

Bruce Baechler's Statement

Tommorow I enter Federal Prison. I was convicted of refusing to register with Selective Service, an agency many people think doesn't exist. But it's still there all right, and its purpose is the same as always: to provide involuntary manpower to the Armed Forces when they can't get enough on their own. The draft made the Vietnam war possible - and resistance to it helped end the war. The draft system still exists, with its pool of I-A 19 year old men, ready to make the next war possible - unless we work to abolish it, and until then refuse to cooperate with it.

The only way we're going to have peace is by each individual (especially YOU) standing up to her/his government and saying "No, I won't be a party to war." Many of us feel that it is worth the risk of prison. I invite and urge you to join us by refusing to cooperate or register with Selective Service, and by refusing to pay any Federal taxes (such as those on telephones, income, tobacco and alcohol), as most of the money thus collected is used to pay for war, past, present, future. And I urge that you do this openly, to inform and encourage others. After all, if we don't end war, war will end us.

-July 19, 1975

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BRUCE BAECHLER CASE

On March 28, 1973, one day before his 18th birthday, Bruce Baechler appeared at the office of Selective Service System Local Board No. 69 in Orange County, North Carolina (where he was then living). He informed the board that he was refusing to register for the draft. He also visited the office of the local U.S. Attorney to tell him that he would not register.

The FBI began an investigation and by fall it became clear that Bruce was likely to be arrested. Now living in Washington, Bruce asked the Friends (Quakers) Meeting of Washington to offer him sanctuary when his arrest became imminent. The Meeting agreed. On the afternoon of January 22, 1974, the FBI informed Bruce that they had an arrest warrant for him. Bruce agreed to call them in the morning and tell them where he could be picked up.

The next morning about 50 people came to the sanctuary at 9, which was in the form of an unprogrammed meeting for worship in the manner of Friends. Bruce called the FBI and gave them the address where he could be found. In the meeting room, Bruce's father sat beside him, while his mother was in a simultaneous meeting for worship in the Hartford (Conn.) Meeting House. After the powerful meeting for worship had continued for nearly two hours, two FBI agents came in and dragged Bruce out.

Trial was held before U.S. District Court Judge Eugene Gordon in Wilkesboro, N.C. April 22-24, 1974. About 25 of Bruce's supporters attended the trial. Four members of Hartford Friends Meeting, of which Bruce is a member, and two other friends of Bruce testified to Bruce's religious motivations. Despite the fact that the failure to register was not in dispute, the jury took seven hours to find Bruce guilty. Judge Gordon sentenced Bruce to 26 months in prison and set appeal bond.

The case was appealed on a number of grounds, including the contention that the draft law constitutes unconstitutional sex discrimination. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals denied the appeal on all grounds. In May of 1975, the Supreme Court (Justice Douglas dissenting) decided not to hear the case. (Ironically, Federal Judge Murray of Montana ruled the draft law unconstitutional on grounds of sex discrimination in another case in June.) On July 20, 1975, Bruce turned himself in at the Federal Prison in Morgantown, West Virginia to serve his sentence.

BRUCE BAECHLER SUPPORT COMMITTEE

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