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What Is War Resistance?

By JESSIE WALLACE HUGHAN, Ph. D.

There is nothing new in the realization that war is both horrible beyond description and impossible to reconcile with either religion or ethics. The twentieth century, however, has found something else, the tragic absurdity of war. It has seen hatred between nations flare up and sink again at the bidding of organized propaganda; it has seen guiltless men blown to pieces, while the rulers who were responsible for their fate went free and it has seen victors and vanquished floundering helpless together in the morass of war and post-war finances.

We of the War Resisters League are not alone in our determination that this ghastly farce must never again be repeated. Our plan of action, however, is frankly different from that which was pursued by peace societies before the World War. Their efforts, for the most part, were directed to the bringing about of agreements for the mitigation of war and the pacific settlement of international disputes; and so well did they succeed that by 1914 nearly all governments were bound together by conventions as hopeful for peace in their day as the World Court and the Kellogg Pact for ours. Yet with the coming of war a moratorium was declared upon them all. There was not a belligerent who did not make clear that, where vital interest or victory was at stake, promises must go by the board.

Accordingly, while we welcome each and every effort for disarmament and the peaceful settlement of controversies, we cannot place any considerable reliance upon pacts made by governments which stand prepared for war. Some force must come into existence behind the treaties to make them more than "scraps of paper," and this force, in the nature of the case, cannot be that of armies and navies. What is it then?

A study of the facts has convinced us that there is one power alone which can prevent a government from declaring war in an actual crisis, and that is the knowledge that popular support, as expressed in men, money, and war service, will not be forthcoming.

The method of war resistance, accordingly, is the continuous organization of men and women for the refusal of all support to war, whether by bearing arms, subscribing to war funds, or performing non-combatant service as an aid to winning the war. Its power will grow in direct ratio to the number enrolled for this refusal, a number-small now while the movement counts thousands rather than millions, but greater with every man or woman who enrolls.

It is obvious, however, that war cannot be prevented merely by refusing service after hostilities have begun; on the contrary it is of the utmost importance that the strength of the opposition be known in advance. Every war resister, therefore, is asked to make written declaration of his decision in time of peace, in order that such refusal may help to keep his country out of war, and not merely act as an obstruction to a war already declared.

The number required to prevent any specific war will depend, of course, upon other factors present. Under favorable circumstances the method has already met more than once with success, as in the cases of the threatened war at the separation of Norway and Sweden and the projected expedition by Great Britain against Russia in 1921. It is clear that a majority is not necessary, nor even a very substantial minority, for one of the lessons forced upon us by the World War was this, that no government believes itself able to wage war without at least the appearance of 100% popular support. It was this conviction that led every belligerent to lavish millions in propoganda, for the urging not only of men to fight, but of women to knit and of children to sell war bonds.

It is the deliberate refusal of this popular support that will be able to put force behind international treaties and eventually abolish war and armaments; and the War Resister's International is already in a position to prevent at least the giving of 100% support. Even in the complete absence of pacifist organization at the outbreak of the World War there were thousands of young men in Great Britain and in the United States who endured prison and sometimes physical torture as "conscientious objectors." In view of the sections of the International now existing in at least twenty-eight different countries, we may expect the number of "objectors" to be many times multiplied in the event of another conflict.

You are now free from lying propoganda and the pressure of popular emotion and are now in a position to bring your own reason and conscience to bear upon your action in the next war. If that war comes, the issue will stand, as we know it stood in 1914—1918, not between one blundering group of nations and another, but between War itself and Humanity.

On which side are you ready to enlist?

A FEW OBJECTIONS ANSWERED—

1—"THE DECLARATION IS A PLEDGE AND I DO NOT LIKE PLEDGES." We conduct business by means of pledges and government by the registration and counting of names. The fight against organized war, like other serious matters, requires more than free lance action.

2—"WAR CAN BE ABOLISHED ONLY BY DESTROYING ITS ROOTS IN THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM." Duelling has disappeared, though its roots are still with us. If WAR is not speedily abolished, it will destroy our civilization and the progressive and radical movements with it. We must therefore fight both the cause of war and war itself.

3—"IT IS UNPATRIOTIC TO REFUSE TO DEFEND ONE'S COUNTRY." Our country can no longer be defended by force of arms. It is common knowledge that in the next war there will be no non-combatants and that it will be impossible to protect our cities from air and chemical attack. The one way to defend the persons and property of our country is to prevent war from being declared.

4—"TO REFUSE WAR SUPPORT IS TO BE A COWARD AND A 'SLACKER' ." In the World War the line was clearly drawn between "slackers" and "Conscientious Objectors" (or War Resisters). The slacker EVADED the draft through trickery, flight, or the securing of a safe job behind the lines. All "C. O.s" defied the draft openly, while a small heroic band of 450 "absolutists," by refusing non-combatant service, gave themselves up to a certain punishment. A coward is useless as a war resister.

5—"ONE'S DECISION SHOULD BE MADE UPON THE MERITS OF A SPECIFIC WAR, AND NOT IN ADVANCE." When a specific war is imminent, reasoned judgment becomes impossible, for facts are invariably suppressed and falsehoods freely circulated.

Tear off and mail your signed declaration to
WAR RESISTERS LEAGUE, Jessie Wallace Hughan, Secretary
171 West 12th Street, New York City

DATE.....

"War is a crime against humanity. I therefore am determined not to support any kind of war, international or civil, and to strive for the removal of all the causes of war."

Mr. Mrs. Miss

Permanent Address

School Address

Occupation

If you are between 18 and 30 years of age, please check ()

War Resisters League

(Affiliated with the War Resisters' International)

Our object is to unite men and women who have determined to give no support to any war, irrespective of the reasons—political, religious or humanitarian—which have led them to take this stand.

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Signers of our declaration are enrolled members of the War Resisters League: **ACTIVE MEMBERS** contribute at least one dollar or ten new memberships per year.

ACTIVE MEMBERS receive a subscription to "The War Resister," quarterly organ of the War Resisters' International, and other literature free of charge.

ACTIVE STUDENT MEMBERS (in groups) contribute one dollar for four members. They may receive "The War Resister" for an additional 30 cents per year.