

The Round Table

ST. LOUIS CATHOLIC WORKER

THE DRAFT

"the right to object conscientiously to war in general and the right of selective conscientious objection to a particular war should be acknowledged by government & protected by law."

the Catholic Bishops of the U.S.

Nov. 11, 1976

THE DRAFT IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

- JAY ALBERG, S.J.

Jay is a Jesuit scholastic and treasurer of the St. Louis Coalition Against the Draft (S.C.A.D.). He often works and prays with us.

By the time you read this, young men all over the country, age 19 and 20, will be faced, with registering for the draft. In many ways these quite unbelievable events have happened so fast--and yet it is also quite understandable. It is critical that we view draft registration in its overall context. That is, as one moment in an overall process whose goal or telos is war. It is war which we oppose, and it is only in this context that our opposition to draft registration is intelligible.

President Carter proposed draft registration to counter the perceived threat raised by the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. He called the Middle East an area of "vital interest" to the United States, which must be protected, even militarily. The United States is more ready to accept draft registration because of the anger and frustration felt by

its citizens as the Iranians continue to hold some of our number hostage.

There are, of course, many ways of attacking the draft as a response to the above situations. I do not wish to attack. I would like to view the situation from a Gospel standpoint and issue an invitation for people to consider what is the Christian response.

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All claim to be in favor of peace. Some say, "Only increased military preparedness can guarantee peace." Certainly better weapons and large armies have delayed war, but they have never stopped it; as a matter of fact, they are necessary for war.

Others point to our right to a legitimate defense. This position is not without its ambiguities. Even if we grant that a Christian has a right to defend him or herself, (which I do not believe to be the case), against what threat is the United States defending itself? With all our present power, could we stop the Iranians from taking our embassy? Could we prevent Russia from taking over Afghanistan? At present, the threat is against our lifestyle, not our lives. It is for our af-

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fluence that we are willing to register our young to die. We will rob them of their freedom, indoctrinate them to hate and order them to kill in order to insure our present standard of living.

There are questions that are raised by the anti-draft position. Do we defend, or at least tolerate, the aggression of the Soviet Union, while condemning our own? Do we sit here comfortably while the hostages endure yet another day as prisoners? Do we hold nothing dear in terms of values, freedoms or the lives of our loved ones?

In short, is there nothing we will die for?

My hope is that the anti-draft position requires more courage than it takes to shoot a rifle or push a button. My hope is that we do have values for which we will die. My hope is that there is nothing for which we will kill. Nothing for which we return evil for evil. Rather, my hope is that we will love our enemies. . . that the day is here when some, maybe only a few, will--with the grace of God--take the Gospel seriously, take our Lord seriously, and lay down our lives for our friends.

We cannot tolerate evil. We cannot condemn the injustice of just the United States or only the Soviet Union. We cannot take for granted our freedoms or our responsibilities. But neither can we distort the Gospel. We cannot compromise it for food or drink, much less for oil.

I believe that supporting draft registration is such a distortion. I say this with not a little trepidation, knowing that many fine men and women who profess Christ, and live that profession far better than I do, support it. But, I cannot remain silent. I invite them to think again. †



REMINISCENCES OF THE DRAFT PAST

-CHRIS BUTLER

Chris worked as a draft counselor during the Viet Nam war and is a member of the St. Louis Catholic Worker community.

The recent reinstatement of draft registration by the U.S. government causes a spate of nostalgia for me, recalling to mind my years as a draft and military law counselor. In reminiscing, the good old days, (which in reality were neither better nor worse than the present), gain a patina of charm merely because of the passage of years. It is one of the saving graces of our memory that good endures these more clearly than evil.

My recollections of the draft and its bitter effects on this society have gained no such charm, however. My memory of it is raw, bitter and agonizing. I remember dealing with the families who were horribly divided because a draft-age son or brother filed for conscientious objector status. And young men, making lonely decisions to flee to Canada to escape forced military "service." And AWOL soldiers, confused, without resources, unable to live within the military, with no way to get out of it safely.

Now our government is telling us to secure our freedom by losing it.

But my most vivid recollection is the rage I felt, in myself and in my draft-age brothers, rage against a society structured so that we felt powerless to prevent this enforced slavery and slaughter. We felt coerced into fighting a war we could not win for a cause in which we had no faith. The experience helps me

She asked what my intentions were, my goals and my needs. I remember how ashamed I was, how I wanted to say the right words to impress her. But she knew. My greatest need was to belong, to regain my foothold into myself.

I suppose seeing this need so often, these smiling people become familiar with its expressions.

How easy it is for us to lie to ourselves, to say, "I need this," or "I need to do that," when in truth, the "I" in us is crying, begging for reassurance. Yes, she knew my needs and I met her qualifications. This was to be my "home" until I was fully capable of functioning again.

So my reflections are not only gratitude, but if anything I can say or write will continue that warm smile, or motivate a fellow being to put forth the effort, just one more day, despite the perpetual frustrating crises, then let it be said. This former Karen-ite said, "Thank you smiling sisters. Thank you amicable Workers, that someone saw my need and smiled that 'openness of acceptance' so desperately needed in today's world."



Nathan Zobrow, OSB

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AND A NOTE...

We would like to share with you the following letter that the Karen House community is sending to various agencies that make referrals of people in need of emergency shelter. Because we don't have a limit on the length of time our guests may stay, we do not have a very high "turn over" rate and feel that it does more harm than good to have our house listed as an "emergency shelter" in the same category as shelters that have, for instance, a one night or three night time limit.

Dear Friends,

We of the Karen Catholic Worker House are writing this letter to share with you some developments in our work of providing hospitality. When Karen House opened in 1977, we provided short term emergency shelter for women and children.

Although we still provide short term emergency shelter for some women and children, a goodly proportion of our guests are people who came to us in an emergency who have stayed at Karen House because they have nowhere else to live. As time has passed, these more long term guests have constituted a larger and larger propor-

tion of our community, and even our short term guests seem to stay for a month or two. This development is not unwelcome by us: it results from the Catholic Worker philosophy of personalism, which stresses a commitment to the personhood of each of our guests as opposed to the more functional or quantitative aspects of providing hospitality. It is simply not within the Worker philosophy to require our guests to adhere to set time limits.

As a result of this development, however, we have concluded that it is unkind to those who are seeking emergency housing to have Karen House listed as one of the "emergency shelters" to which people are routinely referred: in the vast majority of cases, we dash their expectations because there is simply no room in our inn. When room opens up for new guests, we will contact the people and agencies who send our guests to us and fill the vacancy quite quickly in that manner.

We believe that this change in "process" more accurately reflects the dearth of housing, emergency or otherwise, for the poor of our city and that it will remove one useless phone call by people who don't have 20¢ to waste.

Let us close with a hope that more people will come forth to shelter the homeless of our city.

In peace,
Karen Catholic Worker House

YOU AND THE DRAFT

The following article is composed entirely of excerpts from a pamphlet issued by the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors entitled "You and the Draft." The pamphlet was issued in February of this year, shortly after the President's State of the Union Message. C.C.C.O. is located at 2208 South Street, Philadelphia, PA 19146 (215/545/4626).

Whether to resist the draft or not is a decision only you can make. You may decide that prison is not the worst thing that could happen to you, or you may decide that you should comply with the law and follow the legal alternatives. In either case, counseling on your options is essential.

PROTECT YOURSELF. FOLLOW THESE SUGGESTIONS.

--Keep informed. CCCO's News Notes (free) covers the draft and other issues of interest and importance to draft-age people. Write for it.

--Decide what to do. You may decide that you should go if drafted, or that you're against war and won't go. But you should decide now, not when the draft is breathing down your neck.

--Build a record. Selective

Service won't process any claim for deferment or exemption right now. But you can get your views and your claims on record. If you object to war, write for CCCO's "Conscientious Objector Card" and register with the CCCO. Get letters to support a hardship, medical or CO claim. --Consider counseling other young people on their options. If you want to do this work (call Mary, Virginia or Mary Ann at Karen House: 621-4052). --And most of all, ask questions: ask questions of your Congress member, about whether a draft is needed. And ask questions of yourself, about where you stand. ●



Lulise Gilk

If you, or someone you know wants to talk about options for those facing registration for the draft, feel free to call Mary, Virginia or Mary Ann. 621-4052.

if you are interested in working with the St. Louis Coalition Against the Draft, you can call the same people.

a good resource for written information is:
CCCD News Notes
2208 South Street
Philadelphia PA
19146
212-545-4626

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