

The Selective Service law of the United States requires all male citizens to register upon reaching their eighteenth birthday or within five days thereafter.

I shall be eighteen years of age on August 30, 1969, and shall refuse to register. On the following pages , I shall attempt to explain why.

—Jerry Howard Elmer

I. I am a Pacifist

That is, my opposition to the draft stems not merely from an opposition to the current war in Vietnam, but rather from an opposition to all wars. I could not cooperate with the Selective Service System even in "peacetime". The war in Vietnam could end tomorrow, and the basic nature and direction of American foreign policy would remain unchanged. Vietnam is not an isolated blemish tarnishing an otherwise noble record of American foreign policy. Vietnam is, rather, just another sore of the same disease that led us into Guatemala in <sup>1954</sup>~~1956~~, and into the Dominican Republic in 1965.

I believe that war is a crime against humanity, and I would therefore refuse participation in any war whatsoever. Furthermore, I cannot let myself be a part of any process which I consider to be a preparation for war.

In wars-- all wars -- soldiers are forced to slaughter human beings whom they have never seen before, who have done them no wrong. The only crime committed by those massacred in battle is that they happened to be born in a different country at the wrong time. I cannot comprehend that this could possibly be considered sufficient grounds for execution.

Wars have plagued mankind since time out of mind. For as long as we can remember, nations have armed themselves, behind the pretext of making themselves able to withstand an armed attack. And yet we find, too, that nations that have armed themselves have, almost invariably, been drawn into wars. Simply put, a nation that has no atomic bombs could not possibly launch a nuclear attack; a nation stockpiling such instruments is already on the road to using them. It is apparent to me that only when nations realize that armaments cannot secure peace will we have a chance of ending war.



Since I view the raising of a standing army as a preparation for war, and since I could not in good conscience participate in any war, it is only logical that I oppose this preparation for war. The time has long past when military solutions can be considered a workable means of resolving international conflict. Nations must now explore newer, nonviolent means of resolving conflict if man is to survive. We live at a time when the next global war will surely mean the end of life on this planet. We have lived in the atomic age for twenty-four years now. Simply because we have averted--sometimes most narrowly-- a nuclear holocaust in that short time is no reason to assume that we are now safe from that possibility. The continuing rise of militarism brings us closer to that tragedy daily. People refusing to associate themselves with this madness helps put an end to it.

In addition to being opposed to all organized violence, such as that found in modern warfare, I feel that any use of violence is unjust and wrong.

In the Old Testament, the ~~sixth~~ <sup>Fifth</sup> Commandment which Moses brought to the people of Israel from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:13) provides us with an excellent principle of human conduct. It says, "Thou shalt not kill." It does not say, "Thou shalt not kill, except if he's a Communist, or except if he's a Nazi, or except if he hit you first, or except..." It says simply, "Thou shalt not kill."

In the New Testament, both in Matthew (Matthew 6:39-6:47) and in Luke (Luke 6:27-6:38) Jesus tells those who would hear of the doctrine of love for ones fellow human beings. He tells the Jews to love even their "enemies" and to return for evil and hatred, love and kindness and goodness.

If we are all children of God, are all men not brothers? I hold human life sacred, and because of this sanctity, I can perceive

that of God in all human beings. I believe that any form of violence seeks to harm, seeks to destroy those who are essentially my brothers.

To say to one who believes in the inherent sanctity of human life that it is all right to kill human beings under certain circumstances, is self-contradictory, and seems to me to open up the door to insanity.

The Armed Forces trains systematic and organized murder. It furthermore represents a system that stands in direct conflict with the existence of human life and human freedom. I find that this is a process with which I cannot cooperate at all. In as much as registration is the first step in manpower procurement, it is here that I find I must draw the line. I cannot in conscience lend myself to this insanity.

## II. But Why Non-Registration?

If it is the army, and killing which I oppose, why do I refuse to register for the draft? No one is hurt by merely registering. Why not register, and accept a student deferment, or a Conscientious Objector classification?

Specifically, I am opposed to the student deferment because it is discriminatory. It discriminates against the poor, and against the Black-- and against all those who do not have the money or the cultural background needed to get into college. I would never call a Jew a "kike" or a black person a "nigger" and I would never deny anyone a job on the basis of the color of his skin, because of the discrimination involved in such an act. If I accepted a student deferment, I would be participation in a discriminatory process, and this I cannot do.

Similarly, the Conscientious Objector classification discriminates against the poor and the Black, who have not had access

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to the educational and cultural background needed to get a C.O. The C.O. discriminates against those who are conscientiously opposed to participation in a particular war, but are not conscientiously opposed to all wars. It discriminates against those who are conscientiously opposed to participation in all wars but are not religious. And so, I could not accept a Conscientious Objector classification, either.

But there are deeper, more important reasons why I wouldn't accept a student deferment, or conscientious objector status, and why, indeed I wouldn't accept any classification whatsoever.

I am opposed to the draft. It forces people to kill other people, and it represents a form of involuntary servitude. I ask: If one opposes the draft, how is one to manifest this opposition? By cooperating with it every step along the way, by registering at age eighteen, as the law requires, and by going through all the properly established legal procedures for obtaining a deferment? Or does one manifest this opposition by not cooperating with it at all?

I say that since I am so deeply opposed to the draft, I do not want to cooperate with it at all. Rather, I wish to throw the entire weight of my whole being against it.

## XII. The Resistance

By refusing registration, I shall be joining the Resistance, a national group of young men who have taken positions similar to mine.

I believe that one of the great beauties of the Resistance is the great diversity of opinions held by its members. When one "joins" the Resistance, one doesn't sign a membership pledge,



or take an oath of some sort. The Resistance consists of young men of widely differing ideologies, united by their common opposition to the draft.

Many members of the Resistance, for example, are pacifists, such as myself, people who oppose all war and all preparations for war. Many are not pacifists, people who are simply oppose the current direction of American foreign policy. These are people who might have fought in World War II, or if our country were invaded.

I believe that in addition to the moral validity of such a position of non-cooperation, this position has a great deal of political validity as well.

Since peace time conscription was established in this country in 1948 many people have been opposed to it. But while being opposed to it, they have gone along with it--and that is why we still have conscription today.

In his now-famous memo on "Channeling", the director of the Selective Service System, General Louis Hershey wrote that it is a minor function of the Selective Service System to get a mere few thousand inductees each month. However, he says, by the system of registration, selective deferments, and by using the "club of induction" (his words), the Selective Service System is able to channel the entire male segment of today's youth into areas which Hershey considers of "greater importance". He explains that this "is the American or indirect way of achieving what is done by direction in foreign countries where choice is not allowed."

It is apparent through this statement that the government is not particularly concerned about those who while opposing the draft go along with it, by registering and by accepting deferments. These people the government has succeeded in channelling. However, those who oppose the draft and refuse to be any part of it do present the government serious

problems.

Let me give an example of what I mean by the political validity of non-cooperation.

Three years ago Governor Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon was elected to the United States Senate. One of the first things he did as a Senator was to introduce a bill that would abolish the draft. That bill received one vote--that of Senator Hatfield.

Undaunted, Senator Hatfield introduced the same bill the following year. This time it received three votes. This year Hatfield, a Republican brought the bill up, it was introduced by a bi-partisan committee of nine Senators, including Mike Mansfield, a Democrat, and Senate majority leader.

In addition, President Nixon is seriously talking about ending the draft when the war is over. I believe that he honestly means to do this, not because of any moral scruples he has about conscription, but rather because he sees that his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson was thrown out of office because of his unpopularity of the war and the draft, and that it would be politically shrewd for him to end the draft.

I believe that it is only politically shrewd for the men in government--the Nixons and the Hatfields and the Mansfields--to do away with the draft as long as there is real opposition to it. I don't believe that this real opposition comes from those who while being opposed to the draft are prepared to go along with it. Rather I think it comes from those who oppose it by refusing their cooperation with it.

I hope to marry some day, and because I don't want my sons to be plagued by this monstrosity, I find it necessary to oppose it with all my body and all my soul, and with all the strength that God will give me.

#### IV. What About Prison?

Since I have chosen this way for myself, I realize that I shall probably have to spend some portion of my life in prison.

I do not see going to prison as an end in itself, but rather as the unpleasant, but inevitable result of my conscientious actions. I certainly do not relish the thought of spending part of my life behind bars, but I also realize that this will not be the end of the world for me, and that I will come out of prison after having served my time.

Although the government shall imprison my body, would I not, in a deeper sense, be a prisoner if I did not resist the draft? Since I find that my conscience would be imprisoned by obedience to unjust laws, then in order to be truly free I would have to violate those laws. If I registered for the draft, I would consider myself a prisoner; in prison I shall consider myself a free man. I am reminded of Father Dan Berrigan, who, while facing the prospect of eighteen years in jail for having destroyed draft files at Catonsville, Maryland, climbed up on the bars of the local lock-up and pointed to everyone on the outside as prisoners.

Prison can also be a political tool.

Once when Gandhi ran counter to the British colonialists in India, and was brought to trial for his transgressions he, upon being convicted, requested that the judge impose a maximum sentence. A similar request was recently made by a citizen of South Africa who has run astray of the oppressive apartheid system of that government at his sentencing.

These men realized that one of the most effective coercive levers available to any government is the threat of incarceration. As long as the government can effectively say, "Either you buckle under or we shall throw you in jail," they have got the upper hand. However, when



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they are met by masses of people saying, "Throw us in jail. See if that stops our opposition to your policies," they will have been deprived of one of their most effective coercive levers.

In his famous essay on civil disobedience, Henry David Thoreau wrote that in a slave state, the only house in which a free man could abide with honor is the prison. Could this not also rightly be said about the warfare state? Would my actions not be suspect if they did not run in direct opposition to a society which deals in such wholesale violence? Dan Berrigan again: "If we were not in trouble, that would be trouble indeed!"

#### V. Civil Disobedience

Violating the laws of the land is a very serious matter, and should only be done with extreme caution.

I subscribe to that form of civil disobedience which was described by Staughton Lynd as that form in "which the disobedient says, in effect, I feel I cannot obey this particular law. However, I shall disobey it in such a manner that any immediate adverse consequences fall on myself, rather than on others. Furthermore, if in the judgement of society I am to be punished for my act I shall accept that punishment in the hope that I have accomplished something that I could not have accomplished otherwise."

That is, the action must first be nonviolent. If I would oppose the draft by shooting General Hershey, an immediate adverse effect of my action would be that General Hershey would be dead. However, because I am undertaking my actions nonviolently, the only person who could possibly suffer would be myself; I may have to spend part of my life in prison. (This, of course, would not be so for the person who violates the law by going through a red light, or by shooting someone.)

In addition, by doing this act publicly, rather than clandestinely,

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I am clearly demonstrating my willingness to accept the consequences of my action. Rather than going underground, as most lawbreakers do, I hope that through my openness, I can encourage others to take the same step.

Furthermore, I believe that while I will be disobeying the law of the land, I shall, in a larger sense, be obeying the law. I shall be obeying a higher law, the law which says, "Thou shalt not kill," the law which says "All men are brothers."

At Nuremburg we tried, convicted and executed Nazis for not disobeying the laws of the land when those laws involved the perpetration of crimes against humanity. I believe all war and all preparation for war to be a crime against humanity. It is said that the wise can learn from the past mistakes of others, but that only the foolish are impervious to the lessons of history. If I do not devote my entire existence to the eradication of these wrongs which I condemn, am I not an accomplice in these crimes?

Many people fear great disorder if everyone were free to pick and choose which laws they will obey and which laws they won't obey. To this, I can only respond as Dan Berrigan did at Catonsville, Maryland, on May 17, 1968: "We say: killing is disorder, life and gentleness and community and unselfishness is the only order we recognize. For the sake of that order, we risk our liberty, our good name."