



## CONSCIENCE CANADA - 2021 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

Held on Saturday, May 1, 2021, 3:30 p.m.  
Zoom Online Meeting

Conscience  
Canada

### Motions and Resolutions

12 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 2020 AGM (copies available on request)
3. Approval of this Agenda for the present AGM
4. Presentation and Adoption of the 2020 financial statements (share on screen) – Dave Bechtel
5. Appointment of Auditor for 2021
6. Board Annual Report on Conscience Canada's work during 2020 - Doug Hewitt-White
7. Open Discussion & questions about future of Conscience Canada
8. Confirmation of board members standing for re-election: Scott Albrecht, Dave Bechtel, Charlie Diamond, Mary Groh, Doug Hewitt-White, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan
9. Other business and announcements
10. Adjournment

Land Acknowledgement - Jan Slakov

#### **1. Verification of Quorum:** (members present 26 ; by proxy 12 ) Guests: 2

- a) 38 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 March 28, 2021 the Notice of Meeting of the 2021 AGM was sent by email to all the members' addresses CC has on record as required by Conscience Canada's by-laws. The Notice of Meeting was also printed in the CC Spring 2021 Newsletter. The CC Spring 2021 Newsletter with Notice of Meeting was posted to the CC website by March 28, 2021.

#### **2. Approval of the Minutes of the 2020 AGM:**

Moved by Murray Lumley; Seconded by Mary Groh 38 - 0 - Carried

#### **3. Approval of the Agenda for the 2021 Conscience Canada AGM:**

Moved by Murray Lumley; Seconded by Mary Groh 38 - 0 - Carried

#### **4. Presentation & Approval of 2020 financial statements (copies available):** by Dave Bechtel.

#### **Motion to approve the 2020 Financial Statements;**

Moved by Dave Bechtel; Seconded by Dwyer Sullivan 38 - 0 - Carried

## 5. Appointment of an Auditor for CC for 2021:

**Motion to appoint Edward M. Simon CA, Professional Corporation, Kitchener, Ontario as Auditor for CC for 2021.**

Moved by Dave Bechtel;

Seconded by Dwyer Sullivan

38 - 0 - Carried

## 6. Board Report for 2020:

Doug Hewitt-White 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 fall 2021 CC newsletter. Questions and answers followed.

### Motion to receive the 2020 Board report:

Moved by Doug Hewitt-White ; Seconded by Murray Lumley Unanimous vote - Carried

## 7. Open Discussion and questions about the future of Conscience Canada - led by Doug Hewitt-White

Doug mentioned Bruna Nota as the rescuer of Conscience Canada when the board in BC closed CC down around the year 2000.

Bruna said she was far from being alone in this; she mentioned Dominique Boisvert, Jan Slakov and Don Woodside who also helped to revive Conscience Canada when it was closed down in BC.

Guest Elizabeth Curry said she would volunteer her time but suggested extending the CC mandate to defunding the police. Jan replied and offered to connect with Elizabeth by email.

Scott Albrecht said he thought this was beyond our mandate; Doug said it was outside the government tax connection.

David Ramsay thanked everyone who has kept CC moving. He remembered Edith Adams, one of the Victoria founders of CC. War tax resistance in the U.S. was mentioned. It is hard to end something but maybe it has come to the right time.

Guest Anna Nieminen mentioned the book review in the Newsletter, ' The Good War'. She said it didn't address the linkage between war and climate change; if CC addressed the linkages between these two, that would bring in the youth. She described the tax resistance of 1914-1918, that Mennonites could purchase peace bonds; tax resistance could connect to green bonds; she suggested that tax resistance be connected to the climate crisis.

Jeevan Bhagwat, spouse of Anna Nieminen, a poet who remembered visiting Mary Groh in 2011 said that the arts, climate justice and war tax resistance should all be connected by CC. Jeevan and Anna are Scarborough Poetry Club members. They want to help in some way; he suggested doing poetry readings over Zoom, readings related to peace, and inviting CC board members to speak to an audience.

Bruna noted that we have heard from two sets of young people at this meeting and this represents a new dynamism. She asked if there is a nucleus that could move us forward in a similar way to what happened 20 years ago. We, CC, are dealing with personal finances and government. If there were three or four people that would step up, then the older guard would be willing to share their knowledge.

Cymry Gomery said she heard about CC through a World Beyond War (WBW) study group. She lives in Montreal and wants to start a WBW chapter there. Then collaborating with WBW would be possible. A one time per year action to resist war taxes could be done by CC within WBW. Cymry said her goal is to end war, end NATO, a cultural war that includes the Defund the police movement. She suggested that we collaborate with other groups by connecting militarism and climate change. Doug added that we need people with energy and time.

Don Woodside commented that he is listening to the enthusiasm today and remembering other enthusiasms; he said he voted with his feet to get off the board 4 years ago. Don said that CC had lost its resonance with the peace movement. He mentioned the time we advertised on [ceasefire.ca](http://ceasefire.ca), and the Mennonite Church project to get 1000 people to sign the PTR. These efforts didn't give lasting uptake. The financial aspects of CC require financial rigour. Other peace groups we approached did not want to take on the financial rigour required. Our core message

(withholding taxes) is scary and unpopular even though the general message (not paying for war) is popular. If there were people ready to carry it forward then maybe there could be success but he said he is skeptical of this.

Alan Rycroft spoke of remembering the tremendous work of Thomas Berger. Alan called himself an activist; he had been a fundraiser with Coolaid in Victoria. He said, CC's message doesn't resonate with many. We are about civil disobedience so no charity will pick it up. He said only a few people will ever withhold taxes. CC has one specific purpose and would soon be dropped once inside a larger organization.

Doug read a note from Jerrilyn Prior regarding Thomas Berger who has just died. Berger had lost his faith in using the courts to legalize Conscientious Objection to Military Taxes (COMT), but he was a 'Mensch'. Berger was the first judge to travel to Indigenous lands in the north to listen directly to Indigenous people. Berger believed in CC's right to a Charter challenge. The book - One Man's Justice, by Thomas Berger was mentioned. Jan said that the reaction to Berger's going to speak to Indigenous people where they lived was a WOW moment for most people.

Jan spoke of Lily Haury and her attempts to get a class action suit going in Quebec against paying for war. Jan said we need a new president (because Doug has said he wants to pass the presidency on to someone else); someone needs to step up. The board has been composed of low key, competent people, and they are a pleasure to work with.

Abram Bergen said he has sent the PTR idea to 60 or so people. He said there is a dilemma or problem for CC if we put all our efforts into something larger like WBW (and abandon CC). They have a very broad mandate.

Alan Rycroft spoke of approaching pacifist churches. Murray said this has been tried.

Ernie Wiens spoke of the Mennonite church project of a few years ago - what if a thousand church members signed the PTR? Ernie and Charlotte, his wife used the PTR and have withheld war taxes since 2007; he is embarrassed that church members haven't picked it up.

A question was raised - over 38 years of CC's existence did CC ever have full time or part time employees to promote CC? Don indicated that several times part timers were employed, especially in the spring campaign to get more people to use the PTR. Elizabeth Curry said she doesn't like social media for corporate reasons.

Anna N. suggested creating an online petition at tax time. Jeevan suggested using social media as a strategy, far more than we do now. He noted how out of date our Facebook and Twitter accounts are. We need an active presence on social media. This would require a paid person with the necessary skills.

Claire Adamson praised CC even existing as a small group.

Don pointed out that CC's financial existence has depended on a couple of large donations in the past. Alan said that fundraising is not that difficult - \$100 from everyone here would generate income for a part time employee.

Bruna asked if the board would be willing to contact the young people who have expressed some passion here today and ask them to consider becoming board members, so that there is not a complete cutting of the board.

Doug thanked board members that are leaving - Murray & Eric.

Doug asked for volunteers to be on the board. Elizabeth Curry, Anna Nieminen and Jeevan Bhagwat volunteered. Jeevan hopes to connect with the arts community to help move CC forward.

**Post AGM note:** a video of this open discussion is available on the CC website: [www.consciencecanada.ca](http://www.consciencecanada.ca)

### **8. Confirmation of board members standing for re-election for 2021:**

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, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan

### **Motion to appoint/ confirm Directors:**

Moved by Don Woodside; Seconded by Bruna Nota

Unanimous vote - Carried

**9. New board members volunteered to serve on the board** - Those standing for election to the board are:  
Anna Nieminen, Jeevan Bhagwat, Elizabeth Curry

These volunteers were added to the board Unanimous vote - Carried

**Board members leaving the board** are Murray Lumley and Eric Unger. Doug thanked them for their long service.

**9. Other business and announcements** - Doug will call the next board meeting.

**10. Adjournment** was at 5:30 pm

### **CC Board Annual Report for 2020**

It has been 38 years since Conscience Canada was incorporated as a secular non-profit NGO working to validate the right to conscientious objection to military taxation.

Over the years CC has supported Jerilyn Prior's legal test case against the compulsory payment of taxes for military purposes. Thomas Berger, lawyer for Prior, held that the Income Tax Act was in violation of the Charter of Rights, and to this date this issue has never been tested in court. (Ultimately Prior's tax case was unsuccessful and the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal.)

Motions and bills calling for a national Peace Tax Fund have been brought before the House of Commons a dozen times, as recently as 2013. From its very inception CC has been running its Peace Tax Trust Fund and has for some years now been providing an on-line Peace Tax Return.

We have a website and are on Facebook. We distribute twice yearly newsletters to all our members. We have published two booklets that set out the history, principles, and legitimacy of COMT. There is a dynamic DVD and an Infographic that visually drive home the wasted costs of war preparation compared to investing in building peace, health and social justice.

Year after year at our AGMs we have been inspired by guest speakers who have brought to us perspectives on the often dangerous peace work being done by dedicated people trying to save humankind from the insanity of war.

When I became president of CC's board four years ago I set out in our newsletter the near-term goals I wanted to work with you on achieving.

1. Getting the government to engage with us as a serious challenge, not just as a needless annoyance
2. Growing the ranks of CC
3. Growing the number of Peace Tax Returns
4. Expanding public awareness of Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation

So where are we today? On #1 – no change. On 2 – we continue to shrink. On 3 – numbers are declining. On 4 – also no change. A progress report like this is very sobering. Nor is this new for CC. Going back over some ten years of Minutes of Meetings, the same issues around decline and stagnation keep recurring. As Scott Albrecht reported in our last newsletter, our CC board has reluctantly come to the conclusion that CC cannot continue operating as it is.

Since our 2020 AGM your board has reached out to members, consulted and brainstormed, wracking our brains trying to figure out how to deal with our situation. To thrive again we know we would have to bring on board younger, energetic, diverse and organizationally and technically skilled people. We need to be much more effective in promoting our cause and reaching out to new people. How do we effectively promote without the help of the younger energetic people we need? How do we bring in the new people we need without effective promotion? We have not been able to solve this dilemma.

So what are CC's options?

1. Seek out a new peace partner/successor that CC can merge into. A new home for COMT where the operation of the Peace Tax Trust Fund and the PTR can continue.
2. Spend all our remaining operating money on one last-ditch out-sourced recruitment and revitalization campaign.
3. If 1 or 2 are unsuccessful, then close down and return Peace Trust funds to contributors. We will celebrate what we have achieved while urging members to continue the struggle for peace.

### **Rough Timeline**

AGM 2021 – full and frank discussion of options to sketch out how to proceed

From May to end of 2021 – Limp on. With a small board we focus on just keeping the lights on and the water running while proceeding on option 1 or 2. By late fall call all members meeting to inform everyone of work and results on option selected. Decide and vote on if we need to close down.

AGM 2022 to either bring forward details and new plans for going forward, or, final meeting to formally wrap up Conscience Canada.

Doug Hewitt-White  
for the Conscience Canada Board of Directors