

IF YOU WORK  
FOR PEACE



STOP PAYING  
FOR WAR.

# More than a paycheck

NEWS FROM THE WAR TAX RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

August 2008

## Bringing Light Into the Darkness

by Marcus Page and Mike Butler



Haggard after hitch-hiking home, Marcus and Mike hold one of the signs used by the six vigilers on April 14–15 at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

On April 14 and 15 six people with Trinity Nuclear Abolitionists (TNA) went to vigil, pray, and distribute leaflets at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) as part of NWTRCC's 2008 War Tax Boycott. TNA organizes monthly demonstrations at the Laboratory, and the April vigil was planned to last 24 hours. Los Alamos was chosen because it is a key location in the field of nuclearism, being the birthplace of the bomb. It is a key actor in the proliferation of global nuclear violence.

Trinity Nuclear Abolitionists had three purposes for this action:

- To prayerfully encourage the nonviolent, safe, clean disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, along with the clean-up of LANL.
- To visibly celebrate the War Tax Boycott organized by NWTRCC.

- To keep watch over the Laboratory through a 24-hour cycle, as part of the citizen inspections of international crime scenes.

At 9:33 pm on April 14, the two of us, Marcus Page and Mike Butler, were arrested for trespassing because we refused to change our location. TNA always tells lab security how many hours the demonstration will last, and they have not stopped our prayer-actions since last August. This was the first time TNA had arranged for an all-nighter. Armed with a meditation bell, interfaith prayers, and clean drinking water, we were ready to sing, pray, and dance for peace across the street from the Laboratory all night. We were in an area that was safe and well-lit, and most likely belonging to the county of Los Alamos, rather than Los Alamos National Laboratory.

When four professional men arrived to talk with us, starting around 8:55 pm, we welcomed their input and suggestions. They didn't share our view of simplicity, they didn't accept our invitation to pray with us, and they didn't make any gestures to stop the international crimes across the street. Instead they called in the police to interrupt our prayer-action.

Rather than arresting the four professional men for protecting the international criminal actions of LANL, two local police officers upheld the viewpoints of the four other men. Two men claimed to represent LANL, and one man represented a private company LANS—the management company for

LANL. Negotiations led to clarity for the four men—Mr. Killeen, Mr. Holsapple, Fireman Pacheco, and Mr. Mick. We ended the important conversation in a clear disagreement over their claims to authority and continued the vigil in a jail cell throughout the night. Other TNA volunteers resumed the outdoor vigil on LANL property during the next morning.

We were arraigned and pleaded “not guilty.” After two nights in jail we were bailed out in order to organize further TNA actions and prepare for the upcoming jury trials. TNA consistently calls for an end to all nuclear weapons research, development, testing, refurbishing, and production.

The local magistrates court will not allow a consolidation of the cases into one trial, so Marcus Page faces trial on August 18, and Mike Butler faces trial on September 15.

In mid-July the Honorable Judge Pat Casados told Defendant Marcus Page that supporters at his trial will be limited to 22, since that's all the extra chairs in the room. The jury will be six local volunteers in Los Alamos, with court starting around 10:00 am. Casados says that picketing outside will have to be a minimum of 100 feet from the courthouse.

The Los Alamos Police Department is trying to work out a plea bargain with Page, who is representing himself. If a plea bargain cannot be reached, then Page's

*continued on page 3*

IF YOU WORK  
FOR PEACE



## More than a paycheck

### Editor

Ruth Benn

### Production

Rick Bickhart

### Printing

Lakeside Printing  
Cooperative

Printed on Recycled Paper

*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.*

Subscriptions to  
*More Than a Paycheck*  
are \$15 per year.

### NWTRCC

PO Box 150553  
Brooklyn, NY 11215  
(718) 768-3420  
(800) 269-7464

FAX: (718) 768-4388

email: [nwtrcc@nwtrcc.org](mailto:nwtrcc@nwtrcc.org)

Web: [www.nwtrcc.org](http://www.nwtrcc.org)

## COUNSELING NOTES

Thanks to Dave Gross for some submissions. Check out his blog for continuous musings and news related to war tax resistance: <http://www.sniggle.net/Experiment>.

### Economic Stimulus

Many of us war tax resisters were rather hopeful when a letter arrived earlier this year saying we were entitled to a \$600 check (or whatever amount is appropriate to our status) as part of the Bush administration's so-called "economic stimulus." The letter included an approximate date by which the check would arrive, and we began making plans to rush out and buy buy buy. Why not hope that the IRS might make yet another mistake in the crush of things and blast out that check even to those of us who have refused to pay war taxes? But no. By the appointed date what came in the mail was a form showing the \$600 applied to the debt the IRS shows, so no shopping to stimulate the economy for us.

We are grateful to the friends who did receive the payment and decided the best way to stimulate the "underground economy" was to give the money to NWTRCC. One man also called to say that he was not able to join the 2008 War Tax Boycott but he asked us to split his \$600 check between Direct Aid Iraq and Common Ground Health Clinic, the two groups suggested in the campaign for redirection. This kind of support for war tax resistance from non-resisters is deeply appreciated.

### Information Online

For counselors who are asked about the frivolous warning letter or penalty, there is information online at [wartaxboycott.org/frivolous.htm](http://wartaxboycott.org/frivolous.htm) or go to the FAQ page at [wartaxboycott.org](http://wartaxboycott.org). Most individuals who are referred to that page find the

information they need to answer questions. We will set up an FAQ page on the NWTRCC website soon to make the page more accessible also.

In addition, if you are getting questions about the telephone tax, [hanguponwar.org](http://hanguponwar.org) still has lots of useful information.

### Tax Snitches

The IRS has been expanding its policy of rewarding people who turn in tax evaders by giving them a cut of the proceeds. It's become such a potentially lucrative option, in fact, that at least one law firm has gone into business representing tax snitches. It has so far turned in dozens of tax evaders who have underpaid their taxes by more than \$10 billion, in the hopes of getting a payout that can be as high as 30% of what is eventually collected. As far as we know this is an extremely rare occurrence in the case of war tax resisters.

*(Source: [sniggle.net/Experiment](http://sniggle.net/Experiment) (June 18, 2008 entry))*

### IRS Has to Wait

The IRS has decided that while it can seize your "future rights to retirement benefits" as part of a levy, it cannot force you to cash out early in order to get its hands on the money before you retire.

The decision arose in the case of a woman who had a stake in a state retirement fund, but, as she was not yet retired, hadn't started to withdraw from it. A provision of the retirement fund would allow her to suspend her membership in the fund at any time in exchange for a lump-sum payment.

*continues on page 3*

Many Thanks



Network Updates

*We are grateful for recent contributions and dues payments from:*

Asheville War Tax Resistance (NC)  
Christian Peacemaker Teams (IL)  
Madison Area Alternative Fund (WI)  
Nonviolent Action Community  
of Cascadia (WA)

*and the Estate of Dorice McDaniels*

*Southeast – New group name and contact:*

Asheville WTR, c/o Clare Hanrahan  
PO Box 7641, Asheville, NC 28802  
[AshevilleWTR@gmail.com](mailto:AshevilleWTR@gmail.com)

*Counselors and contacts are updated on our website, [nwtrcc.org](http://nwtrcc.org), fairly regularly. If you find that contact information is not correct, please let the NWTRCC office know. If you need someone in your area and do not use the internet or there is no one near you, call the NWTRCC office for referrals, 1-800-269-7464.*

## Why Not 50?

The National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund reports that it is approaching a milestone. Within the last month, Sheila Jackson-Lee from the 18th District of Texas became the 41st cosponsor for the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act, nearing the previous high of 46 sponsors during a Congressional session. Melani Hom, Interim Executive Director, says that they are not stopping at 46, but aiming for at least 50 cosponsors by the end of this Congress.

You can help! For more information visit the website or contact the Campaign office in Washington, DC, at (202) 483-3751.

## Across the Northern Border

Joshua Goldberg is a Canadian war tax resister active with Conscience Canada, a group working for peace tax fund legislation in Canada. In 2007 an online magazine, *Straight.com*, wrote a story about Goldberg, who also appears in the Conscience Canada short film, "Work for Peace — Stop Paying for War." Interestingly, Goldberg is a second-generation war resister. His father fled to Canada because he refused to be drafted in the American military during the Vietnam War.

Joshua Goldberg recently wrote to the Canada Revenue Agency:

"Since 2002 I have been a conscientious objector to military taxation, each year at tax time diverting the military portion of my federal taxes to Conscience Canada's Peace Tax Trust Fund and writing a letter to

Copies of Conscience Canada's DVD are free, but a donation is appreciated. To order mail a donation check to Conscience Canada, 901-70 Mill Street, Toronto, ONT M5A 4R1 or see [www.consciencecanada.ca/References/dvd.html](http://www.consciencecanada.ca/References/dvd.html).



Canada Revenue Agency, submitted with my filed taxes, explaining the reason for the diversion. This Trust Fund is a secure, non-partisan interim facility that allows conscientious objectors to military taxation such as myself the opportunity to directly contribute to peace by setting aside the military portion of our taxes, for the federal government to put into a fund that can be used for activities that do not involve killing or preparations to kill.

"I understand from correspondence with CRA and various politicians since 2002 that CRA currently has no mechanism to log my conscientious objection to military taxation and instead treats my payments to the Peace Tax Trust Fund as a debt owing to the government. This administrative gap is precisely the reason why Conscience Canada has worked with political representatives and their administrators in Ottawa to come up with a workable solution for conscientious objectors such as myself.

"I ask that you notify your supervisor of this letter and that it be kept in my file to document the reasons for my redirection of a portion of my federal tax." ▼

abolitionist actions by LANL employees.

More information is available at [www.Lovarchy.org/LANS](http://www.Lovarchy.org/LANS) or contact Trinity Nuclear Abolitionists at (505) 242-0497. ▼

*Mike Butler is a member of the NWTRCC Administrative Committee. Marcus Page is a founder of Trinity House, a Catholic Worker house in Albuquerque. Both are involved with Albuquerque War Tax Alternative Fund.*

## Counseling Notes

*continued from previous page*

The IRS was trying to seize assets from her, and attempted to seize the retirement account. But the State-run fund said there was nothing to seize, as she wasn't retired yet and didn't yet qualify for payments. So the IRS thought it would tell the fund to suspend the account and turn over the lump sum to the agency.

But the IRS Chief Counsel recently ruled that the agency would have been overstepping its authority in doing that.

In cases like this, the Counsel determined, the IRS has to seize "the taxpayer's future rights to retirement benefits upon reaching retirement age" and wait for the money "when benefits became payable to the taxpayer under the terms of the retirement fund."

(Source: [hr.cch.com/news/pension/062708a.asp](http://hr.cch.com/news/pension/062708a.asp))

## IRS and Foreign Accounts

A May 15, 2008, article in the *New York Times* reported that the IRS is renewing its interest in a law that has been on the books since 1970 but rarely enforced. The law requires that citizens or residents of the US must tell the IRS each year if they have any foreign bank or financial accounts holding a total of \$10,000 or more. Income from the assets is taxed at the ordinary rates of up to 35 percent. Taxpayers are supposed to file a disclosure form, known as the "Foreign Bank and Financial Account Report," (or Fbar).

The law was originally passed to root out laundering of drug money, and failure to file a disclosure or lying on the form can lead to penalties of fraud. The USA Patriot Act included provisions to raise the civil penalties to \$100,000 or half the amount in the account, whichever is great. Criminal penalties are even higher. The Times reports that the number of Fbar forms being filed is increasing, partly because the number of foreign countries that are cooperating with the IRS has increased in recent years. We know of no war tax resisters who have run up against this new enforcement, nor have we heard how widely it is being applied. ▼

## Bring Light

*continued from page 1*

support committee believes his opponent, Officer Paige Early, will be getting the District Attorney to represent her case instead. As it is, Officer Early will represent herself and the State. The last time a Catholic Worker was prosecuted in this magistrate court by the police department was in the mid-1990s. Vince Eirene was convicted and spent 6 months in jail. Page says he will ask for more policing of LANL, to encourage more



# WTR Ideas and Actions

## Utilitarianism and the Golden Rule

I often hear a variety of responses when I tell someone that I am a war tax resister. I'd like to address a certain group of these responses, which come from people who also want to see an end to war:

- "War tax resistance is not going to have any effect unless a very large group of people do it."
- "There are more effective means of trying to end the war."
- "There are better ways to make your opinion known."
- "Your individual war tax resistance is not going to make a difference."
- "You could do a lot more good by earning income at your full potential and using that money to support good causes and good organizations."
- "There are more effective ways to protest war."

These responses seem to be utilitarian in nature. Of course I contemplate the consequences of my actions in consideration of whether the actions are ethical. I enjoy entertaining the thought experiment, "What if everyone did this?" However, I do not believe that the ends always justify the means. My primary ethical obligation is "First, do no harm." Would I be doing harm by paying taxes that I know will be used to kill people? Isn't paying those taxes giving both moral and financial support to an institution that murders people? How can such voluntary cooperation be justified?

War tax resistance is a simple application of the Golden Rule. I would not want someone in another country (that is waging war against my country) to pay for the bullets and bombs that might kill me or my friends or my family.

—Greg Reagle, Washington, DC



Attract people to your tables with a variety of items like a penny poll (instructions available from the NWTRCC office), bumperstickers, and peace symbol beads. Eugene Taxes for Peace Not War, April 2008. Photo by Janine Martin-Horst.

## Two Small Stories

You never know who resists war taxes until you start talking with them.

One of my jobs is performing administrative tasks at a drop-in center for homeless youth. Recently I struck up a conversation with another person who I had seen working there, but who I had not seen often enough to think he was a regular part of our team. It turns out that he works regularly at another site for the same place, but was just there temporarily, making a little extra money. He is not particularly active politically on peace issues per se, but when I told him about NWTRCC, he said that he just stopped paying taxes as a personal protest when George W. Bush became President. He said he knows it'll catch up with him eventually, but he doesn't care because he is so mad about the war and lack of funding for social programs.

And you never know who remembers things about you until you meet them again many years later.

Not long ago, a very close friend of my cousin's emailed me. They have been friends since high school. He is a doctor who works

with people who have suffered from traumatic brain injury. He is going through a period of assessing his work and his life — a kind of a mid-life crisis, for lack of a better phrase. He wanted to talk with me because, although we have gotten to know each other slightly over the years through my cousin, we don't really know each other, and he had some questions about the way I have chosen to live my life. I met this guy many years ago when he was an undergrad at Yale. So what does he remember about me? The fact that I had lived at the Catholic Worker — and that I am a war tax resister! So I shared with him a bit of what I have experienced in both these roles. Of course getting people to delve a bit more deeply is the challenge, but what is great is the way that not paying war taxes is something people remember.

—Melissa Jameson, Brooklyn, NY

## Another Reason to Resist

Charles Merrill stopped filing his tax returns because he and his husband were pre-

# WTR Ideas and Actions

vented by law from filing as a married couple. The Defense of Marriage Act, which was signed by President Clinton in 1996, forces people in same-sex marriages to file tax returns separately as if they were single. No sooner had California started recognizing same-sex marriage this year than the IRS decided to prosecute Charles Merrill for refusing to file — with a possible penalty of 3 years in jail or a \$25,000 fine for each year he hasn't filed.

“Marriage between ‘gender neutral’ couples is legal in California, but our union is not recognized by the federal government, and we don't get the over 1,000 federal benefits automatically extended to heterosexual couples,” Merrill said. “Since our marriage is not recognized by the federal government, the carving over the Supreme Court of the United States is just meaningless words, the words that say, ‘Equal Justice Under The Law.’”

Merrill, who recently suffered a stroke, said from his wheelchair, “I have buried \$2 million worth of gold coins in the desert as a hedge against the economy collapsing. My partner doesn't even know where it is at.” He continued, “If the IRS allows me to file a joint federal income tax form like any other married couple, the money is there to pay. All they have to do is dig it up. I want to pay taxes, but not treated as a second-class citizen. Gay marriage is not a state issue, as the political candidates McCain and Obama claim, any more than heterosexual marriage is. They need to rescind DOMA and make us equal citizens under federal law. As it stands now, gay married couples are taxed without full representation.”

The 74-year-old artist has been in a relationship with Kevin Boyle for 16 years. Merrill's trial is scheduled for sometime in 2009 at the U.S. Tax Court in San Diego, California.

—Dave Gross (Source: foxbusiness.com)

Announcing the Agape Community's annual St. Francis Day event

## A Tribute to Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

**Saturday, October 4, 2008 • 10 am**

2062 Greenwich Rd., Ware, MA 01082

413-967-9369 • [www.agapecommunity.org](http://www.agapecommunity.org)

Poetry reading by **Fr. Daniel Berrigan S.J.**, and many other wonderful events planned and speakers including:

**Prof. Michael True**, professor emeritus, Assumption College

**Frida Berrigan**, Senior Research Associate at the Arms Trade Resource Center

**Robert Jonas**, author, retreat leader and Japanese Flute musician

**Dr. Carolyn West**, mindfulness trainer and teacher.

Bring your own lunch contribution to the potluck.

Agape is a NWTRCC contact in Massachusetts.

## RESOURCES



**New!**

## We Won't Pay A Tax Resistance Reader

Ever wanted to look up a good tax resistance story or quote, but can't put your hands on just the right source. Well, this could be it!

**We Won't Pay** by David M. Gross is a collection of writings from over 2,000 years of tax resisters and tax resistance campaigns, covering both tax resistance as an act of individual conscience and revenue refusal as a technique of nonviolent resistance. The 596-page book pulls together many essays familiar to our readers, such as Juanita Nelson's "A Matter of Freedom," or Bernard Offen's "For a Just World at Peace," and brings us right up to today, with 21st Century resisters like Julia Butterfly Hill and Kat Kanning, a New Hampshire activist.

For more detail about the contents follow the link from the NWTRCC homepage, [nwtrcc.org](http://nwtrcc.org).

To order online go to  
[www.createspace.com/3339658](http://www.createspace.com/3339658).

To order by mail, send \$29 plus \$4.23 postage to the author: David Gross, 718 Clement St. #3, San Francisco CA 94118.

## Eugene Hosts Next CC Meeting and Gathering

Folks with Taxes for Peace Not War in Eugene, OR, have been meeting this summer to plan for the next NWTRCC weekend, November 7-9, 2008. They're full of ideas for a fun and fruitful weekend of workshops, presentations, and discussion. It will also be right after the election so we can spend a bit of time considering whether a change in administration changes our approach. The gathering begins with dinner Friday night, a mini-conference program on Saturday, and the Coordinating Committee meeting on Sunday morning. The gathering ends with lunch on Sunday.

Plan your travel now. Folks on the west coast might consider train, bus, or car pool options. Flights can be arranged into Eugene, though the prices maybe be lower to Portland where the local WTR group will help with travel to Eugene. Plan an extra 2 hours into your travel time to get from Portland to Eugene if you fly (best to contact the NWTRCC office before purchasing a ticket). Brochures and registration forms for the meeting will be online and mailed in early September.

## War Tax Boycott: Where Next?

At the May Coordinating Committee meeting in Birmingham, a good deal of time was spent in large and small group discussions over how the Boycott campaign worked during the last year; what worked, what didn't; and should there be a 2009 War Tax Boycott, and what would it look like?

Your impressions of the campaign will help us make this decision. Some comments from small group sessions included:

- Widen our "welcome mat" to include lower-income, prisoners, those with vow of poverty.
- Plan for a "redirection relay" after tax day, announcing the redirection in vari-

ous cities along a certain route to bring more attention to the redirection aspect.

- Continue regardless of political climate; consider how McCain or Obama would effect our outreach.
- Connect the campaign with "Reclaim the Commons" peace and ecology effort.
- Don't use the word "boycott"; emphasize redirection for human needs.
- Hire people to carry out the campaign.
- Meet with the cosponsoring groups and see if we can build on those partnerships.
- Start in fall with launching actions across the country.
- Continue the boycott with modifications.
- Outline specific strategy, goals, and objectives, so when we evaluate we

can look back and use that to judge our success.

- Some felt the redirection was not an important aspect; others felt it was the strongest part of the 2008 campaign.
- If we have 500 names, use that number strategically to raise the issues of WTR in the public eye.
- Do more ads in movement publications.
- Get more current war tax resisters to sign on; many people we know did not sign on, which would help build up the numbers and base.

Please contact the NWTRCC office with your comments about the 2008 War Tax Boycott and what you think should happen next: PO Box 150553, Brooklyn, NY 11215, [nwtrccc@nwtrcc.org](mailto:nwtrccc@nwtrcc.org) or 1-800-269-7464. ▼



New York City, April 15, 2008. Photo by Tom Good, Next Left Notes, [antiauthoritarian.net/NLN](http://antiauthoritarian.net/NLN).



# War Is A Racket

by Jay Sordean

**W**ar Is A Racket by Marine Corps Major General Smedley D. Butler (1881–1940) is a compact 51 pages outlining the costs and profits of wars. New introductory pages written by veterans bring the book, first published in 1935, up-to-date and offer us highly quotable material that is especially relevant today.

In Chapter 1, Butler states, “War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives. A racket is...something that is not what it seems to the majority of people. Only a small ‘inside’ group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes.”

Butler goes on to detail the profits made during various wars, ending with World War I, and notes that in the many Central and South American and Caribbean countries the U.S. military (and Butler himself) entered, the Marines stayed on as an occupying army, sometimes for decades. When they did go home, they left the countries in the hands of a friendly dictator armed to the teeth in American-made weapons and trained in methods to suppress the people. Behind the Marines came business interests, and then the Marines often came back in to protect these businessmen and put down labor strikes and rebellions.

Granted, a lot of people’s livelihoods, pensions, and investments are directly tied to military interventions and preemptive strikes. Perhaps this accounts for the widespread apathy or even frank support for war in this country. On the other hand, Maj. General Smedley Butler’s three-prong approach to ending the war racket might just be the elixir that antiwar activists seek.

He suggests that one month before going to war, give everyone in the country — bankers, CEOs, politicians, workers — the



New York City, April 15, 2008. Photo by Tom Good, Next Left Notes, [antiauthoritarian.net/NLN](http://antiauthoritarian.net/NLN).

option to work when the war begins, but making the same amount that the foot soldier is paid. The opportunity for war-profiteering is eliminated because everyone is paid the same.

Second, a limited plebiscite would be formed to determine whether war should be declared. The plebiscite would be composed not of the politicians or the heads of the military-industrial-finance complex, but rather of those who would be called upon to do the fighting and the dying.

According to Butler, the third step in this business of smashing the war racket is to

make certain that the military forces are forces of defense only.

If nothing else, this military man who came to view his military interventionist service as something to speak out against in his later years, reminds readers that you don’t have to support war and military intervention to be a patriot, whether veteran or not. ▼

Jay Sordean is active with Northern California War Tax Resistance. War is a Racket can be read online or purchased from Feral House in Port Townsend, WA, (323)-666-3311 or see [feralhouse.com](http://feralhouse.com).

## Save the Dates!

The 23rd Annual New England Regional Gathering of War Tax Resisters and Supporters will be held on November 14–16, 2008, at The New School in Kennebunk, Maine.

The theme of the Gathering is “Telling Our Stories.” Invited to attend are all new and experienced war tax resisters and those who are simply exploring WTR. Cost is \$5–\$50 (You decide how much). This includes food and housing.

For information, registration, and brochure please contact:

Stephen Soucy, PO Box 5510, Ellsworth, ME 04605, [sjsoucy@gmail.com](mailto:sjsoucy@gmail.com).

Questions? Contact Larry Dansinger at (207) 525-7776.

# Heaven and Earth

by A. Jesse Jiryu Davis

In the summer of 2006, I officially became a Zen Buddhist and promised to uphold the Buddhist precepts. It seemed to me that the gravest of them was Non-Killing, and that the most violent thing I did was to pay my federal income tax. That summer Israel was dropping American-made bombs on Lebanon, while US soldiers killed Iraqis and Afghans. A portion of each of my paychecks helped cover the costs. So I resolved to stop paying my taxes. I revised my W-4, claiming enough allowances that my withholding dropped to zero. When it came time to file my taxes, I filed normally, reporting to the IRS that I owed thousands of dollars, and I included a letter explaining that my religious principles prevented me from paying my taxes. I gave the money to the New York City People's Life Fund.

I wonder what impression I made on the IRS clerk who read my letter. How did he or she imagine me, a "Zen Buddhist"? As a robed ascetic in a cave, with an inexplicably high salary?

In the last two years, I've tried to prevent the IRS from collecting. I've had to change many aspects of my life. I quit my full-time job as a software engineer and became a private contractor, hoping that would hinder them. Freelancing has provided many opportunities to practice the precept of Right Livelihood: I have fun checking into a company's business a little bit before I take an assignment. Some are downright immoral, like one firm that identifies influential doctors so drug companies can target them with marketing campaigns and "incentives." Other companies do little harm, but add nothing to the world, which seems wasteful to me — I put most advertising firms in this category. Sometimes my choices are virtuous, sometimes I have to compromise.

Many people have told me that I won't make a difference, and eventually the IRS will collect everything I owe plus interest. I think this is probably true, but practicing the precepts isn't about success or failure for me. I'll try to practice them even though I can't change the headlines, even though there's no end to war. It's frustrating to work so hard without hope of success, but I think acting morally is my only shot at having a fulfilling life.

I regularly attend war tax resistance meetings held by counselors with NWTRCC. The meetings are chaired by Ed Hedemann, who's battled the IRS for decades. At one meeting a young man who was considering whether to pay his taxes this year asked Ed what legal tactics might protect a war tax resister. He asked what works. "Nothing works," Ed replied.

I was moved. Several facts became apparent to me simultaneously. First, that Ed had worked year after year toward an ideal that will not be realized in our lifetimes, that probably will never be realized, and that he was committed to trying, regardless of his chances. Second, that there was no turning back for any of us. And finally, that it didn't matter whether we had any chance of success: ethics don't depend on feasibility.

I think the greatest danger to me is not that I'll be punished by the government, but that I'll forget my intention. It's easy to get caught up in the game of resistance, finding ways to prevent the IRS from collecting what I owe, and it's easy to make an enemy of the IRS, the government, George Bush. I can imagine that I'm some kind of hero. But if I allow myself



to do that, I'll undermine my own project. In the name of peace, I'll have started my own private war.

Instead, I have to keep in mind that the reason I decided not to pay my federal taxes in the first place was because I refuse, as a Buddhist, to use violence to achieve my goals. As soon as I make enemies of those with whom I disagree, as soon as I take pleasure in winning a conflict, I've already lost. As Zen Master Seng Tsan said, "A hair's breadth difference, and heaven and earth are set apart." ▼

A version of this article first appeared in the Dec '07/Jan '08 *Village Zendo Journal*, [villagezendo.org](http://villagezendo.org)



**NWTRCC**  
P.O. Box 150553  
Brooklyn, NY 11215  
(800) 269-7464  
(718) 768-3420

**PLEASE NOTE:**

If there is a red circle around your address label, this is the last issue of *More Than a Paycheck* on your subscription. Send in a renewal ASAP!