

HOME

SEARCH ARCHIVES

CONTACT US

CIRCULATION

CLASSIFIED

PERSONALS

EMAIL NEWS

CAREERS

STOCK FORECASTS

ADS ONLINE

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HOME

NEWS

SPORTS

ENTERTAINMENT

BUSINESS

OPINIONS

HEALTH

SEARCH

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Area demonstrators urge tax resistance

By EESHA WILLIAMS
Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO -- Many among the 1,000 people who participated in a peace protest on Main Street Saturday pay taxes that make the war in Iraq possible, points out one Brattleboro protester.

"I'm not trying to condemn those who pay taxes while protesting for peace, but talk is cheap," said Lou Waronker, who has refused to pay taxes since the Vietnam War. "I believe that if you want peace you shouldn't pay for war."

About half of all federal tax dollars go to military spending, or paying interest on debt from past wars, said Erik Schickendanz of Guilford, who stopped paying taxes in 1989. "Every year I fill out my tax forms to figure out how much I owe in taxes," he said. "Then I donate the money to education, environment and peace charities. It's been about \$2,500 a year for the past several years."

Schickendanz said he received several bills from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over the years, but it wasn't until January that the IRS finally began seizing his paychecks from his job at a non-profit organization in Brattleboro. "I quit my job rather than pay," he said. "Half the people in the world live on under \$2 a day. My life is far more comfortable and less risky than theirs."

"We have no position on war tax resisters other than that, if they refuse to pay their taxes, they're going to have to face the consequences," said IRS spokeswoman Laurie Ruffino.

Of the several thousand war tax resisters in the United States, only a few dozen have been imprisoned, according to Edward Hedemann, the New York City-based author of "War Tax Resistance: A Guide to Withholding Your Support from the Military."

"Since the 1940s, only about 30 have been imprisoned, and that was for refusing to turn over personal documents to the IRS. In the past 10 years, one tax resister had their house seized and another had his car seized. Several hundred have had their bank accounts seized or their wages garnished," said Hedemann.

The author, who hasn't paid taxes in 30 years, said his book spells out ways hundreds of war tax resisters have avoided each of those consequences.

Jacqueline Brook of Putney said she decided to stop paying taxes after the Supreme Court "installed" George W. Bush as president in 2000, and she hasn't paid since. She said the war in Iraq has renewed her resolve. "The Bush administration

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3/25/2003

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Business
Commentary
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Religion
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Weather

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Green Mountains

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qualifies as international terrorists," she said. "U.S. law makes it clearly illegal to 'provide material to terrorists.' I view the payment of federal taxes as illegal and morally repugnant."

Several Windham County residents said they also refuse to pay taxes, but asked not to be identified in this article.

Ellen Kaye of Brattleboro said she and her partner, Robert Bady, refuse to support the military.

Bady, a self-employed carpenter who hasn't paid taxes since 1970, said he and Kaye recently donated \$500 to a group that will purchase health-care supplies for Iraqi civilians, and \$500 to the town of Brattleboro.

"I've had to accept not having middle-class security, like a good credit rating, health insurance, and savings," Bady said. "It has been a struggle at times, but it gives me a sense of integrity and purpose. In this world, it is hard to have those things."

A local chapter of the War Tax Resisters meets monthly in Greenfield, Mass., Waronker said. More information may be obtained by calling (802) 254-9098.

On the Web: www.irs.gov www.warresisters.org

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