

## **Report on the Conscience Canada Annual General Meeting, held at Danforth Mennonite Church, 2174 Danforth Avenue, Toronto, ON, Saturday, April 1, 2017**

Seven members attended this year's Conscience Canada (CC) AGM with 10 additional proxies received. 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 Kitchener ON, Murray Lumley of Toronto ON, Jan Slakov of Salt Spring Island BC, Dwyer Sullivan of Kitchener ON, Eric Unger of Winnipeg MB. Kelly Krauter of Montreal, PQ and Peter Tiessen of Winnipeg, MB resigned from the board. They were thanked for their service to Conscience Canada. Doug Hewitt-White of Almonte, ON and Charlie Diamond of Toronto were elected as new members of the board. Doug Hewitt-White has agreed to act as President of Conscience Canada with Mary Groh acting as Past-President. Treasurer Dave Bechtel distributed the 2016 financial statements and the auditors were appointed for 2017.

### **'Non-business' part of the meeting: -**

At 3:30 pm actor Ben Wert presented Monologues from 'Theatre of the Beat's' play, "Yellow Bellies", about World War II Conscientious Objectors followed by a vigorous discussion, comparing the nature of conscientious objection then with today where the objection is to military taxation.

### **Conscience Canada Board Report for 2016**

The board's efforts were enhanced this year by the work of two paid interns, Kelly Krauter and Emily Mininger. In preparation for a significant push in promotion they cleaned up the mailing list.

Emily created an infographic showing how Canadian tax money could be spent for the benefit of people in need rather than for the destruction of people and habitat. This was translated into French and used on the front of our English and French Peace Tax Return as a change from the old picture of a dove perched on a cannon. These PTR's were sent out with a press kit to numerous media contacts. One result was an interview on Windsor radio station with Jan Slakov and Dominique Boisvert. Artistes pour la paix put our PTR on their website. Echeq a la guerre, a coalition of peace organizations in the Province of Quebec, did also and invited Kelly to make a presentation to their organizing committee.

Kelly also created a Facebook Events page which was used in advertising last year's presentation by Dr. Abuelaish after our AGM on April 9. That event, advertised on social media and local newspapers and posters in public places and church bulletins in the east end of Toronto, resulted in a packed house at Danforth Mennonite Church and contributed about \$2,000 to his Daughters for Life Foundation.

At the conclusion of her internship, Kelly agreed to serve on the board, taking the responsibility of recording secretary from Murray Lumley for the ensuing year. She and two other Quebec members made a CC presentation at the World Social Forum in Montreal in August.

The Canadian School of Peace-building at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg for the second summer included Conscience Canada in its programming; and board member Eric Unger did his best to promote tax re-direction to the students from across Canada and around the world.

This year the statistical information on our DVD was updated by Don Woodside and his nephew David; the music issue was dropped and the video re-instated on our website. Our web master Todd Lumley continues to respond promptly and capably to all our requests. Jan Slakov continues to publish two informative newsletters every year received by 125 people by post and many more on line.

Conscience Canada signed on to the Voices-voix declaration for dissent and democracy, and to Echeq a la guerre's article published in Quebec on the International Day of Peace. Conscience Canada also submitted a brief to the Parliamentary Consultations on Defence Policy on July 31, 2016. It is posted on our website under "Resources".

No MP was found to take our CO bill to parliament. Perhaps too little serious effort was put into the search. Board members are hesitant to ask for support from parliamentarians when so little desire from Canadians for this legislation can be documented. Our 2016 contributors to the Peace Tax Trust Fund, in spite of all our efforts, numbered only 22. There are a total of 157 people with money in the fund.

Our search for a sympathetic MP gave way to a search for people ready to keep Conscience Canada going as a not-for-profit organization. How can we pursue the goal of legalizing the refusal to support the military with our taxes, which is in our mandate? Until our MP's can feel more pressure from the Canadian public for a CO tax bill there is little hope that legislation will happen.

Other groups are lobbying the government to give priority to the planet's peace, environmental health, and human rights and well being instead of to the production of military hardware, and procurement and training for "defence" and "security". We could join with such an organization to make a greater impact; but this would likely mean people who want to keep their earnings out of the coffers of the military establishment would be on their own, without the support of a 40-year-old organization. Maintaining our unique brand or closing it down is becoming a perennial issue for the board and one which must be solved definitively very soon.

The board should be commended for continuing their efforts in spite of so little acceptance. Even though we are geographically remote from each other we feel "the fellowship of kindred minds" committed to a good cause. This keeps us going.

Mary Groh, for Conscience Canada Board of Directors  
for Conscience Canada Board of Directors