



CONSCIENCE CANADA - 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

Held on Sunday, September 20, 2020, 3:30p.m.
Virtual Meeting by Zoom

Motions and Resolutions

5 Proxies were received (members in Good Standing)

Presentation of the Agenda:

1. Verification of quorum and Verification of Notice of Meeting
2. Approval of the Minutes of the 2019 AGM (copies available)
3. Approval of the Agenda for the present AGM
4. Board Annual Report on Conscience Canada's work during 2019 – Doug Hewitt-White; Participation & questions about past & future actions is invited
5. Change in CC Bylaw, Section 22
6. Confirmation of board members standing for re-election: Scott Albrecht, Dave Bechtel, Charlie Diamond, Mary Groh, Doug Hewitt-White, Murray Lumley, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan, Eric Unger
7. Presentation and Adoption of the 2019 financial statements (copies available)
8. Appointment of an Auditor for 2020 –
9. Other business and announcements
10. Guest speaker - Steven Staples - long time peace group organizer - ceasefire.ca and Rideau Institute
11. Adjournment

1. a. Verification of Quorum: (members present 20; by proxy 5) **Guests:** 1

25 members were in attendance in person or by proxy. The Quorum having been confirmed the business of Conscience Canada (CC) proceeded. The following are the motions and resolutions presented and approved by the membership. All supporting material was available at the meeting, is appended to the original of these minutes, and is available to all members on the CC website at <http://www.consciencecanada.ca/>

b. Verification of proper Notice of Meeting:

On August 27, 2020 the Notice of Meeting of the 2020 AGM was sent by email to all the members' addresses CC has on record as required by Conscience Canada's by-laws.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the 2019 AGM:

Moved by Doug Hewitt-White; Seconded by Jan Slakov

- Carried

3. Motion to approve the Agenda for the 2020 Conscience Canada AGM:

Moved by Mary Groh; Seconded by Murray Lumley

- Carried

4. Board Report for 2019 (see addendum at end of these minutes):

Doug Hewitt-White showed and presented the report on behalf of the CC Board. The report is appended to these minutes and is available upon request. It will be posted on the CC web site and published in the Spring 2021 CC Newsletter. Questions and answers followed. Doug spoke to the need to attract younger members and new younger board members.

Scott Albrecht asked a question - what do our young adult children have to say about 'conscience' and its broader meaning for Conscience Canada? Mary Groh wondered if Scott meant that we should change the name Conscience Canada. Abram Bergen commented that some students at Canadian Mennonite University are organizing around the

Palestinian issue. Ivan Unger commented on the 'defund the police' movement. Church members are aging as well. He doesn't see many options within his congregation for expanding war tax resistance. Abram said the two issues for young people are the anti-racism and the Indigenous issue. Joy Warner said that her own adult children are into anti-racism work. She said we are not as aware as we should be of extreme right wing groups entering into the police and military. Young people are concerned about the hate groups shown in the media. Also within the ads to join the military there is promotion of learning how to use deadly weapons.

Motion to receive the 2019 Board report:

Moved by Don Woodside; Seconded by Dave Bechtel

- Carried

5. Change to Conscience Canada Bylaw, Section 22 - the holding of meetings entirely by electronic means:

New text - "22. Members' Meeting Held Entirely by Electronic Means

By means of a vote the Board of Directors may decide from time to time to hold a meeting of members held entirely by telephonic, an electronic or other communication facility."

Motion to accept the change in Section 22 of the CC Bylaw

Moved by Dave Bechtel; Seconded by Ivan Unger

- Carried

6. a. Confirmation of board members standing for re-election:

The four officer positions required by our by-laws, and to be chosen from within the Board within two weeks of the AGM, are President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary; in addition there can be board members at large.

Standing for re-election are: Scott Albrecht, Dave Bechtel, Charlie Diamond, Mary Groh, Doug Hewitt-White, Murray Lumley, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan, Eric Unger

Board Members were elected by Acclamation by means of the clapping of hands which could be seen on our screens.

- Carried

b. Election of new board members can happen any time during 2020

7. Presentation & Approval of 2019 financial statements - emailed to registrants of the meeting: by Dave Bechtel

Motion to receive the 2019 Financial Statements;

Moved by Dave Bechtel; Seconded by Ivan Unger

- Carried

8. Appointment of an Auditor for CC for 2020:

Motion to appoint Edward M. Simon CA, Professional Corporation, Kitchener, Ontario as Auditor for CC for 2020.

Moved by Dave Bechtel; Seconded by Dwyer Sullivan

- Carried

9. Other business and announcements

Dwyer Sullivan recommended that some board members speak at Conrad Grebel College to recruit new younger CC members and board members.

10. 4:45 pm - Guest Presenter, Steven Staples - was introduced by Doug Hewitt-White as the initiator of ceasefire.ca the Rideau Institute and board member of many peace and environmental organizations including the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

In his speech, Steven pointed out that many of the organizations that Doug mentioned are going through the same survival and financial struggles as is Conscience Canada. He suggested that we (peace groups) work together more to 'help all boats rise'. Steven is part of the first generation of peace activists after WW2. He started his career in the 90's; he has worked with the Council of Canadians, as well as participating in the 'Battle of Seattle' WTO conference in 1999. After 9/11, he moved to Ottawa and worked with Tony Clarke of the Polaris Institute. He then started ceasefire.ca and helped set up the Rideau Institute. He said there is a generational shift going on now. There are new initiatives as older activists retire such as Maude Barlow. There is a new Foreign Policy Initiative organization for Canada led by Bianca Mugenyi; also Brent Patterson of Peace Brigades International. Organizing against the Arms

Bazaar in Ottawa known as CANSEC is reviving. Some younger members of this have been elected such as Joel Harden NDP MPP for Ottawa Centre. World Beyond War is now active in Canada. A new peace education organization, Peace Quest has started in Kingston. There is no end to the issues. Monday, September 21 there is a day of action against the Canadian Light Armoured Vehicles (LAV) sales to Saudi Arabia. Hiroshima Hibakusha (survivor) and Canadian, Setsuko Thurlow has won a Nobel prize for her work with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) on the anti-nuclear issue but our Prime Minister has declined to meet with her so the government can go on undeterred from its militarism, including not signing the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty. But military spending continues to rise. All the mainline political parties continue to support military spending; not sure about Green Party. This is a very 'difficult nut to crack'. We have not been able to influence the Canadian government in the way we want. Canada failed to win a seat on the UN Security Council (partially due to our lack-lustre peacekeeping efforts and sale of weapons to combatant countries. We have been unable to mobilize the public opinion which is actually on our side. There are successes - the land mines treaty; not joining the Iraq war; No to missile defence which was a significant success for the peace movement. We were better than Australia on this. The F-35 fighter jet has still not been able to be purchased by the federal government because of public opinion. Op Eds in print newspapers are no longer influencers of public opinion due to the decline of newspapers; now social media vehicles have much more clout. Politics has shifted; it is now a blood sport, with online trolls engaging in personal insults and threats to opinion makers. The Sun media encourages this. Journalists know that the trolls are out there which produces a chilling effect on their opinions. Fund raising is completely necessary to get our message out. There is a decline of donations to charities. Giving and amounts are going down and most organizations are struggling. Steven told a story - he spent 20 years in Ottawa, and from 2006 to 2015 with Ceasefire.ca and the Rideau Institute. Then he worked in labour, with unions. Then due to burnout he engaged in praxis or self examination but is now coming back. There are only a few hundred people who write and are on boards related to activism which is not very large. We need to push out beyond our own groups. "If you want to build bridges you have to go where the rivers are". Our outlook needs to shift. We need to find new messengers, meaning young people. There are gaps that we need to fill and we need to consolidate groups. with regard to financial investment - how are we going to fund the next phase of our movement? Bequests are growing in importance. How do we become more mainstream; how do we influence Ottawa?

Questions:

Jan Slakov asked a question about war tax resistance. Steven says that resistance to paying taxes means we are swimming against the leftist view that we pay taxes for social programs. He hasn't done work with religious groups where war tax resistance comes from. But looking at the use of taxes for ethical reasons, and not unethical (such as war) is an important thing to advertise as CC does with its poster on the CC website and Facebook page. Scott Albrecht asked about building bridges - "are we missing appealing to racialized people? Steven agreed that there is - systemic racism on boards he has been on. He asked, "how do we get better representation, how do we get past a lack of reflection that all of us are affected by white supremacy"? "We need to push past our comfort zones". Harriet Woodside asked, "where have there been mergers of peace groups"? Steven replied that it is a very short list - perhaps Peace Brigades International joining with another group, but not done very often. "Bigger is not necessarily better". "Coming from different perspectives is good. Peace Quest does not replicate any other groups - it is about peace education".

Maryze Azzaria commented that there was very little success with the Quebec version of CC, because people don't want the government going into their tax returns. We are more involved with refugees because of all the wars. Stephen commented on all the education work that CC has done - the infographic on website & facebook. What else can be done with the 9% spent on war?

Jan mentioned education about systemic racism, also systemic militarism.

Dwyer asked, "overall do you personally see a movement toward peace in Canada." Steven said yes! Defund the police is actually a 'conversion issue'. It is the same thing with the military - (we want to convert all that spending to something constructive). Wars are rooted in racism. The funding must be choked off to these (military) organizations. We were trained to do good stuff by older activists. Steven wants to do this for other people.

Ivan Unger commented that reinvesting in socially acceptable projects and refugees is available through making donations. Our taxes can be reduced significantly by making donations to charitable organizations.

Throughout 2019 Conscience Canada's three board teams continued to work in the priority areas.

Court Challenge Team: A letter was sent to the University of Manitoba Faculty of Law to enquire about support for a 'charter test case' but they replied that they are not practicing lawyers and don't do legal work. The team looked at conscientious objection by doctors, where they are using the courts and making a claim under charter rights against mandatory requirements to refer patients seeking medical assistance in dying to participating doctors. Other than conscientious objection to military taxation, this is the first instance that we are aware of where the charter's 'freedom of conscience' article has been used in pursuit of securing a person's right of conscientious objection. Brian Bird a PhD candidate and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Princeton University whose focus has been conscientious objection and charter rights wrote an article on CBC News about the right of physicians not to make referrals. When contacted by Scott Albrecht Mr. Bird said that since a conscientious objection to military taxation case has already gone to court and the Supreme Court has declined to hear an appeal to the verdict, then in his opinion, in the absence of significantly different facts or shifts in attitude of Canadian society, it is unlikely that the court would revisit the issue. Secondly, with respect to constitutionality, all conscientious objectors to military service occurred prior to when the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into being. Permitting conscientious objection during earlier wars was a political decision rather than a legal one, and therefore it did not create a legal precedent that could be followed by the courts. Mr. Bird was not hopeful of there being a legal path forward. This is one opinion. The team needs to seek out others.

Legislation and Lobbying Team: After Elizabeth May's stimulating talk at CC's AGM in Ottawa in April, Jan Slakov got in touch with her and asked if she was willing to sponsor a private member's bill similar to Bill 303 (2011) on conscientious objection to the use of taxes for military purposes. Ms May said if returned to Parliament she would be willing to take this on and would want to consult with us to help find co-sponsors from other parties etc. (Note: COVID-19 has delayed any possible re-introduction of this legislation for now.)

Fundraising and PTR Promotion Team: An appeal for donations was written and appeared in the Fall 2019 edition of the CC newsletter. This may have contributed to a small uptick in donations at the end of 2019. To try to get more people using our Peace Tax Return Dwyer Sullivan worked on organizing an information session at a local church and with the help of Dave Bechtel got an on-site computer available for people to complete a PTR. Organizing more similar sessions will have to wait for the abeyance of COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings, distancing etc.

A final comment: What does the future hold for CC? As with everything COVID has had a very large impact. However our key mission is to get Canadians to tell their government they do not agree with paying for war and the military by using our Peace Tax Return to make their declaration of conscientious objection. Using the PTR is not impacted at all by masks, social distancing etc. We just must find ways to effectively get our message out.

Doug Hewitt-White
for the Conscience Canada Board of Directors