

IF YOU WORK
FOR PEACE



STOP PAYING
FOR WAR.

More than a paycheck

NEWS FROM THE WAR TAX RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

February / March 2011

Organizing Tips

By Ruth Benn with thanks to Pam Allee

These first few months of the year, up until tax day, which is April 18 this year, are a busy time for organizers in the war tax resistance network. With Congress concerned about the deficit and even talking (at least talking) about cutting the military budget, now is a good time to ramp up our outreach. Pam Allee in Portland, Oregon, sent along some notes she took at a “how to be a better organizer” workshop. While many readers have been to such workshops and have lists of ideas stashed away, now seems like a good time to print a couple sections from Pam’s notes and add a bit more from other sources.

Preparation is everything, whether painting a house, gardening, or grassroots organizing.

Recruit Volunteers

There are both “retail” and “wholesale” forms of volunteering, that is, people who will sign a petition and maybe even show up for an action, and people who will knock on doors, make the phone calls, contribute to decision-making, etc.

- *Always be recruiting:* Take advantage of every opportunity to inform people and ask them to help.
- *Provide opportunities right away.*
- *Provide a variety of opportunities.*
- *Make it easy to begin.*
- *Create a community:* Relationship is everything — and can make up for the lack of tangible results.
- *Remain optimistic* — and persevere.

Build Coalitions

It’s all about building power to accomplish a common goal and to establish a base for future work. There are three types of coalitions:

- *Endorsements:* for “looks” essentially, to make your cause look bigger; also a bank of potentially more deeply committed allies.
- *Active Endorsements:* will commit to actions, such as appearing at press conferences, inviting you to speak or table, etc.



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Peg Averill graphic from WRL Organizer’s Manual.

CMTC Account Moves to St. Louis

By Carolyn Stevens

After over 20 years of operations in Seattle, the Conscience and Military Tax Campaign (CMTC) Escrow Account, the largest alternative fund of resisted war taxes in the U.S., has moved to St. Louis. The St. Louis Covenant Community of War Tax Resisters is the new fiduciary steward of the fund, with day-to-day operations handled by Bill Ramsey.

The transition from Seattle to St. Louis has been in the works for several months. Activists with the Nonviolent Action Community of Cascadia (NACC), the Seattle sponsoring group, decided that we needed to move on to other projects, and began looking for a new home for CMTC. We made inquiries of NWTRCC and a few other

groups around the country, and got a positive response from Bill and the folks in St. Louis. We sorted through all our files, shipped boxes to St. Louis, and mailed a letter to all our account holders to inform them of the change. With the final transfers of funds and database, the transition is complete.

CMTC moved to Seattle in the late 1980s after being founded on Long Island, New York. It accumulated close to half a million dollars in deposits, and for many years, served as an active voice of the WTR movement. During the 1990s, interest income from the fund supported the energetic

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More Than a Paycheck is a bimonthly publication of the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee, a clearinghouse and resource center for the conscientious war tax resistance movement in the United States. NWTRCC is a coalition of local, regional and national affiliate groups working on war tax related issues.

NWTRCC sees poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, environmental destruction and militarization of law enforcement as integrally linked with the militarism which we abhor. Through the redirection of our tax dollars, NWTRCC members contribute directly to the struggle for peace and justice for all.

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Taxable Income Levels

NWTRCC offers the standard deductions/personal exemption chart each February as a guide for people who choose to live below the taxable income. To figure out how much you can earn in 2011 before owing income taxes, identify your category and multiply the personal exemption by the number of dependents you can claim, including yourself, then add your standard deduction. For example, if you are married and filing jointly, with two children, you would add \$14,800 (\$3,700 x 4) to \$11,600, equaling a taxable level of \$26,400. Below this amount your family would owe no income taxes for the year, although the filing requirements set the bar much lower because of social security taxes.

2011 IRS Deductions and Exemptions

Category	Standard Deduction	Personal Exemption
Single	\$5,800	\$3,700
Married, filing jointly	\$11,600	\$3,700
Married, filing separately	\$5,800	\$3,700
Head of household	\$8,500	\$3,700

An additional \$1,150 standard deduction may be claimed by a married taxpayer who is at least 65 years old or blind. If the taxpayer is single, the additional standard deduction amount is \$1,450.

You may be able to make significantly more than

the amounts indicated above, but would need to file in order to keep it legal. NWTRCC's Practical #5, "Low Income/Simple Living as War Tax Resistance" (\$1 from the NWTRCC office), includes information on legal ways to reduce taxable income and owe no federal income taxes. We suggest that nonfilers fill out the forms and keep their receipts for reference if circumstances change.

Definitions Clarification

In the last issue of this newsletter there were definitions for some common WTR-related topics on page 2. A reader asked about seizures, given our statement that "WTRs usually do not know that bank account or salary levies have arrived until informed by their bank or employer." To clarify: The IRS is supposed to send a "letter of intent to levy," or a letter that notifies of an "intent to levy" with a 30-day warning. That letter indicates they can levy after the 30 days, but you don't really know if and when that will happen. If you are levied and believe you never received the warning letter from the IRS, then it is possible to request a hearing to argue the levy. However, it is best to raise only technical questions about the IRS procedures; bringing up topics related to refusing to pay for war during the hearing may be ignored, end the hearing, or incur a \$5,000 frivolous penalty. A few years ago a taxpayer actually won a case against the IRS because the IRS had sent the warning letter but it had been returned to the IRS due to a bad address. The IRS tried to argue that they had sent the letter and that was all that mattered; in this rare case, they lost.

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Many Thanks



Network Updates

Thanks to each individual who gave a contribution at the end of the year or in response to our November appeal. Your support and that of these affiliate groups, who recently paid dues, keep us going:

Maine War Tax Resistance Resource Center
War Resisters League, New York City

Note: Due to a holiday, Emancipation Day in Washington, DC, the final day to final taxes (tax day) is Monday, April 18 this year.

We are sorry to hear of the terminal illness of our Nebraska contact, retired Mennonite pastor, poet, mother and grandmother, Muriel Stackley. At this writing she is under hospice care and in our thoughts.

NWTRCC's updated list of war tax resistance counselors, area contacts, affiliates, and alternative funds is on the "Contacts and Counselors" page at nwtrcc.org. Print versions of the Network List, which are slightly more extensive, can be requested from the NWTRCC office. Please let the NWTRCC office know if you are interested in being a contact on our network list. Email nwtrcc@nwtrcc.org or call toll free 1-800-269-7464.

Peace Tax Fund Update

By David Bassett



The National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund (NCPTF), and its predecessor, the National Council for a World Peace Tax Fund, has existed since 1972. Its reason for existence is to pass the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund (RFPTF) bill, originally introduced in 1972 as the World Peace Tax Fund Bill, and in each Congress since then.

The past few years have been difficult for NCPTF, due to a reduction in income, certainly related in part to the recession. Another difficulty has been that our Executive Director, Bethany Criss, who joined us beginning in 2008, developed a severe illness and found it necessary to resign in October 2010. For the present time Board members and other volunteers are carrying out the essential activities of the organization.

Developments in recent months have included the recruiting, by the NCPTF Chair, Richard Woodard, and several others, of over 125 Congressional District Contacts (CDCs)—grassroots activists, whose role

will be to find persons who support the concept of the RFPTF bill and to persuade them to convey this support to their Representative and Senators.

At the November Board meeting, we decided to place the Peace Tax Foundation (the 501c3 sister organization of NCPTF) “in hibernation,” not completely closing it, but limiting fundraising entirely to NCPTF. (As an advocacy group, contributions to NCPTF are not tax-deductible.) The office remains in the same location as before, and we have sent two fundraising mailings, one in October and another in January, 2011. The latter campaign alerts our constituency to the warning by President Eisenhower in his Final Address to the Nation on January 17, 1961, of the risks imposed by the military-industrial complex.

Representative John Lewis plans to reintroduce the RFPTF bill in the House at an appropriate time in this new 112th Congress. The new number of this bill will be published on our website and on the Library of Congress website, thomas.loc.gov, as soon as this is known. We are making efforts to find bipartisan support for RFPTF

legislation in the Senate. We urge those who are supportive of the bill to express their support to their own Representative and to ask their Senators to introduce an equivalent bill in the Senate. If you need contact information for your Congress people, see the “action center” on the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) website at fcnl.org.

The next NCPTF Board meeting will be held February 28.

Contact the campaign at NCPTF, 2121 Decatur Place NW, Washington, D.C., 20008, 1-888-PEACETAX, www.peacetaxfund.org. ▼

David Bassett is a founding Board member and Honorary Chairperson of NCPTF and a war tax resister who lives in upstate New York (Pittsford; near Rochester).

Still available: *A Persistent Voice: Marian Franz and Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation*, with 47 essays by Marian Franz, Executive Director of NCPTF from 1982 to 2005, and 8 chapters by persons actively involved with the Peace Tax Fund and COMT movements. (Cascadia Publishing House, \$19.95, cascadiapublishinghouse.com)

Counseling Notes

continued from previous page

SS Seizure Procedure

Hopefully war tax resistance is attracting more younger people, but clearly a good number of WTRs are from the 60s generation. Questions about applying for Social Security benefits as a resister come up frequently. Carol Moore, DC Area War Tax Resisters, sent this report:

I applied five months before birthdate, as soon as I was eligible. I started getting it by check in July 2010. I currently deposit it in a friend's account. (And of course if you deposit it in your own bank, from time to time they will come along and take everything in your account and the bank might charge big fees and/or close you down.)

I'm in IRS system and get regular notices from them. I started getting threats to garnish social security in late August. As of the December

check they garnished 15% with a letter of explanation as to why.

There is a debit card you can get, and I assume they cannot take more than 15% at a time. Otherwise, the timing for garnishment probably is about the same. But I'm speculating.

If you aren't getting regular [IRS collection] notices, it might take much longer or there would be no garnishment at all.

I don't know if you wait a couple months before applying if it will slow down their process. At some point it would make your first check late; their website provides details.

So these last issues are things for others to report on when they have the experience.

Please send enlightenment from your experience to the NWTRCC office, nwtrcc@nwtrcc.org, or call us at 1-800-269-7464.

New Tax Breaks

In September, President Obama signed a bill that, among other things, permits sole proprietors and other small business owners

to deduct their health insurance premiums as a business expense. Formerly such folks, if they file, could take a deduction, but only after calculating business profits. Now the deduction reduces profitability/income, thus reducing both income tax and SECA tax. Alas, this provision of the law only applies to the 2010 tax year, but it is likely to be wrapped into the package of tax law extenders Congress typically passes each year.

In addition, the tax package Obama signed in December has components of interest to those who use legal means to lower their taxable income and lowers the payroll/FICA/SECA tax on everybody as well. If you are self-employed or a business owner, do some research to take advantage of new or newly-extended provisions. Also, the law extends provision allowing people at retirement age to exclude from their taxable income amounts donated to charity directly from 401ks and IRAs.

—David Gross

NWTR Ideas and Actions

Global Day of Action on Military Spending

The International Peace Bureau (Geneva, Switzerland) and the Institute for Policy Studies (Washington, DC) are jointly organizing a Global Day of Action on Military Spending on Tuesday, April 12, 2011, to coincide with the release of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's new figures on military expenditures. Since this call happens to fall just before tax day in the U.S., you may want to tie your event to international organizing. Check out the GDAMS website at <http://demilitarize.org>. There's a downloadable organizing packet and lots of organizing resources and ideas. With annual global military spending over \$1.5 trillion (2009 figures), the group is asking people all over the world to join together in actions to focus public, political, and media attention on the costs of military spending and the need for new priorities.

New England Gathering 2011

For those of you who won't plan to come to the NWTRCC Gathering in Kansas City the same weekend, consider the always wonderful New England Gathering of War Tax Resisters and Supporters. The 2011 dates are November 4-6, at Pioneer Valley Cohousing in Amherst, Massachusetts. Watch this newsletter for details.

Write Imprisoned Resisters

Frank Donnelly moved from the prison camp in Estill, South Carolina, to a halfway house in his home state. Write him at 5 Grant Street, Portland, Maine 04101. His term should finish in June 2011.

Carlos Steward is about six months into his 2-year prison sentence in Montgomery, Alabama. Send letters to: Carl W. Steward, 09105-088, FPC Montgomery, Federal Prison Camp, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, AL 36112.

Both cases have been covered in previous issues, or you can read about them at nwtrcc.org. See the "NWTRCC News" column for links.

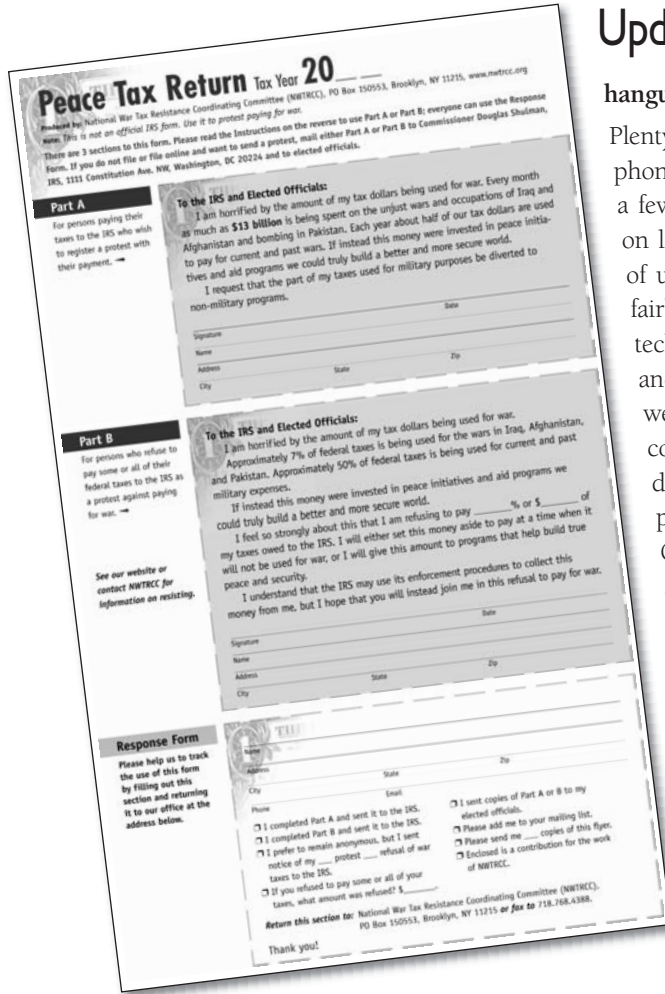
Updated and Active!

hanguponwar.org:

Plenty of people still resist the telephone excise tax, despite the changes a few years ago that left the tax only on local telephone service. For most of us it's a small amount, but still a fairly easy one to refuse. After some technical problems, we finally re-did and updated the Hang Up On War! website. It is now possible to post comments about phone companies directly to that website. We have pages for Verizon, ATT, and Qwest, and will add more pages as comments come in.

wartaxboycott.org:

There are over 212 signers on the Boycott public list, and many others have expressed interest but do not want to be listed on the internet. The campaign is still active, so check the website to see if you name is listed—and if not, please sign up!



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Outreach Flyer Should Emphasize the Debt

No one is surprised to hear how much of their taxes go for the military. Young people especially are shocked to see how much goes for debt servicing. The point we must make is that the budget cannot be balanced while we are at war, the debt servicing portion will grow, and human resources and environmental protection will be cut for it. Today's school children can expect to spend their careers paying this war debt. It is question of how much of their career income that shall require. Environmentalists must be told that war funding is "emergency" funding, meaning it gets a blank check. We cannot fight a

war and fight global warming too. Tax resistance cannot grow if only pacifists do it.

—Gary Erb, Boulder, CO

[As regards the War Resisters League pie chart flyer, Gary suggests "as a springboard for discussion" adding a pie slice that is explicitly labeled "Debt Servicing".]

American Quaker War Tax Resistance
from the 17th through the 19th century

a documentary history



edited by David Gross

"intelligent and intense"
— Elizabeth Boardman
Western Friend

"magnificent... amazing"
— Don Kaufman
More Than a Paycheck

"a wonderful resource"
— Cat Chapin-Bishop
Quaker Pagan Reflections

American Quaker War Tax Resistance
<http://createspace.com/3347562>

Paid Advertisement



nwttrcc.org/peacetaxreturn.php:

NWTRCC still produces the Peace Tax Return, which anyone can use to protest war taxes or to report their resistance. Copies are available in brochure form from the NWTRCC office (.25 each), or you can read the text and download a PDF version from the website.

More Than A Paycheck Ad Rates

\$35 business card (3.5 x 2)

\$75 quarter page (5 x 4.875)

\$150 half page (horizontal only, 7.75 x 5)

\$300 full page (7.75 x 10)

Classified ads: (.50 per word; approx. 40 words/column inch)
(Ads printed on inside pages only.)

1 page (8.5 x 11) inserts, black and white only – \$150 for 2-sides; \$115 for 1-sided (+25% if we do the design and layout).

We prefer to design, or email PDF of insert to the NWTRCC office.

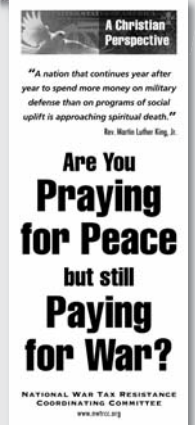
NWTRCC prints 700 copies of the newsletter; 400 are mailed to subscribers and others are distributed at events, peace centers, and stores. Advertisements that do not harmonize with the tone and message of NWTRCC may be rejected at the discretion of the editor and NWTRCC's Administrative Committee.

Send your ad (or ad copy) to NWTRCC, PO Box 150553, Brooklyn, NY 11215 with check made out to NWTRCC or email to nwttrcc@nwttrcc.org. Call with questions, 1-800-269-7464.

Tax Day is Coming! April 18, 2011

Show **Death and Taxes** at an event or on public access TV, table with NWTRCC literature, leaflet, vigil with signs, publish ads in local papers, hold penny polls between now and April 18, write letters to the editor; give a talk at an after-church program or a community group meeting, join coalitions and speak up about war tax resistance, ask for NWTRCC ads to insert in your publications—etc.! To enhance your outreach, here's a sampling of available literature, or see the full list with more details at nwttrcc.org under the "Resources" button.

- **Death and Taxes DVD**, 30 minutes. Sliding scale, \$10-\$20 each postpaid
- **"Thoreau and His Heirs: The History and Legacy of Thoreau's Civil Disobedience"** Teaching Kit. \$30 postpaid, includes DVD, Thoreau's essay, questions for students, and select list of historic civil disobedience actions
- **Brochures**, 20¢ each: "Our Tax Money Our Choice"; "Why Isn't Everyone Who's For Peace A War Tax Resister? Answers to Common Questions"; "Refusing the Federal Telephone Tax"; "Are You Praying for Peace But Still Paying for War? A Christian Perspective"
- **Flyer**: "Where Your Income Tax Money Really Goes" Pie chart flyer from War Resisters League, 2011 version available late-February. 10¢ each for orders of 200 or fewer (WRL handles larger orders: 339 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10012, 212-228-0450)
- **Book: War Tax Resistance: A Guide to Withholding Your Support from the Military**, 144 pages, with 2010 update. \$15 ea., plus \$5 first class, \$3 media mail (call for bulk rates)
- **Practical War Tax Resistance Series booklets**, (#1-3, 75¢ each; #4-7, \$1 each) – #1: Controlling Withholding; #2: To File Or Not To File; #3: How To Resist Collection; #4: Self-Employment; #5: Low Income/Simple Living; #6: Organizational Resistance; #7: Aging and War Tax Resistance.
- **Booklet**, \$1.50 each. "War Tax Resistance at a Glance"



Please add a contribution for postage costs. Affiliates take 20% off total cost of literature. See the NWTRCC website for all of our publications and to order online: nwttrcc.org/publications.php.

Wearables

"I'm Not Buying It" Tee Shirts – Dove with "Not with my body, Not with my mind, Not with my money" on the front (black with white lettering) and "Stop the War Machine" red with black lettering, both with "I'm Not Buying It"/www.wartaxboycott.org on the back. Two other styles are blank on the back: "No Torture" (dark red) and "Paz Y Justicia" (magenta). M, L, XL sizes. \$15 each plus \$5 shipping per shirt (or call for more postage costs)

"Foreclose on War" Scarves – It's a cold winter. Get one for yourself or sell them to others to help NWTRCC's fundraising. Embroidered on each soft, fleece scarf is the slogan "Foreclose on War, Invest in People." \$10 each plus \$4 postage; call for bulk rates and resale prices or see these wearables on our website under the "Resources" button.

Affiliate Reports

Organizational Policy Renewed

By Robin Harper and Suzanne Day

2010 was high time to revise and update a set of policies of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, crafted in 1988 to respond appropriately to any war tax refusing employee. A working panel of seven Friends, including Peter Goldberger, another lawyer, and two war tax resisters, was appointed, with the General Secretary of the Yearly Meeting serving *ex officio*.

Over a period of months every lawyerly sentence and Quaker affirmation in the policy and practice was examined, vetted, and brought into congruence with both our religious understandings and current IRS practices and regulations.

The finished document was brought before the Annual Sessions of the Yearly Meeting in July 2010. The clerk of the revision panel made a brilliant Powerpoint presentation, describing the process used and the salient points revised from the policy approved in 1988. The clerk of Yearly Meeting allowed for questions and spirited discussion, marked by perceptive, practical questions directed to Peter Goldberger and staff of Yearly Meeting responsible for payroll. Also, many heartfelt

affirmations from Friends emphasized that our peace and other testimonies enjoin us to renounce all war and to honor where possible the conscientious leadings of all Friends, including employees of Quaker organizations. The positive *sense of the meeting* in the room was palpable, and the updated policy was resoundingly affirmed.

While very few Friends actively practice war tax resistance, many stand faithfully

behind the significance of the corporate religious community remaining united in support of this avenue of witness to our testimony of peaceful resolution of conflict.

The policy can be found at <http://archive.pym.org/pm/ann.php>, or contact Suzanne Day for more information, (856) 829-7034. ▼
Robin Harper and Suzanne Day are members of PYM's Conscience, Militarism & War Tax Concerns committee.

Save the Dates!

2011 NWTRCC gatherings, with mini-conference and business meeting
May 6-8 • San Francisco Bay Area
November 4-6 • Kansas City

Reminder

Nominations for NWTRCC's Administrative Committee are due March 1. The AdComm gives oversight to day-to-day business operations and plans for the two meetings held each November and May. New members will be selected from nominees at the May 2011 meeting. Nominees will receive a letter with further details.

Watch this newsletter, our website, or contact the NWTRCC office for details.

CMTC

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direct action work of NACC in Seattle, and during the 2000s, NACC used interest income to fund grants to local, national, and international peace and social justice projects. The group in St. Louis has informed us that they intend to continue with the grant-making cycles.

New contact information for the CMTC Escrow Account is: CMTC-EA, 438 N. Skinker Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63130, (314) 374-7446, cmtcea@gmail.com. ▼

Carolyn Stevens is on the board of CMTC and active with the Nonviolent Action Community of Cascadia in Seattle. She was NWTRCC Coordinator from 1987-1991.

INTERNATIONAL

WRI Continues Resistance



War Resisters' International, based in London, reported in September that Inland Revenue is threatening to seize assets from the organization because, since 2003, it has been withholding 7% of its employees' income taxes, estimated as the percentage of the British budget that goes to war; the current dispute is about outstanding taxes for tax years from 2007 to 2010. In its regular letters to the Inland Revenue, the organization states:

"The interpretation of human rights is constantly changing, and nowadays there are no doubts any more that conscientious objection to military service is a human right, derived from Art. 9 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. We are convinced that the same is the case for conscientious objection to military taxation. We therefore dispute that the debt ... constitutes a legal debt, as it is a result of a law which violates basic human rights, as implemented by the Human Rights Act."

For more information see the September report at: <http://wri-irg.org/node/10915> or check the WRI homepage at <http://wri-irg.org>. ▼

Worldwide Connections

Keep up with the activities of groups outside the U.S. Read the Conscience and Peace Tax International Bulletins, which are posted on the CPTI website, www.cpti.ws. You will find links to groups in other countries, reports and photos from international conferences, and, also, a good section on legal documents from cases around the world.

Organizing Tips

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- *Long-Term Relationship:* groups that work on causes that are related, but different.

The how-tos of coalition-building include:

- *Brainstorming* all the different organizations you want to include. Be inclusive, work outside your comfort zone. Narrow it down to an initial target list.
- *Prepare a fact sheet* on your issue; list your current partners; look as big as you can.
- *Write an endorsement letter*, presenting the issue in terms of your concerns and why your issue is compelling. Explain how you expect to win.
- *Contact* the people/groups on your list, via email, phone calls, or in person if possible, using your network for introductions. Go to their meetings! Ask about giving a presentation.
- If you begin to work together, *thank* coalition members as soon as possible, using the best contact method for each.

These days you can search on any subject on the internet and usually come up with some pretty good information. Type in “How to organize an event,” and you’ll be given links to some very useful checklists. “Writing a press release” brings up similar offerings.

Here are a few tips on press releases, some from the old standard *WRL Organizers Manual*, published in those pre-internet days of 1986.



Daniel Woodham speaking at a press conference. Remember to bring signs and banners that will show on camera. *Photo by Steev Hise.*

Tips for Writing a Press Release

- If faxing or mailing, print it on letterhead (make up a simple masthead as needed); many news outlets accept press releases by email also, but most prefer text emails without attachments.
- List a contact person at the top with phone number (cell phone if you will be

on the streets or at an event) and email address.

- Write “For immediate Release” and the date, or name a release date if there is a reason to delay the content’s use.
- A headline should give a quick summary and enticement to the event.
- The first paragraph of the release must contain the basics: who, what, where, when, why.
- Write in short declarative sentences; keep paragraphs to two or three sentences.
- Opinions should appear as quotations from your members.
- Describe your organization in the last paragraph.
- Proofread carefully! Show the end by typing “-30-” centered at the bottom of the release.

Bring a few press packets to your event, which should include the release; action flyer, handout, or fact sheet; and information about your organization. Don’t put too much in the packet, but provide the basics in a neat, not necessarily fancy, format.

If these notes are reminding you of your own “best organizing tips,” please send them to NWTRCC, and we’ll offer more in future issues or at workshops. For action ideas, check out the “What You Can Do” page at nwtrcc.org under the “Programs” button. ▼

Ruth Benn is NWTRCC Coordinator. Pam Allee is active with the Oregon Community of War Tax Resisters in Portland

Perspective

continued from back page

Intelligence is also “the capacity to think rationally and respond successfully to new situations.” Endless war and pervasive aggression against the earth is something new, nuclear weapons are new. Our understanding of ecology is new. Is it an act of intelligence to persistently attack and degrade the interconnected web of life that makes our own existence possible? Is it intelligent to build thousands of nuclear weapons of war, each of which can lay waste to vast swaths of the earth’s ecosystems, and if used collectively can destroy most life on earth?

The cliff-hanging element of the current drama is that the very people who are right

at the cusp of comprehending the deep ecological basis of our existence are currently spending their entire lives funding and otherwise supporting war and the attendant destruction of the biosphere. The current fear-driven model of eternal war makes a mockery of the lives of those who are drawn to live an intelligent existence, but in fact find all of their resources being stolen by the alpha males of the dominant paradigm of power and aggression. It is fear that holds them in their current position of submission, and fear that now threatens to unravel the complex evolutionary web of life. A positive outcome to this drama is only possible if those who have the mental capacity to act on the insights born of their intelligence do so immediately. Do we want to spend our entire lives funding hydrogen bombs, the power

fantasies of our dysfunctional males, and the progressive destruction of the biosphere, or do we want to step outside of frightened selves to become warriors for the earth? What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? ▼

Dana Visalli is a professional botanist and an organic market gardener in Washington State. He redirects his financial resources away from war and toward life-sustaining endeavors because it seems like the intelligent thing to do. He can be reached at dana@methownet.com.

The last sentence is from Mary Oliver’s poem “The Summer Day.” The full essay with graphics and references can be found at www.methownaturalist.com/20-War,Ecology&Intelligence.pdf.

Excerpt from

War, Ecology, and Emerging Intelligence

By Dana Visalli

We think of war as “politics by another name,” a means of resolving disputes between people. But there is another side to war, and that is violence perpetuated on the earth itself. The United States dropped about two million tons of bombs in World War II. While these explosives were aimed at human targets, they all landed on and damaged the earth. Only five years after the end of that war, we dropped 600,000 tons of munitions on Korea, as well as another 600,000 tons of napalm. A year after the end of the Korean war (1953) we were militarily engaged in Vietnam, where over the course of twenty years we dropped seven million tons of bombs (considerably more than in WWII) and 400,000 tons of napalm, as well as spraying six million acres of tropical forest and cropland with teragenic and carcinogenic defoliant. At the same time, as something of a sideshow, we also bombed Cambodia (2.7 million tons of bombs, 1 million gallons of defoliant) and Laos (3 million tons of bombs, 1 million gallons of defoliant). These were wars not just against human enemies (mostly impoverished rice farmers) but against some of the richest ecosystems on the planet, and against the life-sustaining capacity of the biosphere.

War has become a way of life for the United States. Our country funded the civil wars in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s, funded the *mujahideen* fighting against the Russians in the 1979-1989 war with Afghanistan, funded both sides in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, and then in 1990 went back to war ourselves, with Iraq, with Afghanistan in 2001, and then initiated a covert war with Pakistan in 2004. As Vietnam veteran Mike Hastie observed, “The United States is a non-stop killing machine.” This country also maintains a nuclear arsenal of 7,000 hydrogen bombs, many times more than enough to destroy the majority of life on earth.

Because American war-making is so persistent and pervasive, and because every bomb that is dropped, whether it be on

Korea or Vietnam or Afghanistan, in the end falls on the earth, the realization slowly dawns that this unending aggression is actually a war against the earth itself. The irony is that the life sustaining qualities of the earth are the very source of human life. The human body is made up primarily of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and nitrogen, and these elements are derived from the geologically and biologically driven cycles of the earth and sky. So in a somewhat poetic but still scientific sense, the earth is our mother; we emerged from the planet’s evolutionary cauldron and to the earth we shall return.

Why all the violence against the earth, the source of our lives? Male mammals have an inherent urge for power, and humans have an inherent fear of death. The genetically induced emotions related to these passions may be the subconscious forces that are driving our dysfunctional and self-destructive aggressive behavior.

Intelligence is something new on the planet.

Intelligence—in part “the capacity to per-



Courtesy of Dana Visalli.

ceive what is true”—takes courage, because when we become capable of perceiving even relative truths we also understand that much of what we were programmed to believe in childhood is false. The counterpoint to this statement is that succumbing to fear inhibits the development of intelligence.

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