

Why Resist War Taxes

"If you don't believe in it . . . why pay for it?"

This is the title of a flyer that was sent to peace movement people encouraging their participation in war tax resistance activities at the IRS. This title also represents the primary reason why people refuse to pay taxes which contribute to war.

As longtime war tax resister Wally Nelson once explained to a visiting Internal Revenue Service agent, "We don't intend to cooperate with the IRS in its attempts to make us pay for killing. What would you do if I came into your office tomorrow with a cup in my hand, asking for contributions to enable me to buy guns and kill a group of people I don't like?"¹

For many, the only difference between paying for war and participating in war is that the former is less messy and more convenient. In fact, to pay someone else to kill while refusing to do it yourself lacks integrity. Paraphrasing A.J. Muste, in order to conduct a war or build a military, the Government requires two chief resources: soldiers and money. People are drafted through the Selective Service System, and money is drafted through the Internal Revenue Service. During the Civil War, draftees could

1. *New Roots*, p. 33, April 1981.

join the army or buy their way out with \$300. It isn't much different today, except it is an almost universal draft of one's labor, and \$300 would be a bargain, even if you account for inflation.

The technology of warfare has undergone dramatic, even revolutionary, changes.² These changes have created a military with a far greater need—almost an addiction—for money rather than soldiers. This addiction has resulted in unprecedented military spending for a country not at war.

Though few have died as a direct result of this new military hardware, the spending has taken its toll—through the moral and cultural deterioration of our society, deaths from starvation here and around the world, the racism and sexism promoted by a society which glorifies militarism and domination, the lack of jobs, poor education, inadequate health care, insufficient housing and so forth.

The greatest threat these weapons pose is their possible use in conventional wars (in the Third World, such as El Salvador or the Middle East) or in an all-out nuclear exchange between the superpowers that will have the survivors envying the dead. Administration acceptance of the concept of limited nuclear war or first strike capability along with this glut of sophisticated military hardware may inevitably lead to war. The significant changes needed to stop this slide to war will not occur without a massive outpouring of protest, including dramatic actions by many people. Tax resistance is one of the strongest and most dramatic statements an individual can make.

Although not pacifists, some people have been motivated to act because of the nuclear

2. James Fallows in an *Atlantic* article ("High-Tech Weaponry," May 1981) illustrates how costs of modern weaponry have gotten out of hand to pay for counter-productive technological advancements.