

TESTAMENT OF A RADICAL PACIFIST

upon the occasion of Dave Harris' trial for draft refusal

by Roy Kepler

I have, during my adult life, been concerned about war and conscription, and I have been involved with a number of others in efforts to end conscription and to develop peaceful alternatives to war.

I was, in my own childhood and youth, imbued with certain moral and religious values drawn from the society around me which led me to become anti-war and inclined toward pacifist principles. The public schools where I grew up in Denver during the 20's and 30's had an anti-war curriculum. I was influenced by the non-violent message of Jesus in the church I was required to attend-- even though I was dismayed as a youth at the gap between the preachments and the practices of the adult community. I was influenced by the nonviolent examples and philosophies of Gandhi, Thoreau, the American Quakers, Albert Einstein, Jane Addams, Kirby Page, Norman Thomas, John Haynes Holmes and a multitude of others who concerned themselves with problems of racial discrimination, war and peace, poverty and social justice. All of these influences together led me to a pacifist conviction, so that I became a conscientious objector in World War II. It was as a conscientious objector that I was educated in the anti-democratic, anti-human aspects of conscription.

While my brother went to prison, I accepted alternative service and entered a camp administered overall by the Selective Service, and specifically by General Hershey. We were told that Selective Service was a civilian agency and that General Hershey, Colonel Koosch, Colonel McLean, and all the other colonels were really civilian, since they were "loaned" to Selective Service by the Army.

Inside that civilian public service program we were required to work without pay at any job Selective Service might set up for us. We were told that as conscriptees we no longer had any rights but only privileges, and that Selective Service could refuse any privilege it chose.

Like many another in that context I came to see conscription itself was wrong: a misuse of individual human beings for the ends of the state. Thus I came to be opposed to conscription as well as war.

In the period of 1947-1949 I worked with many other opponents of war and conscription to organize a movement of draft resistance to the newly enacted (in 1948) draft law. We worked to oppose the passage of the law before it was passed. We worked to abolish it and to urge non-cooperation with it, after it was passed.

Among those involved in that effort were A.J. Muste of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Evan Thomas of the War Resisters League, Milton Mayer, David Dellinger, Bayard Rustin, James Farmer (of Congress of Racial Equality), George Houser (now the director of the American Committee on Africa), Donald Harrington, successor of John H. Holmes as minister of the Community Church of New York, Cecil Hinshaw, President of William Penn College in Iowa, Jessie Wallace Hughan, founder of the War Resisters League, Dwight MacDonald, critic, and many other prominent persons active as teachers, professionals, clergymen, plus many students and veterans of World War II.

The various anti-war and anti-racial efforts of the 1950's and 1960's continued to engage many thousands of nonviolent activists -- most notably, for example, Martin Luther King, John Lewis and other founders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Norman Cousins, S. Stuart Hughes, Ira Sandperl, Dr. Benjamin Spock and whole new generations of young people concerned with

applying, not just announcing, their best values. It was during this period that nonviolence (i.e. the rejection of violence and the turning toward truthful relationships and non-injury of others) became an American household word. Martin Luther King received the Nobel Prize and world renown as the champion of nonviolence. David Harris, obviously a young man of exceptional intelligence and awakened social concern, could not help but be influenced by the philosophy and example of at least some of the people --or others like them-- who have before him thought and acted from deepest conviction and conscience. His view about war, conscription, and the societies that live under war and conscription must, in at least part, be influenced by his reading about, or meeting with some of the activists of the past. For example, David was one of those students who at the age of 18 or 19 went into Mississippi in 1964 to work there with the nonviolent effort to achieve community building and voter registration. There he met and worked with people long active in pacifist, civil rights, and related groupings; he saw examples of others who tried to act out their best values rather than to suppress them.

David, more recently, during the time he was Student Body President at Stanford, worked for me in my business in Menlo Park. One reason he came to me for employment was that he knew something of my views and activities, and he knew we shared ideas in common. Therefore, when confronted with a warmaking government and a conscription law, David is not wilfully striking out in some nihilistic fashion to violate the law. Rather he is doing what many young men now and before him have had to do: he is refusing to cooperate with conscription out of the view that no man should cooperate with slavery, nor with his own enslavement. He is opposing the draft because he is supporting human dignity and individual freedom. His action can only be seen as one more contribution in the long struggle between the human conscience and the authoritarian demands of the state.

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