
Defense Report

AUSA



You Don't Like War?—O.K., Don't Pay for National Defense!

From time to time people whose pacifist beliefs cause them to object to spending for national defense have raised the question of being permitted to divert their federal taxes to other uses. Some pacifists have tried to hold back the part of their taxes they thought would go to defense spending but wound up in jail for their effort.

Now a new aura of legitimacy has been supplied by duplicate bills introduced into the Senate by Senator Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) and into the House by Representative Ronald Dellums (D-Calif.). The legislation they propose would permit taxpayers with legitimate objection to war to pay their federal taxes into a World Peace Tax Fund. The language of the bills indicates that the fund would be used to finance research on non-violent ways to resolve international conflict, on disarmament efforts and on improvements in international health, education and welfare. The amount of taxes paid would be the same, but that originating from those who "conscientiously object" would wind up in the Peace Fund instead of in the general treasury.

Senator Hatfield and Representative Dellums are being realistic about the proposition. They don't see any chance for passage of their bills this year or for several years to come. They simply want to get the idea before the Congress and give it some exposure.

Well, the idea prompts many questions, the foremost of which is, "Why not permit any tax taxpayer to designate whichever one of his or her pet projects that needs assistance as the recipient of his federal taxes?" Or, with a negative cast, "Why shouldn't any taxpayer be able to designate projects for which he or she does not want their taxes to be spent?"

There are, after all, many millions of taxpayers who dislike the idea of federal support for welfare payments, for research on why a monkey grits its teeth and a whole host of activities that ricochet off the fringes of public opinion. Some taxpayers might even like to withdraw their support for the last Congressional pay raise.

Every taxpayer, in fact, has doubts about some aspects of the federal budget but the great majority can see the wisdom of having a budget that applies itself best to the common good. Pacifists may not concede that national defense is one of those expenditures in the common good but, if our definition of what is good for us continues to include the right to be free, the pacifist approach to maintaining that freedom does not square with the real world.