

Work For Peace... Stop Paying For War

Conscience Canada

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Conscience Canada (CC) Report for 2014

BY CC PRESIDENT MARY GROH

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 Slavkov. 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

continued on page 2

C O N T E N T S

CC report- 2014 **pp.1 & 2**
2015 AGM report **p.3**
Election dialogue **pp.3 & 4**
Letter Excerpts **pp.4-5**
Conscientious
Objection & ISIS **pp.5 & 6**
News Notes **p.6**
Membership form **p.6**



Getting Out the Vote, see News Notes p.6



CC board members and guest speaker, Richard Preston at Friends House, 2015

continued from page 1

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 in 2014 that number had declined to 23. However, well over one hundred people send in PTRs (peace tax returns) and

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letters to their MPs expressing the desire for the establishment of a legal Peace Tax Fund each year.

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 in-

vite 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

"I've always maintained that we should keep our Department of National Defence but it should be National Department of Environmental Defence. Our soldiers should be battling pollution and fires and replanting trees, restoring the Earth. Right now they are at war with the planet."

- David Suzuki

A B O U T

This newsletter is produced by Conscience Canada, a non-governmental organization which has worked since 1978 to:

- increase Canadians' awareness of the connection between taxes and war
- divert taxes away from war
- support creative nonviolent conflict prevention and resolution
- promote conscientious objection legislation

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of Conscience Canada.

An electronic version of this newsletter is available at www.Conscience-Canada.ca. Please let us know your preference.

B O A R D

Dave Bechtel, Mary Groh, Anna Kirkpatrick, Murray Lumley, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan, Eric Unger, Don Woodside

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.

Guest Speaker Richard Preston is Professor Emeritus at McMaster University & active with the Canadian Peace Initiative (CPI).

He described how the Hamilton chapter of the CPI grew out of a project in the Hamilton Quaker (Friends) meeting. (It's interesting to note that CC got its start through a Quaker group too.)

Establishing a Department of Peace would ensure there was someone in each federal cabinet whose job was to promote peace and jus-

tice through government policies and programmes. Given that our economy is a war economy (dependent on and contributing to war and militarism) promoting peace will require systemic change. With a fully functioning Dept. of Peace Canada could start to phase out its military and build up its capacity to resolve conflicts nonviolently at all levels in Canada and around the world. It would include the creation of a Civilian Peace Service with professionally trained people working to prevent and stop violent conflict and war.

The CPI has been working on constituency building with francophone, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, women, youth and new Canadians. Ministries of peace have already been established in some nations including Costa Rica and Nepal.

Election dialogue regarding war & militarism

This long election campaign offers citizens the opportunity to ask questions of their candidates. We'd like to know what you find out, so send in your question and any replies you get to: janslavkov@shaw.ca. We hope to post some examples on our website.

Below are 3 sample questions:

1) Question on alternatives to militarism & war:

I am concerned that our main political parties seem to be tripping over themselves to show their eagerness

to spend on militarism and war. It is as if we, as a people, have lost the ability to imagine a useful response to violence and our fear of violence. We seem to assume the only logical response is more violence. And yet, when we look at the consequences of militarism we have been involved in to some degree or another, such as the war in Afghanistan, the 2003 war against Iraq and the bombing of Libya, we see tragedy, destabilization and seeds of ever worsening levels of violence and terror.

I believe we need to improve and

expand our toolbox for addressing violence and threats. Our actions need to be grounded in respect for each and every human being, especially that part of each one of us which is receptive to honesty, dialogue and concern for others. Establishing a Department of Peace, which would help Canada develop the kind of "toolbox" I am speaking of, is important. Would you support the establishment of a Dept. of Peace and if so, please describe at

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

least one function you would like it to be able to take on.

2) Which aspects of the previous government's policy regarding militarism and defence policy would you most like to change?

3) Do you agree with John F. Kennedy when he said, "War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today." and would you support the establishment of alternative service for conscientious objectors to military taxation? Conscience Canada has worked with several parliamentarians over the years to promote full recognition for conscientious objectors, so that we can ensure that our lives and resources do not contribute to war and militarism. Would you be interested in supporting the effort to ensure that conscientious objectors can direct the military portion of their taxes towards non-violent peace and justice building efforts?

Note: Learn more about Canada's history of offering alternative service for war taxes to conscientious objectors on our website.

From the home page, go to "about" and then click on "history"; or contact us for details.

You might also want to invite your local candidates to learn about and support the white poppy campaign. More info is available on our website and by contacting: janslakov@shaw.ca

Excerpts from letters to Finance Minister Joe Oliver

War is costly and destructive to people, nations, the environment, and our planet. War is an admission of mankind's unwillingness/inability to use non-violent methods of conflict prevention and resolution.

Florence Stemo, Alberta

Once again I write in support of a legal peace tax fund. It could be so easily implemented by your majority government. [...] Imagine, just imagine, if Canada's \$20 Billion military budget, or even a portion thereof, would be diverted for life giving relief, development, education and peace building purposes. Imagine, if instead of devoting Canadian human and material resources for the promotion, manufacture and sale of armaments, Canada would refuse to make and sell military equipment.

Can we imagine the friendship and respect we would gain in the international community if we would use our collective imagination and creativity in order to direct human and material resources towards life giving rather than death dealing enterprises?

Yes, this requires a major shift in our thinking in our domestic and foreign policy. It may seem impossible, but if the current path is not accomplishing real security and peace, we should be bold enough to take an alternative approach.

Why not begin by allowing for Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation, a legal Peace Tax Fund and a Department of Peace compris-

ing individuals, agencies and groups with an alternative vision? Does this government or a future government have the boldness and wisdom to allow, support and legalize an alternative path to peace? What have we got to lose? More importantly, how much might we gain?

Charlotte Wiens, Manitoba

Au nom de ma conscience, je ne ferai pas cette guerre. [contre l'État islamique] Je ne referai pas ici la longue réflexion éthique et géopolitique qui m'a conduit à cette conclusion ferme. Et comme, de nos jours, ce n'est pas de nos corps que vous avez besoin pour faire la guerre mais de notre argent, je ne paierai pas, cette année, un seul sou de mes impôts fédéraux. Et à l'exemple de l'écrivain et philosophe américain



Henry David Thoreau, quand les États-Unis ont déclaré la guerre au Mexique en 1846, je suis prêt à aller en prison plutôt que de contribuer, par mes impôts, à cette guerre que ma conscience considère comme immorale.

Le Canada a déjà reconnu l'objection de conscience à la participation à la guerre durant les grands conflits du 20e siècle. Mieux, il a déjà reconnu, pour les membres des Églises historiques de paix (Quakers, Mennonites, Brethren, Doukhobors) immigrant au Canada au 18e et au 19e siècles, une forme d'objection de conscience fiscale à partir de 1842 et durant les deux grandes

continued on page 5

Letters continued from page 5
guerres mondiales.

English translation:

In the name of my conscience, I will not participate in this war. [against ISIL] I won't go into the long ethical & geopolitical reflection which led me to this firm conclusion. And since, in this day and age, it is not our bodies that are needed for war, but our money, I will not pay any of my federal taxes. Like US philosopher and writer Henry David Thoreau, when the US declared war on Mexico in 1846, I am prepared to go to prison rather than pay my taxes towards this war which my conscience considers to be immoral.

Canada has, historically, recognized the right to conscientious objection during the major wars of the 20th century. Indeed, for members of the historical peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites, Doukhobors, etc.) who immigrated to Canada in the 18th and 19th centuries, a way to respect conscientious objection to war taxation was offered in 1842 and during the two World Wars.

Dominique Boisvert, Quebec

I also do not want to pay for the insane arms manufacturing and sales to all the militias operating in poor developing countries. We need to begin to realize that most

of the world's wars are happening because of the effects of climate change, with its drought, floods and other severe weather that are driving people to rebel against high food and fuel prices, which is what brought about the Arab Spring and the original Syrian revolt. We need to divert military spending to Earth Renewal spending, which also takes note of the huge loss of species due to our activities. It is also a fact that militaries are known as the worst polluters and energy wasters in the world. I am also pleading for my grandchildren, that they will not be dragged into a world of conflict.

Murray Lumley, Ontario

Conscientious Objection & ISIS

BY JAN SLAKOV

As a majority of Canadian MPs voted to expand Canadian participation in the war against ISIS, members of the board of Conscience Canada sent letters to a variety of papers across the country. The following version was published in the Waterloo Region Record on April 7, 2015:

Politics of inclusion

As a representative of Conscience Canada, I agree with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon when he says, "Over the longer-term, the biggest threat to terrorists is not the power of missiles, it is the politics of inclusion."

Of course we want to help the people being terrorized by the Islamic State and other terrorist groups. We wanted to help victims of the Taliban as well. In choosing war, we squander resources that could be put to much better use.

Indeed, when we attack enemies, we just add to the killing, and can't help but kill people who are not terrorists. Our attacks add to the feelings

of despair, fear and anger, the widespread perception of unbearable injustice, feelings and perceptions which throw fuel on the fire of terrorism.

The "politics of inclusion" is the opposite of injustice. It means communicating in ways that build trust and foster the rule of law. This is a much better way of promoting peace than using military attacks with ill-defined and unattainable goals. Conscience Canada says *IF you want peace, stop paying for war*. Please check out www.consciencecanada.ca during this tax season.

When we look at the results of our interventions in the Middle East, how could we possibly think it makes sense to continue with more of the same type of approach?

- Dwyer Sullivan, Kitchener

One reader responded, writing:

"May I suggest to Sullivan that he should consider heading up a delegation from his group Conscience Canada and make a trip to the Middle East and Africa.

While there, he should make an effort to meet with groups such as the Islamic State and Boko Haram to discuss his theory of the 'politics of inclusion.'"

This type of argument is pretty much beside the point – our point being that it would be much better to use our resources to work nonviolently for the changes we wish to see. One can also respond to this type of argument by pointing out that, for people on the receiving end of western violence, a similar argument could be made to justify their taking up arms. ISIS is not the only group to burn people alive; the South African police did that too. Would it have helped for us to have bombed South Africa? Not likely!

With so much attention focused on the violent acts of others, it is easy to lose sight of the violence Canadians have inflicted or are complicit in. In his article, "From Vietnam to ISIS: Canada needs to apologize", Matthew Behrens reminds us of how Canadian companies profit from war,

continued on page 6

News notes

On Aug. 31, 2015, one of Japan’s largest postwar demonstrations, with some 120,000 protesters gathering in front of the Diet building in Tokyo, took place. It was one of more than 200 rallies held across Japan to oppose the Abe administration’s contentious security legislation. Photos and links to media coverage can be found on the Global Article 9 Campaign’s Facebook page.

Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan’s government is on its

way to renouncing Article 9 of its constitution, which reads: “ARTICLE 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. (2) To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state

will not be recognized.”

The Global Article 9 movement seeks not only to protect Japan’s non-aggressive constitution but to spread the concept elsewhere. It is inspired by the 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace’s call that “every Parliament should adopt a resolution prohibiting their government from going to war, like the Japanese Article 9,” and by other similar initiatives.

Conscience Canada urges its members to sign the Change.org petition: “Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: Save Japan’s Peace Constitution”.

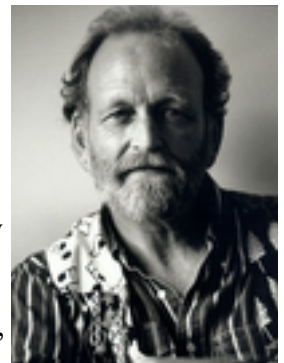
Sept. 21 – Sept. 26 – days for international peace activism

Sept. 21 is the International Day of Peace and Sept. 26 is the International Day for Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Find useful action ideas at Unfoldzero.org.

Getting Out the Vote

Valdy (Salt Spring based folk singer): “Bad governments are elected by good people who don’t vote.”

The Council of Canadians, First Nations groups, some political party offices and others are working to help ensure people can and do vote. Elizabeth May encourages everyone to find a “buddy” to go to vote with, maybe someone who might not have voted without your encouragement. You can vote at any returning office now or wait until advance voting days from Oct. 9 – 12, 2015. Find out more at elections.ca or contact your local campaign office.



Valdy

continued from page 5

of how Canada has participated in horrendous war crimes. Behrens encourages us to counter militarization by understanding “our true history, [accepting] it for what it is, make apologies, and make amends that are rooted not in empty rhetoric or charitable deeds, but in the restructuring of our society so that we no longer profit from the suffering of others.” As a step along this path, Homes

Not Bombs organized an action to raise awareness of Canada’s largest weapons trade show, CANSEC. This trade show markets “tools of terrorism, for their use is intended to make political points, to create fear, and to coerce governments and societies. **‘I will kill everything in sight, every single time,’** remarked one enthusiastic CANSEC exhibitor boasting about his bomber last year.”

Conscience Canada 
membership application / renewal

Membership is open to any person committed to supporting Conscience Canada’s objectives.

Address correction requested.

Name: _____ Dated _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

There is no membership fee but donations in support of CC operations would be greatly appreciated. Receipts will be issued for all donations. Persons completing this membership application will receive membership privileges for two years unless removal from our mailing list is requested.

Let us know if you would like to get involved in helping as a volunteer, or if you would like more (or fewer) copies of the newsletter, or if you would like other informational material.