

2015 Report on Conscience Canada Annual General Meeting, held March 28 at 2 pm at Friends House, 60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, Ontario

Nine members and two guests attended this year's Conscience Canada (CC) AGM with 17 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 2014 Financial statements and the auditors were appointed for 2015. Don Woodside led a discussion on the future of Conscience Canada. It was generally felt that Conscience Canada should continue and perhaps should focus even more broadly, not just on war tax resistance but on the Canadian economy and culture generally, which, like all Western economies, seems to require endless war. But we should not allow the dilution of Conscience Canada's essential message of Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation.

'Non-business' part of the meeting: -

Richard Preston, Professor Emeritus, McMaster University and of The Canadian Peace Initiative:

Don introduced Dick Preston as having worked with a James Bay Cree community for 50 years beside being a professor of Anthropology. Dick is also working with the Department of Peace Initiative in Hamilton. Dick presented slides and made remarks.

Some of his comments follow:

The 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) idea, which Canada helped develop was a study project of Hamilton Friends Meeting of which Dick was a part. U.S. President George W. Bush used R2P wrongly. Hamilton Friends Meeting then changed their project to a study of what a Department of Peace could look like. There is now a Hamilton chapter. Rabbi Baskin of Hamilton said that people have been coming together for a long time to work for peace but we have little to show for it. Former U.S. Representative Dennis Kucinich's bill to form a Peace Department for the U.S. government with 72 sponsors was adapted to Canada in 2003. This idea goes back to early U.S. history. There are some successes. Some points from the slide show: Our economy is very much a war economy. The peace movement presently has no voice in Cabinet. General Hillier & Prime Minister Paul Martin led Canada into Afghanistan to please the U.S. A Department of Peace would have a Peace Minister in the Cabinet to offset the Department Of War. Various aspects - Peace Education, Human & Education rights, non-violence training. Michael Ignatieff when he was Federal Liberal leader was spoken to by the Canadian Peace Initiative and preferred the name Violence Reduction; he didn't like to use the 'Peace' word. There could be a Minister of Peace and a well resourced Department of Peace. This idea receives its strongest support from the Liberal Party. It is envisioned as a Civilian Peace Service which is professional with trained men and women working for the prevention of violent conflict and war, and the non-violent resolution of conflict at every level of society, both within Canada & overseas.

Non-violent intervention; protection of human rights, humanitarian and development assistance, citizen diplomacy are some of the points.

Constituency building has been taking place with thirteen Peace Initiative chapters in Canada, with Francophone, 1st Nations, Metis, Inuit, Women, Youth and New Canadians. There are Ministries of Peace in Costa Rica, Nepal, and the Solomon Islands.

Conscience Canada Report for 2014

During 2014 the recorded history of Conscience Canada's 30 years plus of operations was collected and deposited in the new archives facility at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo. Now any peace activists or historians (or the CRA) can get a first-hand look at our origins and activities from minutes, publications, official documents including the several parliamentary Conscientious Objection Acts, newspaper clippings, photos, audio-visuals and correspondence with the Canadian Government offices and with peace tax activists in other countries. We hope that these archives will be of interest to students in Peace and Conflict studies at Waterloo and elsewhere.

Besides collecting the past of the organization the board rallied around the immediate future by completing the requirements issued by the government's Not-for-Profit Corporations Act. Our by-laws were revised slightly and presented to the 2014 AGM where they were accepted, and the entire Articles of Continuance and By-

laws were submitted to Industry Canada and their receipt acknowledged. Thanks to the board members who assisted in this heavy duty, and especially to Don Woodside who bore most of the weight over the previous two years.

Our Bill saw no action in the House of Commons during 2014. MP Alex Atamanenko who had sponsored it has now retired, so a new sponsor will need to be found. The newsletter, which has now reached its 108th edition, continued its bi-annual publication under the long-time expertise and dedication of editor Jan Slakov. Since so many of our 1,118 members are content to receive it by e-mail the work and expense of mailing it out has been hugely reduced. The expertise of our webmaster Todd Lumley over our data base has made the job even easier.

In another attempt to strengthen our support base we advertised again on Ceasfire.ca during tax season. It attracted a little fresh interest and raised the number of people who sent by e-mail to the government their protest against military taxes. However, that in addition to the usual ads and articles in magazines with a peace-minded readership yielded only a few new peace tax depositors in 2014. The concern over Canada's military activity is not translating into concrete action to stop funding it. Is it because war, though ongoing, is ever more remote from the lives of Canadian families? Whatever the explanation, the participation in peace tax trusting continues to decline towards the vanishing point. The following breakdown illustrates this all too clearly. The peak of interest was during the first Gulf War, when there were around 200 peace trusters across Canada, but that declined to:

2008	- 73
2009	- 49
2010	- 32
2011	- 38
2012	- 31
2013	- 18
2014	- 23

CC board members have been facing the question whether the number of COMT's will ever become significant enough to influence the government to change the tax laws to accommodate them. Should we rather devote our considerable experience, dedication and effort into working for peace beyond the narrow focus of tax withholding? Is there a solid peace organization that would be willing to administer a trust fund for those few who really appreciate this service? These questions have occupied the board during 2014 and it is hoped some clarity will come as we invite our membership into considering the same questions. Perhaps there are some members who will volunteer to try some fresh approaches to growth which we have not discovered. If so, please do step forward.

-Mary Groh for Conscience Canada Board of Directors