



Conscience Canada

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

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Conscience Canada at a Turning Point

Reflections from long time board member,
Jan Slakov

Over the years, Conscience Canada (CC) has undertaken many projects, hoping to increase support for our goals. Despite these efforts, the numbers of people withholding the military portion of their taxes and/or reaching out to elected representatives or media on this issue have declined.

I am so impressed with CC board members, who competently ensure the organization meets its obligations, who serve the cause of peace-building in so many ways, year after year. My esteem only increased when board members decided that it would be better to wind up the organization now, rather than waste the money and energy in keeping the organization alive until it reached a point that it would be forced to close, for lack of resources to keep it afloat.

At our upcoming AGM on April 30, the option of taking the next steps to shutter the organization will be considered.

We will also describe efforts to make CC more relevant by expanding our mandate to include what UN Secretary General António Guterres and others refer to as the “war on nature”, even though it’s apparent there are clear problems with that option.

I think it’s also important to take into account the hopes some stalwart CC members have shared, that we find some way to keep the organization alive. But is there any point to keeping such a marginal vision, such a small organization, on “life support”?

On the one hand, we feel certain that a “world beyond war” is not only possible, but necessary.

And we see conscientious objection to military taxation as an essential tool for that goal. Former US Secretary of State General Alexander Haig said as much, “Let them demonstrate, just as long as they continue to pay their taxes.” If enough people were conscientious objectors and acted on their convictions, the resources being squandered on violence could be redirected towards ensuring a healthy future for all.

On the other hand, even if conscientious objection is not widely adopted, some see it as a valuable perspective to nurture. It’s exemplified by this story: At the time of the Vietnam war, a Quaker-sponsored campaign invited people to stand in a public place with a sign, stating their opposition to the war. One young man who participated was challenged by a passerby, “What the hell do you think you’re doing? You won’t change anyone’s mind.” The young man replied, “I am just making sure they don’t change mine.”

When I first became a supporter of CC, back in the early 80s, I had little to say in response to questions like, “So, you would have just let Hitler/ISIS, etc. take over the world?” Were it not for other CC members, my commitment to nonviolence and my understanding of conscientious objection would be shaky at best. I see our organization as an essential “meeting place” so conscientious objectors can participate in the kind of education we need to transform our culture. To me, that “meeting place” function is enough to justify continuing with the organization.

Clearly, our organization is at a turning point, a time of crisis. We know that crises are times of danger, but also of opportunity. We look forward to our AGM to explore the opportunities that may be possible now.

CONSCIENCE CANADA 2022 Annual General Meeting

Saturday April 30, 2022, 3:30 p.m., EDT – virtual meeting via ZOOM video conferencing

Agenda

1. Approval of the minutes of the 2021 AGM (available upon request)
2. Review of CC activities in 2021 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 2021 financial statements (available upon request)
6. Appointment of auditors for 2022
7. Circle Discussion: dreams for CC; facing real world constraints; plans for going forward.
(Example: Should we hire a "Communications Chief" who would be responsible for the newsletter, improve the website, do outreach via social media, etc.?)

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.

To attend the AGM please send an email to info@consciencecanada.ca . (you will receive an email reply with instructions for how to set up and register for the AGM Zoom meeting on April 30).

If you cannot personally attend this year's AGM —

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 30, 2022

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

_____ (please print) as my proxyholder for the 2022 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 (Jan Slakov) 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:

This proxy has been completed and confirmed by me on:

_____ **date**

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



Learn about the life cycle of armed conflicts and the harms to ecosystems, climate mitigation, and more

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE BEFORE CONFLICTS

Building and sustaining military forces consumes vast quantities of resources and contributes to the climate crisis

- Militaries consume common metals, rare earth elements, water, hydrocarbons, etc.
- Military vehicles, aircraft, vessels, buildings and infrastructure all require energy, contributing greatly to CO2 emissions
- Militaries need large areas of land and sea for bases and facilities, and for testing and training, disrupting ecosystems
- Military training creates chemical and noise pollution
- Ongoing disposal of weapons creates serious environmental legacies linked to military pollution



ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE DURING CONFLICTS

Many contemporary conflicts last years and involve sustained periods of high intensity warfare

- Armed conflicts consume vast quantities of fuel, leading to massive CO2 emissions and contributing to the climate and ecological crises
- Large scale vehicle movements and intensive use of explosive ordinance can lead to widespread physical damage to sensitive landscapes and geodiversity
- Use of explosive weapons in urban areas creates vast quantities of debris and rubble, which can cause air and soil pollution
- Damage to light industry and environmentally sensitive infrastructure such as water treatment plants and pumping systems can cause pollution
- Severe pollution incidents can be caused when industrial, oil or energy facilities are deliberately attacked, inadvertently damaged or disrupted
- Other scorched earth techniques include the destruction of agricultural infrastructure like canals, wells and pumps and the burning of crops, causing air and water pollution
- Weapons and military materiel used during conflicts also leave environmental legacies (land mines, cluster munitions, military scrap) contaminating soil and water
- Small arms and light weapons can harm wildlife through facilitating increased hunting and poaching and causing harm to conservation programs
- Human displacement and camps for refugees and internally displaced peoples can have large environmental footprints (pressure on local resources, waste dumping, etc.)

Continued on next page

Ways Militarism and War Damage the Environment

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE DURING OCCUPATIONS

Sustainable development can be held back, and pre-existing environmental programs and projects may be curtailed or replaced

- Lack of investment and development can lead to the slow collapse of critical environmental infrastructure
- Infrastructure may be damaged or degraded by periods of violence
- Military presence can impact landscapes by vehicle movements or training areas, or by the building of walls and fences
- Poor waste management at military bases can harm public health and the environment
- Resource grabs, over-extraction, and a lack of environmental oversight are common



ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE AFTER CONFLICTS

Many forms of harm are also applicable to this phase

- Weak state control, fragmented political systems, and competing social and economic priorities mean environmental governance can be impeded, limited or absent
- Immediate legacies can include dumping of rubble and debris, pollution from looting, and harmful civilian coping strategies such as overharvesting
- Environmental pressures, including deforestation, are common
- Presence of military forces and pollution issues often continue
- Practices like the use of burn pits and post-conflict clearance of landmines and explosive remnants of war can lead to soil degradation and localized pollution
- Massive urban rebuilding can require huge volumes of resources

ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY?

Failure to call for greater environmental protection before and during conflicts will result in damage being seen as acceptable

Ignoring the environment after conflicts will result in missed opportunities for sustainable recovery (building back greener, creating new domestic legal frameworks to sustainably manage resources, etc.) and may also be setting the stage for future resource conflicts.

***SOURCE: JUNE 4, 2020 BLOG BY DOUG WEIR, RESEARCH AND POLICY DIRECTOR
CONFLICT AND ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATORY (CEOBS)
[HTTPS://CEOBS.ORG/HOW-DOES-WAR-DAMAGE-THE-ENVIRONMENT/](https://ceobs.org/how-does-war-damage-the-environment/)
INFOGRAPHIC TEMPLATE AND IMAGES FROM CANVA.COM**

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. If you are receiving a printed copy, let us know if you would prefer the e-version (in colour, less expensive to produce!).

Tomorrow's Child

Come child
let me teach you peace
for you know too much
of war and despair,
too much
of hunger and pain.

Let me teach you
how to love again,
that one day
you will have the strength
to shield your heart
from hate.

Let me teach you
how to trust again,
that one day
you will not place faith
in those who preach
with guns.

Come child
and embrace tomorrow,
for the dream of
peace
lives in you.



Sculpture *Heart of the World* by sculpturer Mikhail Reva erected in the inner yard of Odessa Children Hospital on 51 Pushkinskaya Street in Odessa

L'enfant de demain

Approche, mon enfant
laisse-moi t'apprendre la paix,
car tu en sais trop
sur la guerre et le désespoir,
beaucoup trop
sur la faim et la douleur.

Laisse-moi t'apprendre
comment aimer à nouveau,
pour qu'un jour
tu trouves la force
de protéger ton cœur
de la haine.

Laisse-moi t'apprendre
à faire confiance à nouveau,
pour qu'un jour
tu ne mettes plus ta foi
en ceux qui prêchent
l'arme à la main.

Approche, mon enfant
et accueille demain,
pour que le rêve de
paix
vive en toi.

© Jeevan Bhagwat

"Tomorrow's Child" previously published with Artists for a Better World International, 2020
(<http://artistsforabetterworld.org/poetry-tomorrows-child/12423/>)

Join Conscience Canada

Membership open to anyone supporting
CC's objectives.

No membership fee (donations welcome!)

Visit: 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

CC BOARD

Scott Albrecht, Dave Bechtel,
Jeevan Bhagwat, Charlie Diamond,
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Anna Nieminen, Jan Slakov,
Dwyer Sullivan

From Our Archives
(CC Newsletter Fall 2003)

Towards a Genuine Defence Department

Leonard Desroches

"As a mother and a Canadian citizen, I'm filled with sorrow for my past complacency and the opportunity lost... I have come to see my guilt in paying 7.4 per cent of my taxes to the military. 9-11 was used to perpetuate the lie of a mighty military being able to protect us. We must move forward from national security to global security." Elaine Gibson wrote this in a fiery letter to the *Pembroke Observer*. She had just participated in a weeklong retreat probing the practice and spirituality of nonviolence.

Elaine fully grasped the reality that eludes too many Canadians: before war there is *militari\$m* - note spelling. Before war there is the day-by-day silent, perpetual war economy fed by our taxes. Before war there is universal fiscal conscription. As the US general and Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, once put it, "Let them march all they want – as long as they pay their taxes."

Every now and then we get a glimpse of the normal costs of maintaining the Institution of War. In a letter-to-the-editor Gloria Paul from Hoyt, New Brunswick, wrote: "I was surprised to read in *The Daily Gleaner* (Fredericton) on January 9 [2003] that in just two weeks of training in December, Base Gaagetown had chewed up \$ 4.9 million in ammunition alone".

To critique the economy without critiquing the daily expenditure of *militari\$m* is utterly unrealistic. All the wealthy countries, including Canada, live off war, either through the actual fighting of wars to expand our interests or, more commonly, by the ongoing threat of war, for which we need a permanent war economy (taxes) to research, design, manufacture, test, promote, sell and maintain expensive weapons systems. Those who critique the economy from an alternative position need to relentlessly make the connection between *militari\$m* and poverty. There is a deep, inextricable connection between war and poverty. There is a deep, inextricable connection between paying for war and perpetuating poverty.

There was a time when the Canadian government bluntly called it the 'War Department'. Now the

Canadian government lies and calls it 'Defence Department'. Why would an elected government, claiming to be genuinely concerned about its fullest defence, be so afraid of seriously exploring Nonviolent Civil Defence? Why would it be afraid of a Peace Tax Fund? It is logical that a dictatorship would not allow such explorations. Why does our 'democratically-elected government' not allow it? Is there a connection between the massive political influence of the **military-industrial-educational complex** and our political parties' view of 'defence'?

Former soldier, Philip Berrigan, faced the question of how wars are perpetuated. From prison, where he was serving his eleventh year of resistance to war making, Phil sent me these words: "Why is the US constantly at war, with Canada a ready and willing accomplice? One reason would be the Christian skill at tradeoffs: the Established Church trades to Caesar its moral neutrality for tax exemption and other perks; the individual Christian trades to Caesar taxes and silence for a six-fold share of the world's goods and services."

Every community in the broader Canadian culture has a warrior tradition: Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist as well as Christian; Francophone Canadian, Anglophone Canadian and First Nations; Conservative Party, Liberal Party, and New Democratic Party. Historically we are all confronted with the same choice: to perpetuate the Institution of War and its necessary taxation system or to begin a global apprenticeship in the other force called nonviolence and its necessary Peace Tax Fund.

What if there was a Peace Tax Fund Day set aside every year to celebrate and to exchange practical ideas? Like every other dimension of the broader nonviolence culture, the work of building a Peace Tax Fund requires persistence and imagination - until, country by country, we transform our War Departments into genuine Defence Departments.

Len Desroches taught courses in nonviolence at the Toronto School of Theology. Among his many published writings is the book: [Love of Enemy - The Cross and Sword Trial](#).