

The War Resisters' International

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Affiliated Sections in :-

ENGLAND, HOLLAND, BULGARIA, UNITED STATES, CZECHO-SLOVAKIA, SWITZERLAND, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, HUNGARY, SWEDEN, DENMARK, AUSTRIA, FRANCE, U.S.S.R., FINLAND, BELGIUM, ROUMANIA, LITHUANIA, CANADA, POLAND, SPAIN, MEXICO, HONG-KONG, IRELAND, NORWAY.

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THE War Resisters' International was founded at Bilthoven, in Holland, in 1921, under the name of "Paco," by representatives of groups of war resisters in four European countries. In March, 1923, the headquarters was transferred to England and the name War Resisters' International was adopted.

To-day there are fifty-two organisations from twenty-five different countries, of four Continents, affiliated, and individual contacts in sixty-eight countries of the world.

THE DECLARATION.

The Declaration adopted at the first meeting of the International in 1921, and confirmed at each successive Conference since, is: "War is a crime against humanity. We therefore are determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war." To this Declaration each member subscribes.

A very remarkable Statement of Principles was drawn up at the first meeting fifteen years ago, and finally adopted at the first International Conference in 1925. Were this statement re-written to-day—1937—reference might be made to war to defend democracy or war for an ideal, but our Statement of Principles leaves us in no doubt. The War Resisters' International, while often impelled to sympathise with one side in a conflict more than with the other, recognises that the resort to armed violence, or any form of warfare, is damaging most of all to the "good cause."

DECLARATION.

"War is a crime against humanity. We therefore are determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war."

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES.

WAR IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY.

It is a crime against life, and uses human personalities for political and economic ends.

WE, THEREFORE,

actuated by an intense love for mankind,

ARE DETERMINED NOT TO SUPPORT

either directly by service of any kind in the army, navy, or air forces, or indirectly by making or consciously handling munitions or other war material, subscribing to war loans or using our labour for the purpose of setting others free for war service,

ANY KIND OF WAR

aggressive or defensive, remembering that modern wars are invariably alleged by Governments to be defensive.

Wars would seem to fall under four heads :—

- (a) *Wars to defend the State* to which we nominally belong and wherein our home is situated. To refuse to take up arms for this end is difficult :
 1. Because the State will use all its coercive powers to make us do so.
 2. Because our inborn love for home has been deliberately identified with love of the State in which it is situated.
- (b) *Wars to preserve the existing order of society* with its security for the privileged few. That we would never take up arms for this purpose goes without saying.
- (c) *Wars on behalf of the oppressed proletariat*, whether for its liberation or defence. To refuse to take up arms for this purpose is most difficult :
 1. Because the proletarian régime, and, even more, the enraged masses, in time of revolution would regard as a traitor anyone who refused to support the New Order by force.
 2. Because our instinctive love for the suffering and the oppressed would tempt us to use violence on their behalf.
- (d) *Wars organised under the auspices of the League of Nations* in the name of Sanctions to defend the Covenant or to maintain Collective Security against a so-called Aggressor State.

However, we are convinced that violence cannot really *preserve order, defend our home, liberate the proletariat or give security* to any nation. In fact, experience has shown that in all wars, order, security and liberty disappear, and that, so far from benefiting by them, the proletariat always suffers most. We hold, however, that consistent pacifists have no right to take up a merely negative position, but *must recognise*

AND STRIVE FOR THE REMOVAL OF ALL THE CAUSES OF WAR.

We recognise as causes of war not only the instinct of egoism and greed, which is found in every human heart, but also all agencies which create hatred and antagonism between groups of people. Among such, we would regard the following as the more important to-day :—

1. Differences between *races*, leading by artificial aggravation to envy and hatred.
2. Differences between *religions*, leading to mutual intolerance and contempt.
3. Differences between the *classes*, the possessing and the non-possessing, leading to civil war, which will continue so long as the present system of production exists, and private profit rather than social need is the outstanding motive of society.
4. Differences between *nations*, due largely to the present system of production, leading to world wars and such economic chaos as we see to-day, which eventualities, we are convinced, could be prevented by the adoption of a system of world economy which had for its end the well-being of the entire human race.
5. Finally, we see an important cause of war in the prevalent misconception of the State. The State exists for man, not man for the State. The recognition of the sanctity of human personality must become the basic principle of human society. Furthermore, the State is not a sovereign self-contained entity, as every nation is a part of the great family of mankind. We feel, therefore, that consistent pacifists have no right to take up a merely negative position, but must devote themselves to abolishing classes, barriers between the peoples, and to creating a world-wide brotherhood founded on mutual service.

CONSTITUTION.

The Basis of the International.

1. The basis of the organisation is the Declaration and Statement of Principles adopted at the first International Conference at Bilthoven, 1921, and amended at the Hoddesdon Conference, 1925.

Affiliation.

2. Organisations whose members individually accept the basis and principles are eligible for affiliation. In those countries where there are no eligible sections, individual members may be accepted. Applications of organisations for affiliation shall be endorsed by the International Council.

International Conference.

3. An International Conference shall be held at least every three years, to which affiliated organisations shall be entitled to send delegates, whose votes shall be according to the affiliated membership. The basis of voting shall be decided before each Conference by the International Council, but no organisation shall be entitled to more than five votes. The Triennial Conference shall determine the policy of the International (within the Basis and Principles) and shall elect the International Council and appoint the officers.

International Council.

4. The International Council shall act in the name of the International between the Conferences and shall supervise the work of the Secretariat. It shall consist of from five to nine members, and shall meet at least once a year.

Officers.

5. There shall be a Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary (or Secretaries). The officers shall serve as an administrative sub-committee and shall be responsible to the International Council and the International Conference.

Finance.

6. All affiliated organisations shall contribute affiliation fees based on their membership. The basic fee shall be 6d. (or its equivalent) per member per year. The International Council shall have liberty to increase or decrease the basic fee, after consultation with the affiliated organisations concerned, according to their circumstances. The International Secretariat shall have power to raise additional funds, but with the consent of the affiliated sections where the appeal is made. Every section will be expected to raise a special fund for the International, in addition to the affiliation fee.

General Relief Fund.

7. The International shall establish a General Relief Fund, which shall be administered at the discretion of the International Council, solely for the relief of such persons and their dependents who are brought to poverty as the result of (a) their religious or moral convictions; (b) national or international disaster.

War Resistance is not an end in itself, it is a way of life to achieve an end. The goal, in the expression of the Socialist, is Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; in that of the Christian it is Truth, Beauty, Love; a world where all can and will desire to co-operate for the common good.

THE COST TO THE INTERNATIONAL.

There are 493 war resisters in the prisons of Europe alone, young men who have resolutely resisted the conscription laws of their country and who face loss of liberty, ostracism, poverty and often death. Many thousands have passed through prison, many have died in prison or after release. You are not asked to pity them, you will need all your pity for the soldier boys blindly led to the shambles. The man in prison you can respect, look up to him as your leader in the struggle.

THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL.

The International is guided by a Council which is elected for three years at the Triennial Conference, which meets in a different country each time. The paid staff number three, the voluntary staff thirty-six. The budget is a little over £1,450 per annum and is raised by voluntary contributions.

The War Resisters' International has become a clearing house of ideas as well as a practical centre for the transfer of letters between countries where there is not even a postal convention providing for direct mail, or where censors are too difficult to avoid. The International acts as a banker, holding contra accounts to overcome the restrictions on transfer of currency. It serves the Movement in innumerable ways.

Sometimes it does big jobs, sending its representatives to International Labour Movements, Conferences and even to Governments.

The International has to speak in many tongues. Fourteen languages are normally used and for this the services of thirty-two voluntary translators have been enlisted who work regularly for the Movement.

The War Resisters' International publishes its quarterly bulletin, "The War Resister," in French, German, English and Esperanto, together with much other literature. Every publication goes into Russia in the Russian language. Several publications in Spanish are at the disposal of Spanish comrades, both in Spain and South America. Literature in Italian finds its way into Italy, while reprints appear in a dozen other languages.

THE SECTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL.

No adequate idea of the Sections and their work can be given here. Many are illegal, their work has to be carried on with great care, and our members take very considerable personal risks. The International often has to take over all records, and not only keep direct contact with the leaders of sections but with thousands of individual members. This work cannot be reported here.

In more democratic countries the Movement has grown rapidly in recent years. In Denmark, for instance, where the membership has been doubled each year for several years, 4,000 members in a little population of three million is considerable. The U.S.A. has 10,000 members in one Section and many thousands in another. In Canada, 2,000 have signed the Peace Pledge Union's Declaration and the International has had to take over direct contact pending the formation of the Canadian Peace Pledge Union, while in Great Britain a movement of a few thousand has now been merged into the great new organisation of the Peace Pledge Union, a hundred thousand strong.

Space is quite inadequate to convey the immensity of this world-wide family, living a way of life, forerunners of a Revolution that will one day make of the world a garden where all shall co-operate for the good of all.