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Make donations, not war

Tax resisters send money to six local charities, not the government

By BOB AUDETTE, Reformer Staff

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BRATTLEBORO -- Six local charities were the direct beneficiaries of a protest against the federal government on Saturday.

The charities received checks from a group of tax resisters who refuse to pay federal taxes on the basis of their opposition to militarism, or the domination of civil society by the military-industrial complex.

War tax resisters "oppose militarism and war and refuse to complicitly participate in the tax system which supports such violence," according to the National War Tax Resisters Coordinating Committee's Web site. "Through the redirection of our tax dollars NWTRCC members contribute directly to the struggle for peace and justice for all."

In all, \$5,000 was given to charities, including to the Windham County Reads program, to a group starting a community garden on Upper Dummerston Road and to the Citizens Awareness Network, a local activist group.

Morningside Shelter received almost \$800 from the tax resisters.

"We are opening a new building for homeless pregnant women and those who have just given birth," said David Mattocks, the executive director of the shelter. "This is a significant contribution to that project."

Daniel Sicken, an East Dummerston resident and a member of Tax Resisters of Conscience, said, though he pays local and state taxes, he hasn't paid federal taxes in 24 years. He said giving the money instead to charity is much more appropriate.

"Redirecting taxes is very much a part of the war-resistance movement," said Sicken. Sicken said the war resistance movement started shortly after World War II by people who were concerned about using America's military might for less than altruistic reasons. He said many of the war resisters today base their opposition on moral or religious grounds.

"But it's hard to be a resister," said Sicken. "It has a lot of rewards, but also a lot of difficulties." Sicken said though he has never been prosecuted for his failure to pay federal taxes, he and other

resisters have had to learn to live with very little money or within the barter economy -- trading goods and services for other goods and services.

"It's an alternate way of doing things," he said. "Of learning to live without money."

"Not paying taxes has liberated me from consumer society which has improved the quality of my life," said Ellen Kaye, a 43-year-old Brattleboro resident who said she stopped paying federal taxes after a trip to Nicaragua in 1988.

Kaye said she saw how her tax dollars were being used to kill innocent people and she was disgusted. She said when it came time to file her taxes that year, she became physically ill, thinking about where her money was going.

Her husband, Bob Bady, 53, of Brattleboro, said the last time he paid federal taxes was during the Vietnam war. He said though he was 18 at the time, he refused to serve in the military.

"And if I'm not willing to fight, why would I pay for someone else to fight for me?" asked Bady.

A representative of Military Families Speak Out said though she might not agree 100 percent with the war resisters, she appreciated the more than \$750 they gave her to help her pay expenses. Linda Ide, of Newbury, said she has family members in the military and Speak Out group was formed to support the troops by bringing them home and taking care of them when they get back.

"You can support the troops and oppose the war," said her husband, Brad Vietje, who added he was concerned that the government was spending billions of dollars in Iraq while cutting services to veterans in the states.

"In Vermont, psychological and medical services for veterans are being overwhelmed," said Vietje.

Tax resister Erik Schickendanz distributed the checks, saying the distribution was a "celebration of acts of conscience and the possibilities of peace."

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