resist taxes for whatever cause and deal with the consequences, that's their decision. War tax resisters are not shirking their civic duty by refusing to pay the IRS. Most reroute their taxes into programs hurt by the military spending and misplaced priorities of the U.S. government.

■ *I would rather work within the system so we can have some influence.*

*War tax resistance is alienating and marginal and will cut me off from the circles of influence that affect real change.*

In trying to make fundamental changes, it is sometimes necessary to do things that others feel is alienating or extreme in order to get the attention of an establishment that chooses to ignore injustice. In a movement for social change, there are many complementary roles to play. Among them is the role of agitator, which aids in getting attention and raising issues. As Martin Luther King, Jr., once noted, "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored."

■ *Taxes are good; we shouldn't refuse to pay them (I support some of the things taxes pay for, like education and human services).*

While many taxes are neutral, those that contribute to killing are not, and that's 50% of the federal budget! Nevertheless, most war tax resisters don't simply refuse taxes, thus putting the burden of society's expenses on the shoulders of others. Rather than keep resisted taxes, they reroute those taxes to society's programs most in need of attention. Also, most war tax resisters do pay many taxes not related to military spending.

■ *It's wrong to break the (tax) law.*

Openly withdrawing consent is essential in a free society to resist oppression and tyranny. Nonviolently breaking laws has had a long and honorable tradition in the U.S. If Thoreau hadn't refused to pay his taxes as a protest to slavery and the Mexican-American War, he would never have written his essay "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience." If protesters for women's suffrage, labor, civil rights, Vietnam War, and gay rights, among other movements hadn't committed civil disobedience, those movements might well have had very different results.

## PRACTICAL AND TECHNICAL

■ *War tax resistance is too complicated.*

It can be complicated depending on how you resist the taxes and what your personal situation is. But it can also be as simple as doing what you do now except to refuse a token amount of money and include a letter of explanation with your return. In any case, there are counselors who are willing to help explain the techniques and issues.

■ *I would have to change my lifestyle.*

As mentioned earlier, however, some war tax resisters go out of their way to be uncollectible and consequently might change their lifestyle, including changing to one of more simple living. Many war tax resisters find they can fit this resistance into their current lifestyle.

■ *I never owe anything; the IRS always sends me money.*

Chances are you are being overwithheld with each paycheck. This can be corrected by claiming at least another allowance on the W-4 form that you file with your employer. This will mean that less income tax will be withheld and you will owe money to the IRS at the end of the year. Now you will be in a position to refuse payment.

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