

Conscience and Peace Tax International

Bulletin Number 4

20 April 2009

This message is about the value of writing a personal Statement of Conscience in response to government demands for taxes that finance war.

One couple in the United States, Philip and Louise Baldwin Rieman, redirected the military-related portion of their federal income taxes to life-enhancing organizations every year for nearly four decades. They wrote a series of statements to explain that paying for war, or preparations for war, violates their religious beliefs. These written statements were regularly shared with government officials, with elected representatives, and with many other people. The Riemans wrote clear expressions of their personal witness, and these statements continue to encourage each of us to listen to our own inner voice of conscience.

Phil and Louie were both killed in an ice-caused automobile accident on December 26, 2008 while traveling to a family gathering.



In September of last year, the Riemans prepared the following Statement of Conscience in support of a group human rights complaint that was endorsed by many people of various ethical and religious backgrounds and then submitted to an international body for review:

“As Christian pacifists and Church of the Brethren pastors, we see no moral difference between the conscription of our bodies to kill and the use of our money to kill. For over thirty years, we have refused to pay about fifty percent of our federal income taxes, although we always willingly pay the non-military portion.

We give the amount we withhold to life-enhancing programs and organizations that work for the cause of world peace

using peace-filled means. The government responds by attempting to intimidate us, by seizing funds from our bank account, by garnishing our wages, and it once took our family car by force to be sold at auction.

We are members of one of the historic peace churches. As such, we have strong convictions about the sanctity of human life. We cannot bodily be a part of state sponsored warfare, and we cannot in good conscience voluntarily pay the portion of income taxes that is used for war or war preparations. All of the people on this earth are children of God, created in the image of God, and we treasure them in spite of government declarations that some are "enemy" and therefore of no value.

We have few costly possessions, and we live with the uncertainty that anything we own may be taken from us by our government. We believe we are doing what God calls us to do, and we would go to jail before we would willingly pay taxes for war.”

Phil and Louie were long-time supporters of the effort to enact national legislation that

acknowledges and accommodates conscientious objection to military taxation. Their energetic support of this objective, and their presence at numerous organized events in Washington D.C., was inspirational. They are featured in numerous materials developed by the Peace Tax Foundation, including: a [bulletin insert](#); a DVD; a [story booklet](#); and a [YouTube clip](#).

The Riemans worked as community developers and grassroots peacemakers in East Africa for five years and then served as prophetic pastors in Iowa and Indiana. Phil and Louie were devoted to comforting those who suffer, and empowering people of faith to overcome the injustice which is so often its cause. They were deeply committed to non-violence, believing that hatred is only overcome by understanding and love.

Writing a Statement of Conscience can seem like a daunting task, but it also can be a liberating experience. Allow yourself the opportunity to compose a first draft. It can be as simple as one sentence, or it may require many paragraphs. The statement is for you, and for anyone else that you chose to share it with. It need not be based on the withholding of taxes, nor sent to government officials.

Phil and Louie Rieman were living proof of the importance of clearly expressing personal truth by writing statements of conscience.

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