

History of conscientious objection to military taxation outside the UK

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There is a long history of people conscientiously objecting to paying towards war. Conscience organised a webinar exploring the history of conscientious objection to military taxation, including the history of attempts to bring about legislative change. This can be viewed online⁽¹⁾. In compiling this factsheet we have also extensively referenced the history of war tax resistance worldwide compiled by the The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee in the USA⁽²⁾.

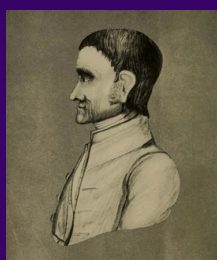
Refusing to pay for specific wars in the 16th, 17th & 18th centuries

In the 1500s many people refused to pay a special war tax which had been imposed on the Dutch to finance the wars of Philip II, King of Spain and the Duke of Holland⁽²⁾. In 1637 the Algonquins (an indigenous people who now live in Eastern Canada) opposed taxation by the Dutch to improve a local Dutch fort⁽²⁾. In 1709 a Quaker Assembly in the US refused a request of £4,000 for a military expedition into Canada⁽²⁾.



During the American Revolution (1775–1783) most Quakers were opposed to military taxes. And the official position of the Society of Friends supported this position. Many Quakers were jailed, and some had property seized and auctioned⁽²⁾. In 1798 Quakers refused to pay military taxes during the Irish Rebellion⁽²⁾.

Refusing to pay for war more generally



In 1755 John Woolman and other Quakers were unsuccessful in their attempt to persuade the Society of Friends to refuse payment of £60,000 tax which had been levied by the Pennsylvania Colony for war purposes⁽²⁾.

<https://conscienceonline.org.uk/education-for-peace/>

First country to officially exempt pacifists from paying war taxes

In 1820 Russia became the first country to officially exempt pacifists from paying war taxes. Czar Alexander I issued a certificate of military tax exemption for Quakers⁽²⁾.

'Thirty British citizens were invited by Czar Alexander I to establish a cotton mill. Because some of the employees were Quakers, a petition was submitted to the Czar from the employees asking for freedom of conscience and an exemption from military service, church taxes for war, etc. The Czar issued a certificate which read 'His Imperial Majesty has given his gracious assent to this petition ... all ... shall be exempted from all civil and military taxes ... the sect of Quakers may now and in future be freed from war taxes for the support of the Military...'⁽³⁾.



Henry David Thoreau

One of the reasons Henry Thoreau in Massachusetts refused to pay his annual Poll Tax was the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). He was arrested in 1846 and spent the night in jail. Against his wishes his aunt paid his taxes and he was released. He wrote about his experiences in his influential essay: 'On the *Duty of Civil Disobedience*'⁽²⁾.

A few years later in Hungary, in 1861, there was an extraordinary example of war tax resistance:

'Hundreds of Hungarians stopped paying taxes to the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph I, who needed more money to fight Napoleon III. When property was seized for the unpaid taxes, auctioneers refused to auction it. When Austrian auctioneers were brought in, Hungarians refused to bid. It cost more to collect than what was collected'⁽²⁾.

Ammon Hennacy

During the First World War Ammon Hennacy was imprisoned for two years for refusing to register for the draft. Outside prison Hennacy continued his conscientious objection to supporting war. He 'never paid any taxes in his life because of their use in paying for the military and war'. He did this by reducing his liability for tax by living in voluntary poverty⁽²⁾.

Juanita Nelson

In 1959 Juanita Nelson (pictured) became the first woman in the US to be imprisoned for war tax resistance⁽²⁾. Released the same day as her arrest, she wrote 'A Matter of Freedom'⁽⁴⁾ about her experience. The tax authority never collected the money due⁽²⁾.



Refusing to pay for Vietnam and Iraq wars

In 1964 Joan Baez refused to pay 60% of her income tax, due to her opposition to the war in Vietnam. While protesting against the imminent invasion of Iraq in 2003, Julia Hill (pictured on front cover) decided to redirect the federal tax she owed to peaceful purposes⁽²⁾.