

STAND (or sit) FOR PEACE



PEACE VIGIL

INTERNATIONAL CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' DAY

**SUNDAY 15 MAY 2016 3 - 4 p.m.
Morrab Gardens, Penzance**

preceded by a Peace Picnic

Please wear something white
Bring a banner or placard if you can

Organised by the Cornwall Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. WILPF was founded in 1915 by 1200 women from 12 countries who braved the dangers and difficulties of war-time travel to meet in The Hague to discuss how the war – and all wars – could be ended, promoting international co-operation rather than patriotic militarism.

For more information about the vigil or to join our group or mailing list, please contact us: brigittemorrigan@talktalk.net phone 07909617558
<http://www.wilpf.org.uk/get-involved/cornwall-group/>

A booklet giving more information about Conscientious Objectors in WW1 is available from us or from WILPF.

A Brief History of Conscientious Objection

15th May is International Conscientious Objectors' Day, introduced in 1985 by the International Conscientious Objectors' Meeting [ICOM] to focus world attention on conscientious objection.

2016 marks the centenary of the first inclusive legal right of conscientious objection. The Military Service Act to conscript soldiers to fight in WW1 was passed by the British government in January 1916. It contained a legal clause [drafted by 2 Quaker Liberal MPs] allowing potential soldiers to refuse to fight on the grounds of conscience. It was promoted by the No-Conscription Fellowship, run increasingly by women as the men were arrested.

16,000 British men registered as COs in WW1. Being a CO was no easy option. More than 80 British COs died either in prison or as a direct result of their experience there. Many more were made physically or mentally ill and not all recovered. COs and their families often suffered threats and intense social stigma, and were refused employment and ostracised after WW1 ended. Many applicants were refused exemption by the tribunals and were then treated as deserters: court-martialled, imprisoned, sentenced to years of hard labour or even shipped to France and threatened with execution by firing squad. Some were still in prison many months after WW1 ended.

We honour those brave men in WW1 and all women and men across the world since who have had the courage of their convictions, refused to fight and suffered as a result. We feel it is especially important to honour and remember those who said NO to World War One and to put a different, feminist point of view:

War

We honour and grieve for all those who suffered and died in WW1 and in all wars: the displaced civilians, bereaved families and raped/sexually abused women [women and children have always borne the worst consequences of warfare, despite the numbers of men who have died fighting]; the courageous COs who suffered heavily and/or died for their beliefs; all the millions of soldiers killed, maimed or traumatised by fighting. We grieve also for the massive environmental destruction and degradation which war always causes. We believe that this sad remembering, rather than glorifying war and making soldiers into heroes, should become once more the focus of Remembrance Day in November.

We believe that war is incompatible with the concept of the sister/brotherhood of all humanity, and that deliberate killing is incompatible with the belief that all human life is sacred, as cherished in most major religions and enshrined in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

History and today's newspapers show us that military intervention rarely succeeds in stopping war, injustice or terrorism; instead violence creates more violence. WW1 'the War to End All Wars' did not; instead it directly sowed the seeds of Nazism and WW2. We call instead for initiatives to make and promote peace: to talk to rather than kill each other, diplomatic intervention and mediation of conflicts, negotiating with a willingness to compromise, and the inclusion of women and gender-perspectives at all levels of decision- and peace-making, as per the UN Security Resolution 1325 in 2000.

Conscientious Objection Today

We call on all countries to end compulsory conscription and to introduce the option of conscientious objection [still not allowed in too many countries].

We support those advocate that "The Right to Refuse to Kill" be added to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to conscientious objection to military service is not yet explicit in Article 18 of the UDHR: *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*

We support the Taxes for Peace Bill 2016. One hundred years on, we are still not permitted 'absolute exemption' from military service, as we remain financially conscripted through our taxes