



PEACEWORKER JOURNAL LETTER

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Dear Friends,

I write this journal letter from a little café in Brighton, having just been to visit the Brighton Peace and Environment centre to discuss the work of Conscience: Taxes For Peace Not War. It's gorgeously sunny outside, I'm very much enjoying this workday by the sea!

It's been a very busy year so far for us three UK Peaceworkers, and for this reason I'm grateful for the opportunities we've had in the last couple of months to get together and share our work and experiences. In January, Rhianna and I finally managed to visit Zara at Omega Research in Manchester. It was really valuable seeing her office (a converted silk mill next to a canal, with a focus on sustainability - complete with all organic tuck shop!) and hearing about her projects, which I'm sure you'll have read all about in her journal letter. In March, we met with the two QUNO workers in Brussels for a weekend of reflection and forward looking. And finally, we've just got back from a weekend away at the QPSW Annual Conference. This was the first time the three of us delivered a workshop together, it was an encouraging experience to share our work from the perspective of our individual projects, in



the context of being Peaceworkers, as well as adding to the bigger picture of Quaker work in the world.

My work at Conscience: Taxes For Peace Not War has been buzzing along as well. One of the most enjoyable parts of my work is when I get the opportunity to leave the online campaigning world of the Conscience office and engage people in the campaign with talks and workshops. In January I organised a film screening of 'Contempt of Conscience', a documentary about the war tax resister group the Peace Tax Seven, at a local cultural project and music venue. I've also given several talks at meeting houses, churches and YFGM (Young Friends General Meeting). This year continues to offer new and unexpected opportunities, such as an invitation to speak on the radio about our campaign! A host of a Sunday afternoon money and religion programme saw somebody 'tweeting' about their conscientious objection to paying military tax, and snapped us up to discuss the Bill and the relationship between taxes and conscience.

The highlight of the year so far has been the Parliamentary launch of the Taxes For Peace Bill. This took place in the Atlee Suite of Portcullis house on 2nd March (White Feather Day, 100 years since conscientious objection was legally recognised at the height of World War One). It was quite strange but exciting seeing the quiet office work of myself and Shaughan (our campaigns manager) materialise into the jam packed room in Parliament, full of Conscience supporters old and new, and MPs commemorating WW1 conscientious objectors (CO's) whilst arguing that, in the words of Ruth Cadbury MP, 'We stand in the same movement with those then and now who do not want their labours conscripted into war... conscientious objection to military tax is an idea whose time has come.'

Our Early Day Motion (a parliamentary petition) was submitted by Ruth Cadbury MP back in February. It currently has 26 signatures,



the majority of which are from SNP MPs. This is very encouraging as, when I last wrote, we were in a period of uncertainty due to long-term Conscience supporters from the Labour Party either not being in office anymore, or now being in Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet - a position which doesn't allow them to support back bench bills. The resounding feeling from our parliamentary event and the EDM, however, is that the concept of conscientious objection to military tax is being carried on into a new generation of government, and will thrive in this Parliament, future Parliaments, and long into the next century.

Since I last wrote, my 'Statement of Conscience' project has truly come to life. Hundreds have been registering as conscientious objectors to military tax in support of the Taxes For Peace Bill. Every day I am enthused and motivated by individuals writing in stating why they fundamentally object to the Government conscripting their taxes to the military machine. Their testimony joins a powerful discourse of women and men who have opposed the state because it demands their complicity in war, in complete opposition to their conscience.

I said in my last letter that I continue to find new strength and meaning in the cause, and am happy to write that this has only grown and flourished in the last 3 months. My most recent thoughts have developed from the daily testimony I have been receiving – words of conscience from this generation of COs. The right to freedom of conscience in regards to war was a hard won battle, and played a seminal part in the democratisation of war. Yet today weapons are being devised and manufactured and wars continue to be waged in our name, with our resources but without our consent. In every corner of society we are faced with forced investment in future violence, whether it be through paying our taxes, or, for example, trying to advance one's career in an industry heavily funded by the military budget – such as aeronautical engineering. I strongly believe that we have to remember and



continue work for our right of conscientious objection, otherwise it could be reduced to a past phenomenon in this country whilst simultaneously new forms of conscription expand to enable and support the way war is waged in today's world.

Thank you again for enabling the Peacemaker scheme to happen, every week offers new challenges, new experiences and new opportunity for reflection and learning – long may it continue.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions at all.

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In Friendship,

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