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People

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## Pacifists and Civil Defense

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## PACIFISTS AND CIVIL DEFENSE

The following is a brief summary of a discussion on Civil Defense held in Fendle Hill, February 5 and 6, 1951, under the auspices of the Consultative Peace Council. It is published not as a formal or definitive statement but as a suggestive and as a preliminary to a more thorough study of the problems which pacifists and other citizens face in connection with Civil Defense programs.

Participation in Civil Defense programs is often urged on the ground that their objective is to provide succor for people caught in disasters such as bombing, and presumably every one ought to be willing and eager to assist in such matters and to undergo training so that this assistance may be as efficient as possible. Pacifists do want to share fully in meeting human needs and not least in times of overwhelming disaster. They do not want to wait until called upon much less conscripted to render utmost help in such situations. It seems advisable that pacifists should make this clear from the outset, and it seemed clear to the group that those in charge of a church or school e.g. might indicate in reply to a query from a defense organization that the building would be available to house refugees fleeing from a bombed area.

Defense programs are, however, not confined to the calm, efficient, preparation against possible disaster. For one thing, the atmosphere in which so-called defense activities are carried on is usually that of preparedness for war and development of a war psychology, including hatred of the enemy. Not seldom this serves to maintain and further whip up the hysteria against liberal ideas and persons which is already far too rife. Such preoccupation with the idea of war and acceptance of war as inevitable may itself help to bring on the war which would be an indescribable catastrophe. The main concern of Americans today should be to prevent the man-made disaster of war. Pacifists will wish to devote themselves to this task and to decline in participation in so-called "defense" activities which are mainly calculated to build up a war psychology.

In this connection it was noted that there might well be an important difference between certain activities at a time when war is actually on and disaster has occurred or is clearly imminent, in legal terms where there is "a clear and present danger" and the same activities in peace time. Experience in other countries seems to have demonstrated that there may be much waste of money and effort involved in elaborate "defense" activities and training in peace time. Attention was called to a report from England to the effect that Friends and others "stood aside from the organizations under civil defense" in the early days, in part because of a feeling that until the emergency actually came, it was difficult to see just where the human need would be greatest; in part because of a wish not to get enmeshed in the war machine. There is an almost unanimous opinion among Pacifists in Britain that "this waiting policy was justified by events." It would seem that by not rushing into "defense" activities, even though in themselves they appear innocuous, American pacifists today may help to contribute to maintaining the spirit of calm and freedom from fear which is now so important and be the better able to render efficient aid if disaster should actually come.

Not only are "defense" programs often carried on in an atmosphere of war preparation but there is an actual link at many points between the

civil defense program and the military machine and its activities. Since by definition pacifists cannot take part in war, this is another reason why they should exercise great care about being drawn into civil defense work. An action has to be considered in its context and if it is a part of a war machine a pacifist will desire to avoid it, just as a loyal citizen may have no objection in ordinary circumstances to make it known that he is not a Communist and yet refuse to take a "loyalty oath." It is suggested, therefore, that even if a pacifist undertakes to engage in some specific activity, in connection e.g. with fire fighting, he may wish to keep off civil defense committees which might easily involve his being gradually made part of the war machine. Secondly, he will presumably wish to bear witness to his pacifist convictions in such situations, making it clear that it is out of concern for human need and not any desire to support war that he shares in humanitarian activities.

A special concern was expressed over reports that in a considerable number of places defense programs are carried out in such a way as to develop war-mindedness and in some instances feelings of terror in children. Similar concern was felt over the tendencies illustrated by a county civil defense publication which stated that "school authorities should 'clean house' of Communistic-tainted Liberal (sic) teachers and their dangerous and insidious effects on young minds." It is clearly necessary to try to determine what measures may be necessary for the physical protection of children and to see to it that school systems confine themselves to carrying out such measures. Any attempt to use the civil defense organization as an instrument to intervene in school policy, to produce conformity in teachers, to secure the dismissal of teachers of independent spirit, etc. should be regarded as completely inadvisable and should be resisted. A special responsibility rests in all such matters affecting the schools and civil liberties on individual and groups in local communities throughout the country.

An important new issue will be raised for pacifists if, as has happened in other countries, conscription is introduced in connection with the civil defense program. There were several hundred pacifists, including a considerable number of women, in England during World War II who suffered imprisonment after conscription for civil defense had been introduced, though in a number of instances they had been willing or even eager to render voluntarily the service now imposed upon them. Others did not feel it necessary to protest at this point. Even these, however, stated: "They realize that by registering they may commit themselves not only to participation in an organization called Civil Defense, the line between which and offensive action is becoming increasingly thin, but also to acceptance of the principle of rigid regimentation of a man's life."

Finally, it was recognized that in this as in other matters equally sincere and courageous pacifists would be led to draw the line at various points. In deciding where to draw the line all would recognize two sets or types of values and the need of effecting a balance or integration between them in shaping their course from day to day. Our set of values consists in the maximum of identification with all human beings, especially in suffering the maintenance of fellowship with all men, however their views differ from ours, the desire to live as good citizens in a democratic society and to obey the laws, save where this means violation of conscience; and the impulse to minister to human need. Another set of values springs from our

commitment to the "life which taketh away the occasion of all war" and our faith in the dignity and freedom of the human person, in "that of God in every man," which forbids us to take part in war and war preparation or in the denial of liberty to, and imposition of slavery on human beings. Saying "No" to war and regimentation, being careful not to cooperate in them, bearing our witness against them, and also, therefore, essential expressions of our way of life.

Our community or communion is primarily with human beings rather than with systems and institutions. As someone has phrased it: "No line is to be drawn against any human being; we draw the line, therefore, against co-operation with anything that divides, enslaves or destroys human beings."