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9. International Conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns

Abstract Lecture Dr. Paul Oestreicher 5. Sept. 2002

- Money is more than a method of payment for goods and services. It symbolizes power, and is increasingly the measure of our values. Its use and abuse is an ethical issue. To be forced to pay for what you regard as intrinsically immoral could itself be immoral, and an abuse of power.
- To refuse to pay for the military system is a logical extension of the now widely – but still not universally – acknowledged right to refuse to bear arms.
- To provide for the right to selectively opt out of a part of the tax system, a system which is not in itself objectionable, presents a major challenge to the legislative system.
- Notwithstanding the difficulties, these can be overcome, provided enough people want that to happen. Not only the objectors themselves should seek to make such a provision workable. Human rights law needs to address this issue.
- Tax refusal alone can be made more credible by the creation of national peace funds, which need public support. Tax revenue could be diverted to such a fund. Trained peace brigades need funding, and could logically exist alongside the military system.
- Objectors to military expenditure may need to recognize that supra-national UN-sponsored peacemakers or peacekeepers may themselves be part of the military system. Indeed, at their best, soldiers may come to take on the role of police, who do not use weapons in a warlike context.
- Objection to military taxation, or conversely, the will to fund non-military peacekeepers, need not be confined to pacifists. Those who accept the right of the state to wage just wars will increasingly need to concede that nearly all contemporary wars fall far short of any of the classic definitions of what constitutes a just war.
- Legislators need to be convinced. They will only be convinced if there is a strong body of voters behind an idea. Nevertheless, an idea becomes realistic well before the majority of people recognize its desirability.
- This idea can not succeed in a single state. Therefore an international network is needed to create a new climate of opinion.
- As in the struggle for all creative change, there will be casualties. Laws will sometimes responsibly have to be broken, and in consequence, those who break them will need local and worldwide support.
- As in all movements for social change, there will be gradualists and radicals, confronters and diplomats. Those who believe in the cause should not be fighting each other in the process. Lawbreakers and lawkeepers can live together in solidarity in promoting a cause which is not an end in itself, but part of the attempt to create a more just and peaceful world.