



# Conscience Canada

Work for peace. Stop paying for war!

Travaillons pour la paix. Cessons de payer pour la guerre !

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## Three stories from International Conscientious Objectors' Day

By Karen Robinson

*This article comes from Karen's blog post on 19th June 2021. Karen is a Campaign Worker at **Conscience: Taxes For Peace Not War** in the UK. Her blog, '[Fund War No More](#)', is Karen's way of sharing news and reflections in the course of her work.*

Last year, during the first lockdown, the UK national ceremony to mark International Conscientious Objectors' Day was held online. On 15 May this year we met again online. The video of the ceremony can be found here: <http://www.co-day.org>

We met this year with harrowing images of a new outbreak of violence in the Israeli / Palestinian conflict on our screens and in our minds. The outbreak lasted from 10 May to 21 May 2021. In those eleven days it was reported that 256 Palestinians (including 66 children) and 13 Israelis (including 2 children) were killed. More than 1,900 Palestinians and at least 200 Israelis were injured<sup>(i)</sup>.

The online ceremony included many moving contributions, and the names of many individual conscientious objectors from different countries and through the ages. In this blog I have focused on three contributors' stories. They are in chronological order of the events they describe.

The first story was from **Rebecca Johnson**. I remember Rebecca vividly from Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the 1980s, nonviolently protesting against nuclear weapons stationed at the United States Air Force base near Newbury in southern England. In the



online ceremony Rebecca appeared in an inspiring video put together by the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, Brighton Quakers, and XR Peace. (39:19 minutes into the video).

Rebecca spoke about her parents; "This is an article from May 1940 and it was when my father successfully managed to get himself out of prison and given the exemption as a conscientious

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## CC carries on after change in board leadership

At the end of August the Conscience Canada board reluctantly accepted Doug Hewitt-White's resignation as president and chair of the board. In a message to the board Doug expressed his regrets and cited family and health reasons for his decision. Doug plans to still contribute as an at-large board member.

Following this unexpected turn-of-events the board was very pleased to have Jan Slakov step forward and take on this very important leadership role.

"I've long had a secret desire to take over the world and thought it would be good to start with Conscience Canada", says Jan, smiling. "But seriously, even though the notions of conscience and conscientious objection can seem marginal at times, I think they, and our organization, are much needed in this world.... Sometimes, for a 'yes' to be meaningful, we must also be clear about 'no'. If we want a healthy world, then there are things like creating enemies and militarism that we must say no to. Let us all be open to transformative change. Let's reflect on what we must start doing and be clear on what we have to stop doing – when we must say no in order to advance our human journey."

objector. He and my mother both had been conscientious protectors of children who were brought out of Germany by the *Kindertransport*, and they set up a school, and they also tried to find homes for people and families for the Jewish kids, that were being brought out, really from as early as 1934.”

The *Kindertransport*, or children’s transport, was “the informal name of a series of rescue efforts which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain from Nazi Germany between 1938 and 1940” (*The Holocaust Encyclopedia*)<sup>(ii)</sup>. Wikipedia says; “The United Kingdom took in nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Nazi Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, and the Free City of Danzig. The children were placed in British foster homes, hostels, schools and farms. Often they were the only members of their families who survived the Holocaust”<sup>(iii)</sup>.



*The children of Polish Jews from the region between Germany and Poland on their arrival in London on the “Warsaw”. February 1939*<sup>(iv)</sup>.

The second story was from **Penny Stone**, a singer and composer. She sang a song, ‘*Take Back The Sky*’, which she wrote in 2010 (2:42 minutes into the video). Penny spent time in Palestine and listening to Israeli conscientious objectors. Here she introduces her song:

“A lot of kids along the beach part of the Gaza Strip made kites and flew them and they broke the world record for the most number of kites flown in the sky at the same time, which is such a beautiful *human* image, lots of kids being able to do this. And of course it needed the support of adults in this case, clearing the shells of bullet cases off the beach. You know, it wasn’t as safe as perhaps it looked for us in the pictures. But it was a huge act of *humanness*, cos it just said, ‘Hello, we’re kids’. And that’s it. That’s why people are refusing to fight, it’s

because we hurt other humans, we hurt other adults, we hurt other kids”.

Here are the first verse and chorus of ‘*Take Back The Sky*’:



*In Gaza City, Palestine, just standing by the sea,*

*Here I was born a refugee, but no refuge could they find for me.*

*Well I’ve been trapped here all my days, three borders closed surrounding me,*

*And soldiers sitting in the sea and bombs a-falling down on me.*

*And there’s no place to hide, my home isn’t even safe inside –*

*Nowhere to run, to play, where I can be a child:*

***Just for one minute, just an hour of my troubled days,***

***Let this flying kite take back the sky for me***<sup>(v)</sup>.



*On 30 July 2009 children in Gaza created a new world record for the number of kites flying simultaneously in the same place*<sup>(vi)</sup>

The third story was from **Atalya Ben-Abba** (17:12 minutes into the video). Atalya is an Israeli conscientious objector from Jerusalem.

“Five years ago, in 2017, I refused conscription to the Israeli military. Because conscription is mandatory in Israel I was sent to military prison where I spent 110 days. I refused to serve in the Israeli military because I chose to not take part in the Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.”



“It is seen as treacherous to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Hence this is the exact reason why it was so important to me to be loud and bold about my decision. I felt as though I had to take a personal responsibility for being on the side of the occupier. I could not just keep on living my peaceful life while these injustices are happening. Even though I was scared of being sent to military prison and of the consequences of being an outcaste, I thought and still think I made the right choice.”

In an article by Amnesty International in 2017, Atalya said, “My objection to serving in the army is grounded in reasons of conscience; I believe that in order to bring security to all people in Israel and

Palestine, government policy must change and the occupation must end<sup>(vii)</sup>.” Later in the article she said: “A Palestinian activist spoke to me about his experience with Israelis; as a kid, all he saw were foreign soldiers speaking a language he didn’t understand, entering his village and demolishing houses. He was afraid of them and was angry. Only years later did he meet Israelis who showed him a different side to our society. Listening to him made it clear to me that we live in an endless cycle – violence begets violence and is not the answer. Cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians will pave the way to peace and allow us all to live in safety without fear and hatred<sup>(vii)</sup>.”

Thank you Rebecca, Penny and Atalya.

### References

- (i) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021\\_Israel%E2%80%93Palestine\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Israel%E2%80%93Palestine_crisis)
- (ii) <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40>
- (iii) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindertransport>
- (iv) Photo February 1939. [Kindertransport – Wikipediahttps://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindertransport#/media/Dat: Bundesarchiv\\_Bild\\_183-S69279\\_London\\_Ankunft\\_j%C3%BCdische\\_Fl%C3%BCchtlinge.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindertransport#/media/Dat: Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-S69279_London_Ankunft_j%C3%BCdische_Fl%C3%BCchtlinge.jpg)
- (v) [https://singlounderthanguns.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/take-back-the-sky\\_lyrics.pdf](https://singlounderthanguns.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/take-back-the-sky_lyrics.pdf)
- (vi) Photo: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/photos/flying-high>
- (vii) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/05/conscientious-objector-atalya-ben-abba-sentenced-to-a-further-30-days-in-military-detention-following-her-refusal-to-serve-in-the-israeli-military/>

## ABOUT

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, let us know if you would prefer the e-version (in colour, less expensive to produce!).

## BOARD

Scott Albrecht, Dave Bechtel, Jeevan Bhagwat, Elizabeth Curry, Charlie Diamond, Mary Groh, Doug Hewitt-White, Anna Nieminen, Jan Slakov, Dwyer Sullivan



# The Green New Deal

Why the fossil fuel civilization will collapse by 2028, and the bold economic plan to save life on earth  
by Jeremy Rifkin (244 pages, 2019)

A Book Review by Mary Groh

This is the handbook for people concerned about climate change and wanting to get involved in rescuing our planet.

Rifkin calls our new era the Third Industrial evolution, which follows the First powered by steam and the Second by oil and the combustion engine. In the first two “We came to believe that...the earth is here for our taking...climate change is now the bill come due...How we adapt to the planetary reality that faces us will determine our future destiny as a species.” p.244

The new era will depend upon renewable energy, mainly solar and wind, and a “smart digital infrastructure.” This will need to be in place in short order, and Rifkin as an advisor to the EU and the People's Republic of China (and other states) has positive things to tell about how these two huge states are addressing the problem. The USA, sadly, is behind.

How to finance the global change is interesting. The colossal investments made in the extractive industries and pipe lines, etc. will soon be stranded assets because wind and solar power are seen to be much cheaper sources of energy. There are, however, trillions of dollars in pension funds which can be put into green energy development and distribution, especially with the collaboration of green banks, which have already been created in the UK, Japan and elsewhere.

The preferred business model for new development is the energy service company (ESCO), which “puts the technical expertise and best practices of private enterprise at the service of the public.” (p. 196). He calls this “a new brand of capitalism” and lists ESCO's 10 top performers in 2017, starting with Schneider Electric, Siemens and Ameresco.

Another prop in the new breed of capitalism is the peer assembly. “Peer assemblies are informed bodies that bring the voice of the public into the

process and encourage elected officials and government agencies to be more responsive and integrative in their missions and assignments and to be more systemic and attentive to the multiple perspectives rising up from their communities.” (p. 242)

Words that speak loudly to peace activists come in the section on Finding the Money. “We ought to

consider reallocating at least a small part of DoD's (USA) priorities from ever more costly expenditures on weapons systems we will never use to the military's new paramount role in protecting the country against cyber wars and managing climate-related disaster response and relief missions, which will increasingly be seen as the most important national security issues facing our communities and country in the decades to come.” (pp. 183,184)

It is heartening to read a book by someone with experience fighting climate change.

By refusing to contribute to finance this institution we work for its total abolition and we open the real possibility of peace. Peace

as absence of fear. Peace is integral to a community of equals, in which the dignity of each is fully respected. It is a revolutionary position.



## Join Conscience Canada

Membership 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 help out as a volunteer. We need website and social media contributors.

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

## Reaching out to Peace Tax Trust Fund contributors

This past Spring, Dave Bechtel, CC's Treasurer, sent everyone who has deposits in our Peace Tax Trust Fund a statement on their money held in the fund. Some of these deposits have been with Conscience Canada for quite a few years.

Depositors were reminded that they have the option of leaving them on deposit, withdrawing them, or deciding just what you would like to do with them.

Unfortunately 29 statements were returned to us as undeliverable. Some depositors may have moved and we do not have current addresses. So if you have at any time contributed money to the CC Peace Tax Trust Fund and have not received a statement from us this year, please get in touch by mail to

Conscience Canada,  
515 Langs Dr. Unit J,  
Cambridge, ON  
N3H 5E4

or by email to  
dbechtel75@hotmail.com

## From Our Archives (CC Newsletter, Fall 2011)

### Tiré de nos archives (infolettre de l'automne 2011)

Prize winning poem from CC's 2011 New Art / New Media Contest

Poème primé au concours New Art / New Media 2011 de CC  
(traduction libre)

#### PEACE TAX

Tax me not  
for the purpose of war  
when the world  
is in need of peace.  
Guns and bombs  
can never buy  
democracy's release.

Take my dollar  
and build a bridge  
between opposing sides  
let understanding and  
dialogue  
conquer what divides.

Invest in peace  
and you will make  
the world a better place  
wherein the need  
for guns and bombs  
will be at last, erased.

#### IMPÔT POUR LA PAIX

Ne me taxez pas  
à des fins guerrières,  
lors que le monde  
a soif de paix.  
armes et bombes  
sont impuissantes  
à assurer la démocratie.

Utilisez mon dollar  
pour bâtir un pont  
entre les camps opposés;  
laissez la tolérance et le  
dialogue  
vaincre les divisions.

Investissez dans la paix  
et vous ferez de la planète  
un monde meilleur,  
où le besoin  
d'armes et de bombes  
sera enfin éradiqué.

by Jeevan Bhagwat  
translation Claire Lapointe

*Want to read more anti-war / pro-peace poetry?*

*Visit the website of Poets Against War:*

[www.poetsagainstawar.ca](http://www.poetsagainstawar.ca)

*Vous souhaitez lire d'autres poèmes prônant la paix?*

*Consultez le site Web des poètes contre la guerre*

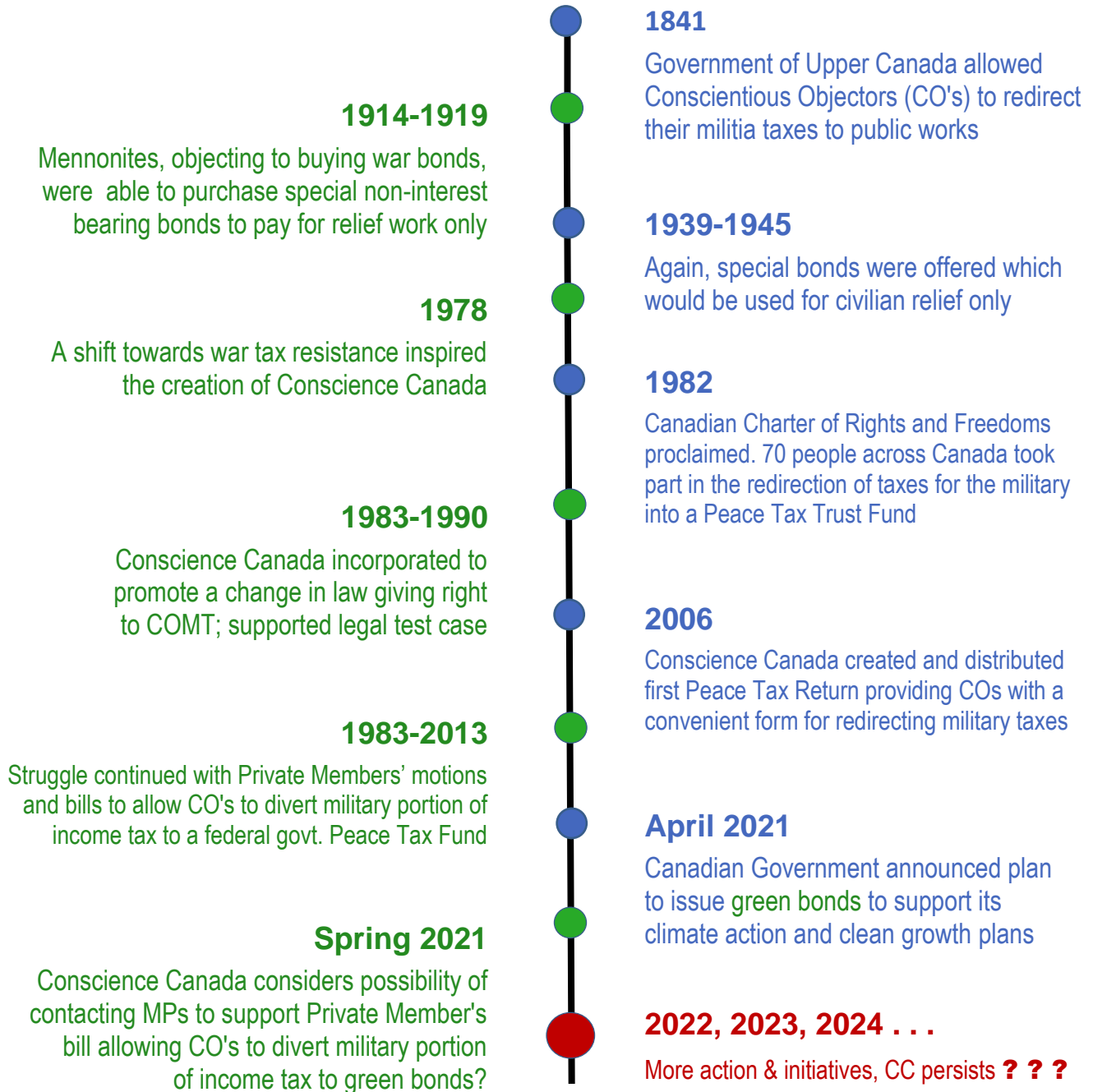
<http://www.poetsagainstawar.ca> (en anglais seulement)



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## Timeline of Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation (COMT) in Canada



### Sources:

- ◆ DVD "Work for Peace, Stop Paying for War", 2009. Available via Vimeo and on CC website (French captioned version also available)
- ◆ Conscience Canada: Review and Outline of Organization (April 2021)
- ◆ Government of Canada's Budget 2021:  
<https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/report-rapport/p2-en.html#chap5>