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The Center on
Conscience & War

The Reporter for Conscience' Sake

Volume 63

Spring 2006

Number 1

Operation Refuse War A Success



Conscientious objectors from around the world join the American Friends Service Committee's May 13th silent march on the National Mall of Washington, D.C. as part of their Eyes Wide Open exhibit.

From the Desk of the Executive Director

International CO Day and the events surrounding it this year were truly inspiring. Some of the details are discussed in this Reporter, but you really had to have been there. Hearing the COs from around the world tell their stories was, in Bill's words, "Awesome."

And awesome in the precise meaning of the word, since they inspired awe in me. In particular, I was struck hearing about Boro Kitanoski from Macedonia. In this case, the sheer weight of the number of COs brought down the draft system. His story somewhat reminded me of the Vietnam era, which ended with hundreds of thousands of CO applicants. That resistance, too, brought down the draft system in the United States.

I was also awed by the sheer strength of the U.S. COs. The stories of Joshua Casteel and Kevin Benderman, although known to me, struck me anew upon hearing the story directly.

The march from the Eyes Wide Open boots exhibit to the Capitol, where I joined my fellow Quakers in their weekly vigil under the banner of "Seek Peace and Pursue it," evoked

different emotions as we watched the hundreds marching recede. My twenty year old son, Russell, stood with me, and my thoughts could not help but wander to those similarly aged men and women half the world away and the others who had returned.

And so from the inspiring I returned to the day-to-day realities of work of the Center. Calls from reporters. Calls from parents. Calls from soldiers and sailors and marines. Last week a call from Florida. Last night at 11 p.m. a call from Indiana. Today a call from nearby Maryland. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan drive the calls, day in and day out.

After the war is over the calls will still come. The calls will come until the day in the distant future when our country and our world realizes that war is wrong and pointless. And until that day the Center—with your support—will be here, too.

Yours for Peace and Justice,

S. E. McNeil



For many, May 15 passes each year without a second thought, just another day; however, for a select few, this day is one of celebration, discussion, and solidarity with others that refuse to fight. While the Center has typically organized its own Advisory Council and Lobby Day events around International Conscientious Objection Day, globally this is also a day of meetings, workshops, vigils, and demonstrations drawing attention to the issue of conscientious objection. This year we were fortunate

to truly feel this international presence. Operation Refuse War, an international conference of resisters to global war, was a collaboration among multiple peace organizations to bring together the various experiences and perspectives of conscientious objectors worldwide. Participants joined from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Britain, Columbia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Guatemala, Israel, Macedonia, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, and from across this country to learn from each other, network, and attempt to develop some strategies for this global movement. From watching *Sir, No Sir!*, a documentary on the GI resistance movement in the Vietnam War, to teaching and playing cooperative games, it was a full and valuable weekend. The following pages highlight some of these events and workshops.

Also Inside:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| News Briefs..... | 2 |
| Center News..... | 3 |
| Workshop Highlights.... | 4 |
| Lobby Day..... | 7 |



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The Reporter for Conscience's Sake is a publication of the Center on Conscience & War.

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News Briefs

Recruitment Lawsuit Brought To Department of Defense

The New York Civil Liberties Union has filed a federal suit against the Department of Defense, charging a violation of high school students' privacy rights through illegal recruitment efforts, specifically using an unauthorized database. The lawsuit could determine the role that No Child Left Behind plays under the more restrictive military recruitment law passed by Congress in 1982.

(North County Gazette 4/26/06)

Desertion Numbers Rise, British Armed Forces Bill in Parliament

According to the BBC, over 1,000 British soldiers have deserted since the beginning of the war in Iraq. This number has become increasingly significant as a new Armed Forces bill makes its way through parliament. The bill would introduce harsh punishments for refusal and desertion, the maximum penalty being life imprisonment.

(BBC News 5/28/06)

US Female CO Jailed

Katherine Jashinski, the Army National Guard CO who publicly declared her refusal to deploy in November, was sentenced to 120 days confinement and given a bad conduct discharge after her May 23 court martial. Although her original CO claim was denied, Jashinski's commanders testified that she was sincere in her beliefs. Her *habeas corpus* claim is now in federal court on a motion for reconsideration. Jashinski, the first female CO to be jailed during the current war, has already served 53 days at Fort Benning and received a 20 day reduction for good behavior.

(Columbus Ledger-Enquirer 5/24/06)

British CO Sentenced

After refusing to serve in Iraq, British CO and Royal Air Force doctor Malcolm Kendall-Smith was sentenced to eight months in prison on April 13, 2006. Found guilty on five charges of disobeying orders, Kendall-Smith asserted, "I have satisfied myself that the actions of the armed forces with the deployment of troops were an illegal act - as indeed was the conflict. To comply with an order that I believe unlawful places me in breach of domestic and international law, something I am not prepared to do."

(War Resisters' International 4/17/06)

Anti-War West Point Group Resists Name Change

A West Point Military Academy attorney has asked the founders of West Point Graduates Against the War to stop using the term "West Point," explaining that the name cannot be used in association with partisan groups. The group argues that they still adhere to West Point's Cadet Honor Code and are not anti-military. They are fighting to keep the name.

(Raw Story 5/19/06)

Macedonia Ends Conscription

Macedonian Defense Minister Joban Manasievski announced in April that Macedonia will abolish military conscription by the beginning of next year. The new professional army would have around 7,000 regular soldiers and 2,500 reserve troops. According to CO activists with Peace Action, this decision is in part a result of increasing in numbers of conscientious objectors in the country, 1,530 applications in 2005 alone.

(ISN Security Watch & Peace Action 4/11/06)

Advisory Council Meeting

Although CCW's annual advisory council meeting came at the end of an already packed weekend this year, it was no less valuable. Over coffee and bagels, it was both an opportunity for the public to get to know the Center and our work and for us to connect with our constituency. The day included a counter-recruitment workshop by American Friends Service Committee's National Youth and Militarism Program Associate Oskar Castro, a workshop on a military draft by CCW Counseling Coordinator Bill Galvin, an introduction to the Peace Tax Fund by National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund interim Executive Director Tim Godshall, and a GI Rights workshop with CCW Executive Director J.E. McNeil. Perhaps the highlight, however, was the keynote speaker, Monica Benderman, addressing the struggles of her husband Kevin as he became a military CO and was eventually imprisoned for his beliefs. Between her story and the aura of the entire weekend, it was easy to truly believe J.E. McNeil's words, "Everyone is a conscientious objector. They just don't know it yet."



CCW Executive Director J.E. McNeil gives her opening remarks



Monica Benderman recounts her CO husband Kevin's struggles

Lobby Day



Marcus Kroll, Bill Galvin, and Mya Wheeler lobby Kansas Representative Todd Tiahrt's office

On May 16, 2006 people of conscience gathered in Washington, D.C. and around the country in their home districts to lobby their Congress member on issues of conscientious objection. This year the lobby day was focused around protecting the rights of conscientious objectors in the military. Members of Congress were lobbied asking to support the Military CO Act, a bill that will further protect the rights of COs in the military. The lobby day was a great success in raising awareness and educating congressional staff and members about conscientious objection, as many in Congress are unaware that this is a real issue for members of the military.

For more information on the Military CO act and to find out how you can help visit:
www.CenterOnConscience.org/milco



CCW Lobbyist Theo Sittler provides some lobbying pointers

Mobilizing against the Draft

This discussion allowed participants to speak of the movements and experiences in their countries. Perhaps most significant was the report out of Macedonia that the government had just decided to abolish conscription the week before the conference! The military was responsible for placing conscientious objectors into civil service (alternative service). Approximately one out of every four people drafted received CO status. As this was becoming a drain on the military budget, they decided to abandon conscription.



What's Next? Developing Long-Term Strategy for an International CO Movement

All-in-all, the Operation Refuse War conference left a lasting impression and provided inspiration to keep doing this work. On Sunday, May 13 the conference was wrapped up with a discussion of strategy and ways in which to move forward in this movement. Suggestions included creating sister city relationships between conscientious objector organizations and peace and justice communities world wide, setting up better lines of communication via listserves and e-mail, further collaboration among smaller organizations in order to tackle larger projects, and systemizing CO laws in each country in order to share and compare them with others. In the end, the participants from Colombia made an invitation for the next conference to be held in their country, and everyone seemed eager to witness the range of work that continues to be accomplished there.



GI Rights Hotline Gathering

This was a great opportunity to place some faces with the names that each of us know from the Hotline. Around fifteen counselors from across the country, and even one from Germany, met to discuss some of the common issues, trends, and challenges we face in our counseling calls and other work surrounding GI Rights and conscientious objection. It was also a time to start thinking about the future of the Hotline and what changes could be made in the coming years. Luckily we will have the chance to further dissect these and other issues in a longer GI Rights Retreat in the fall, but this was a promising start.



From The Hill // Theo Sittler

One of the biggest problems when working for the Military CO Act, a proposed bill that would allow for a fair process of CO applications in the military, is that data on the number of CO applicants in a given year is difficult to obtain. The military report on these numbers is skewed, as they only count the applications that were processed. Generally, this amounts to a small number due the unfairness and the inconsistency of the current policy. Many who apply for CO status get frustrated with the system and end up getting out through other means. These people are never counted.

Real data is needed in order to convince members of Congress that there is a serious problem with the CO military discharge/reassignment process. Due to our lobbying efforts Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), a member of the Armed Services Committee, introduced an amendment to the FY 2007 National Defense Authorization Act. The amendment directs the Government Accountability Office to study and report on the number of CO applications from 1989 to 2006. It also specifies that all CO applications should be reported, even the ones that were never acted on or in which the applicant ended up getting out another way.

On May 11 the amendment was approved by the House and became part of the Defense bill. It was then sent to the Senate and is now awaiting conference between the Senate and the House for reconciliation with the Senate version, we expect them to pass. This is a small but important step toward working for the Military CO Act.

For more information on the Military CO Act please visit: www.CenterOnConscience.org/milco

Drivers' License Case Stymied

On July 11, 2005 the Center filed a court challenge to a Virginia law which requires young men to register with Selective Service before they can receive driver's licenses. The Court dismissed the case initially because the Center's client, Christopher Snyder-Beattie had not yet applied for a license and been rejected. After Christopher went through the motions of applying for a license and being turned down, the attorney for the state consented to a court order which permitted Christopher to file an amended lawsuit within seven days of the Court signing the order. Although the Court signed that order within several days, Christopher's attorney, CCW Executive Director J. E. McNeil, never

received a copy of it and therefore missed the seven day deadline. Although the Center has offered to file a new suit on behalf of Christopher, he and his family have decided not to pursue that course.

The Center thanks Catherine Snyder, Chris Beattie, and Andrew Snyder-Beattie for bringing this issue to the attention of the public in Virginia and for giving the Center an opportunity to brief and argue the case. At this point another family will need to step forward to allow us to end this violation of the rights of parents and children to make their own choice of conscience.



Looking Ahead

I came to the nation's capital as a young man searching for hope and trying to find his way in a world full of lies and deceit. Here I came across the Center by doing a simple internet search, and my time here has given me a newfound faith in pacifism. Bill has been a large factor in that with his ever so strong beliefs and built-up wisdom, even believing that Hitler could have been stopped by nonviolence. The person I will miss most has to be Theo, who is an inspiration and the guy I feel I most relate to. I wish the very best for him and his soon-to-be wife. Then there's Hannah. I hope I have as much fun doing my BVS year as Hannah seems to be having. Good luck getting to Norway or wherever you end up. Lastly, J.E. is like the mother who keeps everyone in line and runs the place. Not a lot would get done if it weren't for her. As long as she's in charge, the organization is in good hands. I'm going to miss everyone. Wish me luck. Joe



Sara Returns to CCW

My name is Sara Baldwin, and I am returning to CCW after completing my BA. I graduated from Mary Baldwin College (no relation) with degrees in Philosophy and Japanese studies. My study of philosophy has strengthened the ethically based beliefs that I have towards non-violence and conscientious objection. Currently I am taking a two year sabbatical from my education in order to work at CCW and then travel to Japan where I plan to teach English. I look forward to spending the next year working to further the goals of CCW.

Operation Refuse War Highlights



Eyes Wide Open

Our conference coincided with American Friends Service Committee's Eyes Wide Open exhibit on the human cost of the Iraq war. Pairs of boots lined Washington, D.C.'s National Mall, each representing a U.S. military casualty, and a field of shoes and Wall of Remembrance honored the Iraqis also killed. The four-day exhibit was accompanied by speakers, worship, and a silent march. We marched, wielding signs and representing COs from around the world.

Conscientious Objection as a Movement Building Tool

In this excellent discussion, a wide range of experiences emerged. In Colombia, where conscientious objection exists on paper but not in reality and people are conscripted at gunpoint by all of the armed actors, the CO movement is at a basic education and outreach level, concentrating on poor rural communities. Most encouraging was the report from Paraguay, where the CO law is complex, and it is difficult to understand the process. CO activists prepared a simple, one page form that fit within all the complexities of the law. In a very short time they went from 5 COs to over 120,000! Their movement was also somewhat helped when reports concerning the deaths of soldiers due to brutal treatment by the military were publicized.



International Support for Conscientious Objectors and War Resisters from the USA

Today soldiers have limited options to act on their convictions if they believe this war to be wrong. Unlike the Vietnam War, there is no legal refuge in the world. We looked at the work of the Military Counseling Network, located in Germany, which is active in counseling Conscientious Objectors in the US military and the efforts of peace groups in supporting the war resisters who have gone to Canada in refusal of this war in Iraq.

CO Rights in Congress and the U.N.

This workshop on protecting the rights of conscientious objectors in the United Nations and the U.S. Congress was led by Theo Sither of CCW and Andreas Speck of War Resisters International. The workshop focused on giving information about the activities in the U.N. and Congress around issues of conscientious objection. Andreas spoke about bringing the situation of U.S. conscientious objectors before the Human Rights commission. Theo spoke about working for the Military Conscientious Objection act in the U.S. Congress and working to reform and further protect the rights of those in the U.S. military who become conscientious objectors.



Building Support for COs from the Outside

Led by Marc Ligen of the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO), Clare Bayard of War Resisters' League (WRL), and Steven Potts of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), this workshop concentrated on what non-military organizations and individuals can do to support conscientious objectors. Much time was focused on the use of veteran support networks and services and what individual veterans could do to further connect with conscientious objectors. This included such existing services as the GI Rights Hotline and extended into brainstorming new methods to educate individuals in the military about conscientious objection and provide concrete assistance throughout the claim process. The many international perspectives created a wealth of experiences and ideas.



Building Bridges with Military Families and Veterans

This plenary focuses on how individuals and organizations could better support and understand conscientious objectors and their families. We heard from Tia Steele (Gold Star Families For Peace), Laura Costas (Military Families Speak Out), and Monica Benderman, wife of jailed conscientious objector Kevin Benderman. Each shared their own experiences about the different services and support (or lack there of) that they received as military family members. Monica especially emphasized the need for more concentration on helping service members and their families adjust to life after the military.

