

An introduction to conscientious objection to military taxation

What do we mean by conscientious objection?

Conscientious objection is when someone objects to a course of action on moral, ethical, political or religious grounds. The term is most commonly used in the context of individuals having a conscientious objection to serving in the military.

So what is conscientious objection to military taxation (COMT)?

Conscientious objection to military taxation is when people object on moral, ethical, political or religious grounds to a proportion of their taxes being used to fund the military. They object to their taxes being spent on preparations for war or the conduct of war.

Conscientious objection to military taxation is often seen as an extension of the principle of conscientious objection to military service. If an individual feels it is wrong to prepare for war / take part in war through doing military service, they may also feel it is wrong to provide money (through their taxes) to pay other people to do this. Being obliged by the state to pay for the military (through our taxes) is sometimes referred to as 'financial conscription'.

What does a Peace Tax Campaigner do?

Peace Tax campaigners campaign for a change in the law so that individuals have the legal right to be able to conscientiously object to military taxation. This would mean people could register as conscientious objectors and opt for the military proportion of their taxes to be paid into a Peace Tax Fund.

What is a War Tax Resister?

While waiting for legislative change some individuals choose to withhold the military proportion of their taxes in advance of a legal mechanism being established. They are known as war tax resisters. People have had belongings seized, been declared bankrupt, and been imprisoned.

This factsheet is one of a series produced by Conscience Education for Peace. They are available, together with videos and other information resources, at:

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

Why people become conscientious objectors to military taxation

Just as people become conscientious objectors to military service for a range of reasons, people decide to become conscientious objectors to military taxation due to a range of beliefs and motivations. These include ethical, moral, religious and political objections to paying for war, as well as humanitarian, environmental and legal reasons. For some people it is a logical extension of their conscientious objection to military service.

How do people resist paying for war?

In advance of there being legal provision for conscientious objection to military taxation some people have sought their own ways to try to minimise their contribution to military spending. These include withholding the military proportion of their taxes, redirecting the funds to peaceful purposes, not cooperating with the collection of military taxes, seeking alternative ways to pay, and living simply so that their income is below the taxable level.



(1)

History of conscientious objection to military taxation

There is a long history of people having a conscientious objection to military taxation. In the UK the earliest known objector was St Hugh of Lincoln. In 1195 he refused a demand from King Richard 1 to provide knights to serve in his French wars.

Outside the UK there were examples of people refusing to pay for specific wars and conflicts in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

The essay written by Henry Thoreau in 1846, '*On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*', continues to inspire war tax resisters to this day. Thoreau refused to pay his annual Poll Tax, one of his reasons being the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).

In addition to its two factsheets on the history of opposition to military taxes, Conscience: Taxes For Peace Not War organised a webinar, '*Exploring the History of Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation*'. You can listen to the webinar via a link on the Conscience website. (2)