

Spanish war tax resistance to military spending

While the Spanish government withdrew troops from Iraq, Spanish troops remain in Afghanistan and on hand for further interventions. Weapons factories; the traffic in arms; the distortion of scientific research ... There is no underlying change. Yet if it seems that our protests are ignored, more than we imagine we have in our own hands the possibility to counter the pervasive influence of militarism.

We claim that "peace is our affair" and demand the right to construct, through our civil disobedience, a demilitarised and participatory society, capable of handling its conflicts without resorting to violence. Such a transformation will take many forms of action: insumisión (total resistance to both military and civilian conscription), Education for Peace, dismantling the military machine, research and protest about the manufacture and sale of arms, research into military spending, the preparation of alternative methods to defend what we value, and contributing one more grain of sand tax resistance to military spending.

The war tax resistance in Spain is:

Active. We are not resigned to passive laments, hoping that other people will lead the social transformation to which we aspire. We will not delegate our capacity for action to any party or representative.

Collective. This campaign is carried out by many people who in different ways are in the same process of disobedience to all social militarisation, be it in the barracks, the school, the workplace, etc. Rather than being a private concern in our own name, we are a collective movement finding its own strength in building from ...

Public. We want to be heard. A society without voice is easy to manipulate. Our disobedience takes place in the settings of everyday life family, work, free time, with our form of consumption or non-consumption; with each small daily gesture we are making it clear that we do not agree with how our taxes are used. Pursuing such an attitude has a pedagogical and multiplicatory effect among the people we know.

Nonviolent, part of an ethic that is concerned with both ends and means. We do not see "the other" as our enemy. We believe that we strengthen ourselves every time we handle a conflict positively.

Political. We seek the abolition of armies and all the measures that benefit social militarisation. We are guided by the political principles of justice and solidarity that ought to regulate social institutions.

When we fill in our tax declaration forms, we adjust the final amount due to the state to remove the percentage budgeted for military spending. Then we handwrite a PS to the printed form: "For war tax resistance ... euros", putting in the amount we have withheld and sent to an alternative project. This project might be one we recommend state-wide, and so the money is sent to the central account, or it might be something chosen by objectors who send their money direct to one of the NGOs promoting war tax resistance to fund their own projects. The tax collection authorities usually take no action, although they do have the power to withdraw money directly from someone's bank account. The point of our action is to construct a critical attitude towards social militarisation.

The state-wide campaign of war tax resistance has been carried out for 20 years. At first, the alternative projects were mainly social support. However, it is relatively easy to fund the construction of a well, a hospital or library, whereas it is more difficult to raise funds for the activities of a group that aims to end the militarisation of its own country. Therefore we switched to supporting groups who defined their objectives in an antimilitarist framework. Thus we have come to know objectors and pacifists in Paraguay, Guatemala, Turkey, Colombia, Women in Black in

Belgrade, the Soldiers' Mothers of Saint Petersburg, groups in Israel and Palestine. Within the Spanish state, we have cooperated with campaigns against the militarisation of schools, against firing ranges, and against the militarisation and unjust trading practices of the European Union. Currently we are in the process of getting to know groups working with nonviolent strategies for democracy in Zimbabwe. We have consistently cooperated with Peace Brigades International and have cooperated with specific projects of War Resisters' International, including 15 May actions and the Balkan Peace Team.

Our contact with the groups we support goes much further than simply sending money diverted by tax resisters. We learn about each other's situation, strategies, methodology; we debate and exchange ideas, we support and -- if the situation permits -- visit each other. In many cases we have built a relationship of friendship and cooperation difficult to forget.

We are looking at other ways of campaigning against how militarism is financed. Increasingly the government is trying to deduct tax at source and to phase out the personal tax declaration form, while it collects significant sums from indirect taxes such as VAT. Also we want to address the role of banks in financing the arms industry and spreading discriminatory values.

In contrast to many groups elsewhere, the Objeción Fiscal groups of *Alternativa Antimilitarista Movimiento de Objeción de Conciencia (AA-MOC)* in the Spanish state do not favour legislation for "peace taxes". We would see this as primarily an expansion of the existing provision for making tax-deductible donations to charities. In view of experience of legislation for conscientious objection to military service, we believe that such laws operate to suit those who enact them. When our ultimate aim is complete demilitarisation, we cannot resign ourselves to a law that merely allows individual objection. For us, the act of objection is as much a matter of politics as of conscience.

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