



# Conscience Canada

Work for peace. Stop paying for war!  
Travaillons pour la paix. Cessons de payer pour la guerre !

515 Langs Drive, Unit J, Cambridge, ON N3H 5E4 — Tel. 250.537.5251  
info@consciencecanada.ca — www.consciencecanada.ca

Spring 2020

Number 118

ISSN 1196-9970

## Why be a pacifist?

Author Tim Gee in an interview with [Sarah Freeman-Woolpert](#) discusses the challenge and potential of pacifism in the 21st century.

This is an abridged version of an article originally published 2019-12-14 in [Waging Nonviolence](#)

Tim Gee has dedicated his life to peace activism and environmental organizing. In 2010, he was a member of a group dubbed the “Superglue 3,” having glued himself to the Royal Bank of Scotland protesting its investment in tar sands. More recently, he took part in London’s climate strikes and a sit-in that helped disrupt the world’s biggest arms fair. Gee’s third and recently published book, “Why I Am A Pacifist,” explores the personal experiences and philosophical arguments that led him to become a pacifist, and how this informs his activism today.

I spoke to Gee on Remembrance Day. We spoke about the role of faith in his pacifist approach to activism, and the linkages between war and climate change. Gee emphasized that a truly pacifist movement will require a nuanced approach to building a new society. From developing a pacifist economy to addressing structural injustice — bound up in racism, misogyny and xenophobia — Gee described the challenge and potential of pacifism in the 21st century.

*In “Why I Am A Pacifist,” you emphasize an important point: Pacifism is not passive. Do you find that people struggle with this concept and can’t imagine pacifism adequately dealing with tough issues, like fascism or the climate crisis?*

I thought long and hard about whether to use “pacifist” in the title of the book. It was when I looked up the origins of the word that I decided I

would. Pacifism literally means “peacemaking.” And although it has often been conflated with not doing something, the case I make in the book — building on lots of other people’s work — is that pacifism is a process of creating the conditions of peace. It is the presence of justice, not the absence of tension.

When I think about fascism, and what the core components are of the fascist point of view, these are ultimately the things pacifism tries to take away: toxic masculinity and the swaggering aggression that goes with it, strong pride in the military and obviously a deep racism. If we take an approach to pacifism that addresses racism and economic inequality, fascist ideas can’t thrive in that environment.



Furthermore, the climate crisis is deeply related to peace. The very power dynamics that have led to the current destruction of the planet are the same ones that lead to war. I became an environmentalist shortly after I became a pacifist,

after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began. I made the link between wars for oil and oil causing climate change, and have been almost a full-time activist ever since.

*Quakers have a long tradition of working for peace and justice. How has your Quaker faith shaped your pacifist beliefs?*

One of the images used for peace, the dove, is an image that arises out of Christianity. It can often be used as a representation of the presence of God. The idea that peace and the presence of God are the same is quite a powerful one. Beyond the rational arguments, this is the experienced truth for

# CONSCIENCE CANADA 2020 Annual General Meeting

Saturday April 18, 2020, 2:00 p.m., Danforth Mennonite Church, 2174 Danforth Ave, Toronto

## Agenda

1. Approval of the minutes of the 2019 AGM (available upon request)
2. Review of CC activities in 2019 and a look ahead (members' participation invited)
3. Confirmation of board members standing for re-election:
4. Election of new board member(s)
5. Presentation and Approval of the 2019 financial statements (available upon request)
6. Appointment of auditors for 2020

## BREAK

3:30 pm Film: A BOLD PEACE – Costa Rica's path of demilitarization (60mins)

**NOTE:** This constitutes the official annual meeting notice required by the Conscience Canada by-laws. Please let us know if you want to receive a PDF copy of the by-laws by email.

## If you cannot attend this year's AGM in person —

please send your proxy (see form below) for your vote

either **BY POST** to: 515 Langs Drive, Unit J, Cambridge, ON N3H 5E4

or **BY E-MAIL** to: info@consciencecanada.ca (please copy and complete form below)

### Proxy for Annual General Meeting April 18, 2020

I, (please print) \_\_\_\_\_, a member in good standing of Conscience Canada, do hereby appoint:

\_\_\_\_\_ (please print) as my proxyholder for the 2020 AGM of Conscience Canada.

*NOTE: Your proxyholder is not required to be a member of Conscience Canada.*

**OR**  I appoint the current Chair of the Board of Conscience Canada (D. Hewitt-White) as my proxyholder

This person identified above is to act on my behalf as my proxy and is to vote:

as they see fit on all matters identified in the Notice of Meeting and on any amendments to these matters or on any new matters arising

### OR

only in accordance with the following specific voting directions on matters identified in the AGM agenda:

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**This proxy has been completed and confirmed by me on:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **date**

\_\_\_\_\_ **signature** (if proxy sent by post, not required if sent by email)

many Quakers of what keeps them going in the context of an extremely violent society.

In some of the nonviolent discourse, and particularly among some advocates of strategic nonviolence, there's a hesitancy for an approach that allows space for the spirit. We need something inside us to keep us going. When I wrote my first book, I was reading Gandhi and King, and just focusing on their political strategy. It was only when re-reading [Gandhi and King] that I found it is very difficult to read these people in an entirely secular way. The spiritual struggle was every bit as much of it for them as the political struggle. So I'm not saying that nonviolence needs to be religious or spiritual, but I would like to make space for it because it can be an important part of social change.

*In your vision of a pacifist society, what is the interplay between direct action against militarism — like the London Arms Fair blockade — and the deeper structural work of addressing racism, sexism and economic injustice?*

The London Arms Fair is one of the world's largest arms fairs, and there are literally tanks on the streets, on the backs of lorries. There are human rights-abusing countries from around the world — Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Israel — who all came [to the Arms Fair] this year. I would also include countries like the United States, which is going to be using weapons bought there in its current policies. There are only two main gates to enter the Arms Fair, so I went there with Quakers and people of many faiths, and together we blocked one of the gates for most of a day.

We held two Quaker meetings for worship that were very moving. At one point, a constable interrupted us and said that anyone who didn't move was going to get arrested. For a lot of people, that prompted cultural memories of Quaker meetings in the early days being broken up by constables. Not one person moved until the scheduled end of the Quaker meeting.

But they still managed to get the other gate open, and even if we had closed both of the gates, we wouldn't have stopped war. It would have been a wonderful symbolic victory, but we wouldn't have stopped war. And I think that's one of the reasons why I wrote "Why I Am A Pacifist." It's because I want to make a distinction by saying that we can go protest outside the London Arms Fair every two years, but being a pacifist means identifying the injustices, the metaphorical traffic leading to war that we experience in our everyday lives, of

*I want to say that each of us has many opportunities each day to prevent the conditions that lead to war*

which I would include any policy or practice informed by racism, gender inequality or anything that perpetuates economic inequality.

By broadening out and saying the traffic to war exists in all our lives, I want to say that each of us has many opportunities each day to prevent the conditions that lead to war. That means campaigning against things like the flagship racist policy in the United Kingdom, which is every bit as important and integral to pacifism as is going to the Arms Fair and sitting in lorries loaded with tanks.

*What does a pacifist foreign policy look like to you? Are you ever challenged by those who equate pacifism with international isolationism?*

A pacifist foreign policy would naturally have to be internationalist and solidarist. I don't see any other way to do it. I support the idea of a uniformed service because I think there's a lot of ways the passion and skill currently used in the military could be used, as it is to some extent in clearing mine fields or rescuing people from the most extreme effects of climate change

that we're already facing. So I support a pacifist and internationalist foreign policy.

*We are seeing such a powerful shift in the momentum around climate justice work. What are some of the deep linkages between a movement to address the climate crisis and global militarism?*

The climate justice movement in the United Kingdom is bigger right now than it has ever been. Awareness of climate change, including in the



priority lists of issues by voters, has skyrocketed in the last year alone. The youth climate movement and school strikers are the most intersectional environmental movement I've ever encountered. So my experience with school strikers is that the arguments I make in the book about all of these issues needing to be linked is just obvious to them. It doesn't need explaining.

One of the slogans people have been chanting on the streets is "Cash for climate, not for war." It's an overwhelmingly nonviolent movement, and a



movement which understands that a more climate friendly world would be a more peaceful world, by not

pursuing so many wars for oil — not to mention the contribution of militaries to climate change directly. So I have a lot of hope for the youth climate movement. I think about my generation, the people who became politicized through the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, who are now beginning to enter politics and take some positions of responsibility. But young people today are even more passionate and determined, and they're not going to wait 15 years until they are put in positions of leadership. I think it's up to the rest of us to listen and follow.

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**Credits:**

Page 1: Peace demo in Katowice, Poland, 2019 authored by Silar

P.2: Peace & Love on wall in Nepal, 2018, [Gaurav Dhvaj Khadka](#),

P.3: rainbow peace flag at Pride Parade in Seattle, authored by Shenkonic

## Join Conscience Canada

*Membership is open to anyone supporting CC's objectives.*

*No membership fee (donations welcome!)*

Visit: [www.consciencecanada.ca/membership](http://www.consciencecanada.ca/membership)

Let us know if you can get involved as a volunteer. We need website and newsletter contributors and new members for the CC board.

Email : [info@consciencecanada.ca](mailto:info@consciencecanada.ca)

## A B O U T

This newsletter is produced by Conscience Canada, an NGO working since 1978 to:

- increase Canadians' awareness of the connection between taxes and war;
- divert taxes away from war and to peace work;
- support creative non-violent conflict prevention and resolution;
- press for military tax re-direction legislation in Canada.

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

This newsletter is available on-line at [www.consciencecanada.ca](http://www.consciencecanada.ca). If you are receiving a printed copy, please let us know if you would prefer the e-version (in colour, less expensive to produce!).

## B O A R D

Scott Albrecht, Dave Bechtel, Charlie Diamond, Mary Groh, Doug Hewitt-White, Murray Lumley, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan, Eric Unger

