

war threat and the immoral misuse of Government spending. However, many war tax resisters also do not believe that killing or the threat to kill is an acceptable way to solve social or political problems. Frequently, new resisters have expressed a gain in personal power they have felt over their own lives upon becoming war tax resisters.

Historically, war tax resisters have been moved by strong religious convictions in their nonpayment. Segments of the Society of Friends, the Church of the Brethren, and the Mennonite Church—the historic peace churches—have felt that to pay war taxes is to participate in war, violating the teachings of Jesus. Only since World War II and especially since the Vietnam War, have there been significant numbers of war tax resisters motivated by political or secular beliefs.

No matter what motivates those of us who resist war taxes, it is agreed that each one of us is responsible. And part of that responsibility is to reduce our complicity in war and preparation for war.

However, for a lot of war tax resisters, reducing complicity is only one of many reasons why they are refusing to pay war taxes. Another major reason is to register a protest—a protest which cannot be ignored. They are not simply striving for moral purity, but seek to *confront* the Government with their opposition. For these tax resisters, living below a taxable income level may deny the Government funds for war, but it will not provide a means for confrontation.

The ability to motivate other people makes war tax resistance more than just a personal action. The classic case of this phenomenon is that of Henry David Thoreau. His personal act of tax refusal and subsequent essay had, and continues to have, enormous impact. War tax

resisters are not shy about what they are doing and why. Such dramatic acts of protest will not move all who are in sympathy to act in kind. But many will take steps they would not otherwise have taken.

Finally, most resisters want to put their tax money to constructive use. So their nonpayment and subsequent redistribution of tax money is a way to correct the deficiencies of Government spending. Alternative or People's Life Funds have been set up by communities of resisters as a means to maximize their fiscal impact.

—Ed Hedemann

---

Reprinted from *Guide to War Tax Resistance* (1986), War Resisters League, New York.

---