



PEACEWORKER JOURNAL LETTER

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<http://www.conscienceonline.org.uk/>

Dear Friends,

I've not yet written my first sentence, and I am already overwhelmed by thinking about everything I want to squeeze into my precious 1,000 words. I do hope that the over-riding message you hear when reading about what I have been up to is *thank you*. Thank you from me for this unique opportunity. Already, after 3 months, I have learnt so much and began to formulate strong networks which will stand long after my Peaceworker year. Thank you from my organisation, whose staffing capacity has been doubled thanks to the Peaceworker scheme. One of the many things I love about the scheme is that in supporting and nurturing the individual in their commitment to peace, it helps to foster work for change at national and even international levels – in true Quaker fashion.

I write to you from Conscience: Taxes for Peace Not War. Conscience started life in 1979 as the 'Peace Tax Campaign'. It was formed by a Quaker called Stanley Keeble, partially in response to concerns about military tax that were taken to Meeting for Sufferings. In response to 53 concerns from local meetings, Meeting for Sufferings decided to support the establishment of an independent campaign which would work for a change in the law so as to permit the right of conscientious objection to military taxation (COMT) – and so began the life of The Peace Tax Campaign.

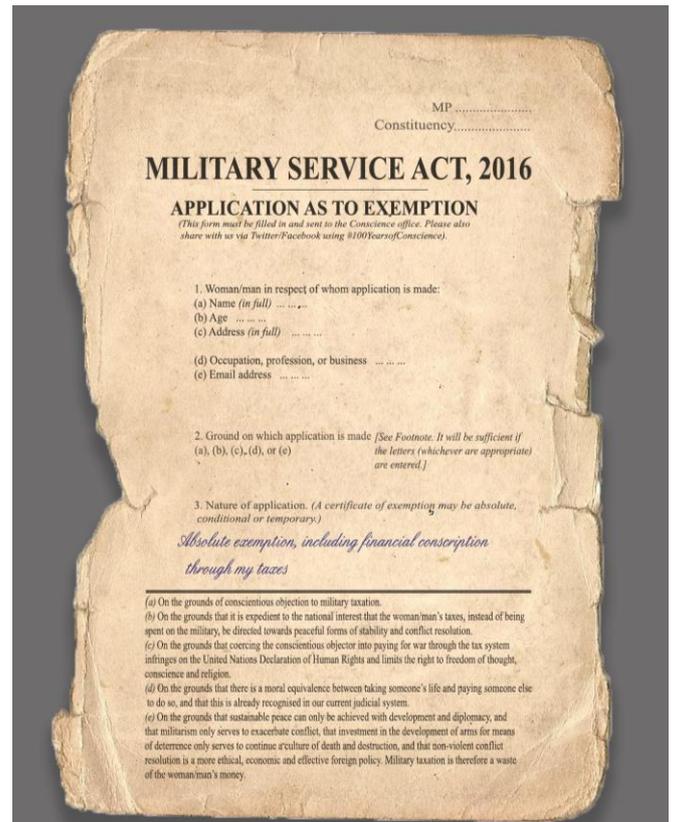
So here I sit, 37 years later, the third Peaceworker to work at



Conscience. My own presence is just part of a period of change the organisation is going through. Since I started Conscience's veteran fundraiser has moved on and its treasurer and office manager has retired. We are hoping to get a volunteer in soon to help out on our Peace Agenda events which are being used to engage new people in the concept of COMT.

With change comes fresh energy and renewed enthusiasm for the cause, and it is truly an exciting time to join Conscience, as it is tabling its first Peace Tax Bill since 1999. The Bill is being introduced on the centenary of the Military Service Act of 1916, which saw the first inclusive right of conscientious objection to military service. This is **the perfect opportunity** to bring attention to the fact that our proposed law has a **legal precedent**. Since 1916, the right to conscientious objection has been recognised in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the European Union Convention on Human Rights. The legal right to act in accordance with one's conscience has been placed firmly on the statute book by the Government in the Human Rights Act 1998.

We are introducing the Bill on the foundation that the rights of conscientious objectors are not yet fully recognised. It is taken for granted that we contribute taxes for military preparations. Modern warfare requires the passive acceptance of the country of the necessity of military taxation, in times of both peace and war. We remain conscripted into accepting the ideology of deterrence, investing in a future of violence and funding deadly and destructive technology. In support of our bill and to draw attention to the significance of debating it during the centenary, I have begun a project to make a register of COs and collect 'statements of conscience'. These are up to date versions of





the personal testimony men had to give when applying for conscientious objector status in WW1.

I've also been researching into past draft bills and Early Day Motions on peace tax, as well as Peace Tax campaigns abroad. In doing so I have gained knowledge of the international peace tax movement and its politics. An understanding of international support for the campaign has enabled me to approach groups in Britain who would show similar support.

I've been working in the capacity of Parliamentary Officer, which has involved booking meetings with MPs and liaising with those who have shown interest in the Bill. Already my Peacemaker year is facilitating brand new experiences and opportunities for learning. I have lobbied MPs, written an EDM which is to be tabled soon, attended the Labour Party Conference and edited a parliamentary briefing. All of this is giving me valuable experience of lobbying, and an understanding of the process of researching, developing and managing draft bills.

Three months in and, despite continuous usage of the phrase, I'm not yet sick of saying 'conscientious objection to military taxation' (although I'm sure my friends wouldn't agree). In fact, whenever I take time to sit back and reflect upon what we are actually campaigning for, I find new meaning and new strength in the cause. The latest was only this morning when I was writing to my MP to tell him to vote against bombing Syria. I began by feeling helpless and angry that the decision could ever be made by my country to intentionally kill in my name. I felt like a fundamental human right of mine, to not take the lives of others, was being dangled out of my grasp and the best I can do to reach it is to beg that my MP feel the same way as I do. We have got to keep campaigning, keep marching, keep lobbying, keep our voice heard in order to change national opinion on the effectiveness and humanity of military responses. But there has also got to be a mechanism in place for those of us who are forced into complicity when the government votes to use military force. A mechanism that will enable us to know in ourselves and demonstrate to others that our country is *not* acting on our behalf, and *not* with our money.



I fear I've come to the end of my word limit, and have so much more to say! If you want to discuss anything about the campaign or hear more about my work on it, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me at outreach@conscienceonline.org.uk, or phone the office on 0203 5159132.

Until next time!
In Peace,
Holly Wallis