

2013 Report on Conscience Canada Annual General Meeting, held April 6 at 2 pm at Danforth Mennonite Church, 2174 Danforth Avenue, Toronto

Fourteen members attended this year's Conscience Canada (CC) AGM with 12 additional proxies. Mary Groh, President of the board, presided over the meeting. Persons willing to remain as board members and who were accepted by the meeting were: Dave Bechtel of Kitchener ON, Mary Groh of Toronto ON, Anna Kirkpatrick of Nelson BC, Murray Lumley of Toronto ON, Jan Slakov of Salt Spring Island BC, Dwyer Sullivan of Kitchener ON, Eric Unger of Winnipeg MB and Don Woodside of Dundas ON. Treasurer Dave Bechtel distributed the 2012 Financial statements and the auditors were appointed for 2013. Don Woodside gave a report on the progress of his work on new government requirements for the Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act which governs Conscience Canada. Former board member Jonathan Seiling made an announcement which involved inviting CC to join a campaign to counter World War I propaganda that the Canadian government will soon roll out as part of celebrations of the 100th anniversary of WWI.

At 3:45 pm - Din Jalonen of the musical group 'The Soles' presented songs of spirituality and peace, including an original anti-war piece called 'F-35', referring to the disastrous near purchase of a \$multi-billion war plane by the present Canadian Conservative government.

At 4:00 pm the group was invited to partake of refreshments which included a cake in celebration of CC's 30th anniversary of incorporation in B.C. In 1983 and the 10th anniversary of CC's reconstitution in Ontario in 2003.

At 4:10 pm - **Chris Sabas**, a U.S. Attorney and full-time member of Christian Peacemaker Teams' Aboriginal Justice Team based in Toronto, gave a talk with slides on the anti-Drone campaign at Hancock Airbase, near Syracuse, NY. She talked about what drones are and the fact that actual US citizens have been deliberately targeted and killed by these drones along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border - in particular, a father and son.

What follows are some of the facts presented:

Drones in Canada so far are small inexpensive surveillance aircraft.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 8, says that "Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure", so how do the use of Drones affect these rights? Canada wants Drones for border surveillance, shoreline surveillance and for earthquake search and rescue. Drones have been use in Afghanistan too.

The Drone program may be on hold, but there has been leaked an expressed desire to deploy drones by the Canadian Defence Department claiming that Canada has too much 'geography'.

U.S. Senator Rand Paul recently conducted a 13-hour filibuster against the use of Drones authorized by President Obama. There is no transparency regarding the use of Drones. There have been strikes on human targets in many countries in the Middle east & North Africa.

The Pentagon, CIA and the Whitehouse overlap in their use of Drones and there may be little co-ordination between these institutions regarding the deployment of Drones. There is a known Drone base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

During just ten days in January, 2013 there were 7 strikes recorded.

'Terror Tuesday' is now the name given to Tuesdays when President Obama is provided with a list of potential Drone strikes that day - a choice of deaths that he can choose from. The CIA also doesn't need approval from any oversight body in its use of Drones

There is 'Overlap of terror' strikes. The killing of people whose names are not even known is called a signature strike.

Drones are being used to affect the outcome of political coups and civil wars - keeping repressive regimes in power.

We don't know how many civilians have been killed.

The U.S. says it is trying to mitigate civilian casualties but we don't know how.

Why doesn't the U.S. try to capture suspected terrorists and put them on trial (instead of assassinating them by stealth with no due process of law)? One reason is that there is a so-called 'imminent threat' to the U.S.?

It is claimed that the U.S. has the right to self defence. Realities of combat include not putting U.S. troops in harm's way while U.S. citizens are being targeted.

There are some concerns with backlash to the use of Drones according to U.S. Stanley A. McChrystal. He has said that the use of Drones does cause extreme resentment among targeted people as well as people far away from where the Drones are actually used.

Drones are used to secure borders, for drug enforcement and are used well beyond U.S. borders (the excuse being that the U.S. must 'extend its borders' to prevent attacks on the Homeland). All kinds of security reasons are given?

Hancock airbase near Syracuse N.Y. Is a National Guard base but operator staff at Hancock are flying Drones by remote control along the Pakistan/Afghanistan border.

Stress is now showing up in the operators. There are security problems with Drones - their computer software guidance systems have already been 'hacked' with Drone software being found on Iraqi computers.

There is a high potential for margin of error - innocents are killed due to quick decisions that are often required of the operators.

There is planned event called 'Resist Syracuse' for the weekend of April 26-28 .

A public event known as the 'Hancock 38 Action' during Holy Week, 2011 consisted of a walk from Ithaca to Syracuse, N.Y. The group has been back 12 times since - facing lighter state law consequences so far, rather than the more serious federal law.

Former U.S. Attorney General (under President Lyndon Johnson) Ramsey Clark was there for the trial as an expert witness. Participants carried out a 'Die- in' at the rally and Anti-war activist Kathy Kelly and a Demoine, Iowa activist were also present.

Mary thanked Chris for her very informative and disturbing talk and there were a few questions and comments.

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 pm

Board report for Conscience Canada for 2012

The year 2012 has been one of administrative changes for Conscience Canada. Our treasurer Benno Barg retired after four years of diligent work, and was succeeded by Dave Bechtel who had been keeping the books for several years. Dave found for us a new excellent but somewhat less expensive auditor, and the board feels fortunate in how the financial management continues in good hands.

Also our webmaster Bryan Eelhart resigned from the board, though he continued to volunteer his considerable expertise and mentoring. The data base was up for adoption after Benno retired, has been well fostered by board member Anna Kirkpatrick, and we hope now has a long term manager, Todd Lumley.

Our mailing address and phone number, in place since the organization came to Toronto in 2003, also had to be changed when Bruna Nota, former president, moved. Dave Bechtel agreed to use his home address in Kitchener, and Jan Slakov, long time board member and experienced in networking, became the telephone resource person. The printing and mailing of the newsletter moved from Kitchener to Scarborough in September, and the president has found this a light relief from more cerebral tasks. But with so many changes it has been challenging to keep all the gears running without hitches and glitches. Secretary Murray Lumley has put some work into drawing up a chart of who does what in the organization, and we hope the flow of responsibilities and information will soon reach a comfort zone.

Two new board members were added: Eric Unger of Winnipeg brings valuable writing skills; Dwyer Sullivan of Kitchener used his connections with the Basilians in Colombia to locate a person to represent us at the Conscience and Peace Tax International conference in Bogota in February 2013. Both of these men are committed and experienced peace activists.

Don Woodside took on the tedious work of preparing our Articles and Bylaws for the transition to the new Federal Rules of Incorporation which have to be completed in 2014. We owe a dept of gratitude to Don for this and for his on-going contributions of wisdom and experience to Conscience Canada. The five Ontario board members had the privilege of meeting in his Hamilton home in November. In addition to that meeting and the March meeting on the morning of the AGM (when Anna from Nelson, BC joined us) we held telephone conference calls in January, March and June.

The speaker at our 2012 AGM, held at Toronto Friends House, was Jonathan Seiling, a former board member and a historian, who researched the role of conscientious objectors in the war of 1812-14, especially those from the historic peace churches in the Niagara Peninsula who were close to the military action. Conscience Canada has been involved in this Bicentennial commemoration.

Board members participated again in Hiroshima Day commemorations, the Canadian (Department of) Peace Initiative forum, and other peace-related events.

Two newsletters were again produced by our competent and unflagging editor, Jan Slakov. This goes out to 300 people by post and about twice that number by e-mail. Promotional ads and articles were placed in a number of magazines and on-line publications leading up to tax time. Murray's contact with Ceasefire.ca provided their 20,000 members with a link to Conscience Canada, which resulted in 1,000 hits to our website and boosted the Peace Tax Returns to 153 Option A responses. This is still a small number across Canada, and the number who actually sent money in to our Trust Fund can only be reckoned in dozens. The board would be grateful for suggestions of ways to make the peace tax issue more compelling to peace-minded people across the country. Even with all the efforts described above the company of peace trusters is shrinking.

As we look back 30 years to the incorporation of Conscience Canada in Victoria, BC, and 10 years back to its headquartering in Toronto, we wish that we had achieved a stronger voice by 2013. We must keep casting out our nets with vigour and conviction, knowing that our work for peace and freedom of conscience is needed more than ever in Canada.

Mary Groh, president,
For Conscience Canada Board:
Dave Bechtel
Anna Kirkpatrick
Murray Lumley
Jan Slakov
Dwyer Sullivan
Eric Unger
Don Woodside