

PROMOTING NON-MILITARY SECURITY

Conscience UK launched www.peacepays.org website in response to a problem they perceived in attracting younger people - teenage to 25 years - to the peace tax campaign. In the UK young people are very concerned about peace issues and strongly support Stop the War coalition. However, there are very few in Conscience UK and the peace tax issue is 'off their radar'. A number of reasons for this were identified:

- Young British people have experienced their country going to war almost continuously throughout their lives, but none have experienced military conscription so it is not a concept which comes easily to them
- Many students don't believe they contribute to the war machine because 'they don't pay taxes'. Of course they do through VAT, fuel duties, tobacco and alcohol duties etc.
- The idea of withholding taxes seems a passive and undynamic way of trying to prevent war and create peace.

The inevitable other face of war tax resistance is what we should do with the money instead and non-military security (NMS) is the inevitable answer. NMS answers the usual complaints leveled at peace tax campaigners such as:

- It makes no difference if you withhold tax from the military because the money will be taken from elsewhere and the peace tax fund used to fill the gap. But NMS is a tangible purpose the money could be put to.
- Peace tax is nebulous and unrealistic. But NMS is a realistic alternative
- Withholding taxes is an individualistic act which does not really engage with the wider picture. But NMS helps us to focus on the global impact of redirecting taxes.

Campaigning on the internet has taken off in Britain, so it seems an ideal way to approach the younger audience. Peacepays.org is a website designed to engage the young and approaches the issue from the angle of NMS being a better way to spend the money.

It starts with an amusing animated cartoon which leads to a row of doors facing the viewer. There are facts and figures, but set out in small chunks and delivered in an interesting way. There is a game using multiple choice questions to engage the surfer with mind-boggling snippets about how much is being spent on the military and comparing it with other major projects which would benefit the public. There are sections on different aspects of NMS - why conflicts happen, what the alternatives are, who is active in this field. One section gives the surfer ideas for getting involved according to how much time they can spare. In 10 seconds they can email the Chancellor, in 5 minutes they can sign the online picture petition and in 15 minutes they can write to their MP.

The workshop discussed ways of promoting the website and monitoring the effectiveness of the site. One idea was to print postcards to give out for free, leaving bundles in student bars, advice centres etc. Students can use them to write to their friends and relatives, so the news gets out further. Going to universities and giving talks or displays about Peacepays was another approach. Euros vor Vrede offered their ideas for attracting younger people and there may be some collaboration here between them and Conscience, so there may be additions to the Peacepays website in the future. Different ways of measuring success involved web counters and 'webstats'. The picture petition shows numbers involved. A feedback form could help and follow-up to membership can be measured.