

National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC)

Report about war tax resistance in the USA

Organizational Structure: NWTRCC is a network of organizations and individuals across the U.S. who are war tax resisters or support war tax resisters. There is one part-time, paid coordinator, and much of the work carried out by volunteers. The organization is overseen by the Administrative Committee (AdComm), made up of four full members, two alternates, and a volunteer Fundraising Clerk. The AdComm meets face-to-face twice a year in conjunction with the two Coordinating Committee meetings, which are decision-making gatherings open to representatives from affiliates, war tax resistance counselors, and area contacts, and anyone in the war tax resistance network. The meetings are held in different locations around the country. There are approximately 8,000 to 10,000 war tax resisters in the U.S. NWTRCC's has a small annual budget of approximate \$35,000.

NWTRCC is a clearinghouse and resource center for the conscientious war tax resistance movement. It is a coalition of local, regional, and national affiliate groups working on war tax related issues. NWTRCC sees poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, environmental destruction, and militarization of law enforcement as integrally linked with the militarism that we abhor. Through the redirection of our tax dollars, NWTRCC members contribute directly to the struggle for peace and justice for all. We publish a newsletter, *More Than A Paycheck*, six times a year and have literature that provides specific, practical details about war tax resistance.

We offer counseling to people with general questions interested in war tax resistance and to current resisters with very specific questions or entanglements with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). We have a network of counselors around the country and offer training sessions or informational updates at each of our meetings.

War Tax Resistance in the U.S. The war tax resistance movement in the U.S. continues at a steady pace, although it does not appear to be growing despite the war in Iraq.

Since the last international meeting, a major legal case related to war tax resistance is that of three members of a small religious community, Restored Israel of Yahweh in New Jersey. The community has a long history of refusing to participate in the federal tax system for religious reasons of not wanting to pay for war. They have called NWTRCC on occasion for information but were not part of our network. Three members were sentenced to prison on criminal charges in the summer of 2005, and two are imprisoned now serving more than two year sentences each. NWTRCC has tried to help publicize their story and provide support along the way. Because of the particularities of this case, it does not signal a new trend of harsher treatment for war tax resisters, but it has been an important case and one of concern to our network. In general, the IRS in the U.S. pressures war tax resisters to pay in the same way they pursue others with tax debts: they send notices and demands for payment, and take funds from bank accounts or paychecks. Their practices of seizing property have eased off in the last decade.

NWTRCC has promoted resistance to the small excise tax on telephone service (like VAT) since the Vietnam War. The government was forced to end this tax on long distance calling in May 2006 due to court cases from big corporations about the misapplication of the tax. While it is still applied to local service, the campaign is winding down. We will be discussing whether we

need to offer a new campaign that helps bring people into resistance at a low level as did the telephone tax.

Other ongoing activities include actions each year on April 15, tax day in the U.S. All kinds of groups hold small and large actions around the country, about war tax resistance and also about budget priorities in general. Thousands of flyers produced by the War Resisters League, "Where your income tax money really goes," are handed out at post offices, Internal Revenue Service offices, or busy street corners. We copied the peace tax campaign in England and produced a Peace Tax Return, which has brought new people into our network. Groups affiliated with NWTRCC hold "how to" workshops in the months before April 15, and alternative funds, which collect war tax resisted money, announce their grants to peace and justice groups around April 15. NWTRCC gets calls from many newspaper and radio reporters locally and nationally, and many journalists refer to the NWTRCC website for information. There are links on our websites to other groups.

NWTRCC held a Strategy Conference in October 2005, and we are working on some of the priorities that came out of that conference, including, improved resources and outreach to young adults who are becoming independent and starting new jobs; creating internet video shorts to advertise war tax resistance more widely; looking into making a new introductory film about war tax resistance; circulating a survey to peace activists to solicit their opinions about war tax resistance that will help us develop new campaigns and outreach materials; and generally making our website more lively, adding new information as frequently as possible.

Significant Challenges: With the war in Iraq, we are not seeing the kind of growth in numbers of resisters that we might have expected, and many of our groups are held together by long-time activists with few younger faces. When peace-oriented people hear about war tax resistance there is always interest, but our outreach is limited by our small budget and numbers. Many new people who contact us for information are extremely angry about the misuse of their tax dollars by the Bush administration, but their fear of the IRS is hard to overcome, and they often ask about legal ways to lower their tax bills and reduce their complicity with war. A sense of economic insecurity combined with possible repercussions of the attacks on September 11, 2001, may be part of the fear also.

Despite the challenges to the growth of the movement, there is a sense that resistance is not shrinking and that those who have chosen to refuse to pay for war at some level feel even more certain that this is the right thing to do in the current political climate.

The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee is a member of the national peace network United for Peace and Justice and also has connections to many other peace and religious groups through NWTRCC's network of affiliate organization.

Ruth Benn, Coordinator

National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC)

PO Box 150553, Brooklyn, NY 11215 USA

Phone: (718) 768-3420; Fax: (718) 768-4388

email: nwtrcc@nwtrcc.org • websites: www.nwtrcc.org • www.hanguponwar.org

Larry Rosenwald is NWTRCC's representative to the 2006 conference and may enhance on this report at the conference.