Draft registration changes coming soon

By Courage to Resist. April 30, 2018

A federal commission has been established to address the future of draft registration in the United States and whether the draft should include women, an alternate form of national service, be extended, or end entirely. The press release states “The Commission wants to learn why people serve and why people don’t; the barriers to participation; whether modifications to the selective service system are needed; ways to increase the number of Americans in service; and more.”

As the first real meaningful opportunity for a national debate about the draft in decades, we are keeping a close eye on this commission. Open-mic public hearings are scheduled for seven more cities as well as an online website for comments. Let them know what you think!

In a recent Courage to Resist podcast, draft registration resister Edward Hasbrouck gave us an in-depth background on this commission. Here are some highlights:

“ Every American inspired and eager ” to be sucked into the war machine? Oh, hell no!

“When you say, ‘I’m not willing to be drafted,’ you’re saying, ‘I’m going to make my own choices about which wars we should be fighting’ and when you say, ‘You should submit to the draft,’ you’re saying, ‘You should let the politicians decide for you.’

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VFP President urges GIs to resist illegal orders

Attacks on Syria could lead to nuclear war

By Gerry Condon, National President of Veterans for Peace

Why the rush to war? Why is the mass media cheerleading for war instead of asking hard questions? Why are Democratic and Republican politicians trying to outdo one another with calls for ever more massive attacks on Syria?

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Israeli military objector Tamar Ze’evi on choosing prison

Tamar Ze’evi, at nineteen, refused to serve in the Israeli military. Today, she works with the Mesarvot network to advocate for other objectors in Israel. The following is our April 2018 podcast with Tamar, edited for length and clarity. To listen to this podcast, and hear Tamar’s complete story, visit couragetoresist.org/podcasts (also available on iTunes, TuneIn, Stitcher, and GooglePlay).

A year ago, I refused to enlist in Israel Defense Forces (IDF) out of a sense of belonging and responsibility to my society, and to the people who live on the land of Israel, whether they are Palestinians or Israeli. Because of my refusal I was in a military jail for four months until I got my exemption.

In every family we have soldiers. Both of my older sisters served in the military. Weapons are everywhere. The military is in every aspect of life.

As a teenager, it was very clear I was going to serve. I’m going to do my best, maybe become an officer, maybe try to be a pilot, maybe some intelligence force. For many, to be a “real feminist” in Israel today means joining a military

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Tamar Ze’evi, center, along with other Israeli youth protesting against being drafted into the Israeli army. The sign reads, ‘Neither clerks nor tank drivers, we are refusers and feminists.’ (Photo: Mesarvot)
Israeli military objector Tamar Ze’evi continued (from front)

I knew what the occupation was. My parents opposed it in a way but I never saw a real connection between military service and occupation. The military seemed sterilized from politics. Then I started questioning military service and exploring the meanings of it. I was very frustrated. I was angry that I felt responsible for the occupation.

If someone would ask me I would say, “I don’t want it, I oppose it.” I was sitting with a Norwegian friend. I did not choose occupation any more than them but I had this huge responsibility over my shoulders as a 16-year-old girl to ponder this huge question. What is my responsibility? What is my obligation and what is the most moral thing to do? After a while I grew to see it not only as a painful duty to make this choice, but also as a right.

Because I belong to Israel I have the right and ability to change the reality because my Bangladeshi friends cannot come to Israel and talk about the occupation. They do not know what the occupation looks like and what it means. I tried to see it as a privilege that I have the ability to try and make life better for both the Palestinian and the Israeli.

During that time there was another war in Gaza. It was very hard, very shocking to see how the Israeli military used overwhelming force in relation to the Palestinians—how they used their power against civilians in such a horrible and extreme manner. I think that taught me something. Over 10,000 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip and maybe 60 or 70 Israelis died, most of them soldiers, while many of the Palestinians were children and civilians.

I was studying at an international high school in India at the time. I heard a lot of criticism about what was happening back home in Israel—criticism which I agreed with—but I was still trying to figure it out. I recognized Israel can’t survive without an army at this time. In the meantime, I acknowledge that the main task of the military is controlling the Palestinians. But how can I take the privilege I have, like sitting at home while my friends give years of their life, and sometimes their life, to do a task that I believe is needed—protecting Israel? I couldn’t get over this argument.

After returning to Israel and seeing the reality in a much more critical and informed way, I decided that I’m not going to enlist because I didn’t know where to draw a moral line. I couldn’t say, “this checkpoint is okay, but this checkpoint is one too many. Or one more human rights violation—there are so many. I understood that it didn’t matter when or where we had crossed that moral line, I just know for sure that we had already crossed it.

I figured out that the only way to stay true to myself, which was the point of all this process, was to face reality with my moral truth. I understood that if I will simply say what I believe and the real reasons I’m not willing to enlist, it meant I would go to jail. It was a scary thought but it was also the first time in all these years that I felt complete with an answer.

I contacted Mesarvot, which is a network that supports refusers. At that time another refuser was in jail because of her refusal to be drafted. Then I met another girl named Tamar, Tamar Alon, who had the same draft day.

On November 16th, 2016 we were supposed to enlist. Instead, we had a big demonstration outside of the military base. We got off the bus, found the first commander we could find, and we told him, “We refuse to enroll.” He was not very impressed but took us to the high commander who made sure we understood what we were doing. They took us straight away to detention. We were sentenced to a week in military jail. Every time you get out of prison and you have to go back and refuse again—in and out and in and out.

I had six imprisonments, a total of 115 days. After four months of that I went before a Conscientious Committee, which considers conscientious exemptions from the military. Three days after I met this committee, someone came to me in the middle of the prison, gave me papers and told me I’m free to go. I was exempted from military service.

The other Tamar didn’t get a conscientious exemption. But a week later, she got exempted for very bad behavior. Kind of a fuck off, and go away, exemption.

Looking back at this journey I couldn’t have done it any other way. I feel complete with my choice to go with my truth and fight for what I believe in out of solidarity with people who suffer.

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Draft registration changes continued (from front)

What’s happening right now is that a national commission has been appointed to study the question of whether draft registration should be continued, whether it should be expanded to make women, as well as men, register for the draft, whether a draft itself should be started, whether there should be some other kind of compulsory national service enacted.”

Our friends at the Center on Conscience & War recently noted, “All branches of the US government have affirmed that Selective Service registration is about being prepared for war. For many this is a violation of their conscience or their deeply held beliefs. When an individual is compelled to follow their conscience and not submit to registration, they are punished for life without due process. In a country that pays such lip service to freedom of religion and belief, this extra-judicial punishment must end.”

On his own website, Resisters.info, Edward Hasbrouck explains it this way: “In late 2015, Commander-in-Chief Obama ordered all military assignments opened to women. That order undercut, and probably eliminated, the legal argument that had been used since 1980 to justify requiring only men, but not women, to register for the draft.

That gave members of Congress three options, none of which most of them wanted to take responsibility for, in the run-up to the 2016 elections:

1. Do nothing and wait for courts to invalidate the requirement for men to register for the draft;
2. Repeal the requirement for men to register, and abolish the Selective Service System (and risk being attacked as peaceniks); or
3. Extend the requirement to register for the draft to women as well as men (and risk being attacked by both feminists and sexists).

After elaborate bi-partisan machinations, Congress chose Door Number One (‘Do Nothing’). Perhaps members of Congress thought that would allow them to point the finger of ‘blame’ at the courts, and away from themselves, if draft registration was ended. More likely they just wanted to punt this political hot potato past the 2016 elections.”

Courage to Resist’s project director Jeff Paterson believes that talk of national service is kept intentionally vague so folks think, “that could be a good thing, kids need a jobs program.”

“The feds can afford to pay minimum wage and have plenty of applicants for meaningful jobs without resorting to forced labor. Who’s to say that these jobs won’t include things like building border walls and staffing immigration check points? Folks in favor of mandatory service always seem older than the arbitrary cut-off age for such servitude,” notes Jeff Paterson.

“Other people suggest that a draft and/or enforced service would be a societal equalizer, but our current president is proof that the rich have ways to avoid ‘mandatory’ and ‘universal’ service. Trump avoided the Vietnam War draft based on bone spurs before becoming, according to his current doctor, the ‘healthiest individual ever elected to the presidency.’

No one wants a draft, but draft registration exists because empire building is dicey. If we don’t oppose the draft and ‘mandatory service’ today, young people will have every right to despise us tomorrow.”

Israeli military objector Tamar Ze’evi continued (from pg. 2)

from the occupation—really all of us. All of the people who live in Israel: Jews and Muslims, Christians and Arabs, and Palestinians and Israelis. All of us live in fear and are full of hate and racism and revenge. Too much blood and violence are present here in our lands.

In the past year we have had ten refusers sitting in jail. All of them opposed the occupation, called for change, and sacrificed their freedom and sometimes their social status.

Recently we published a public letter from high school students who were getting ready to graduate. Sixty teenagers signed this letter saying that they will refuse to enroll in the military because of their resistance to the occupation. We formally sent the letter to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education, but it was mainly for the media. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Education and the head of the IDF all replied to the letter! We now have 100 people that have signed the letter.

It represents a strong, optimistic youth voice that’s not willing to compromise the values and the nature of our life here. We are calling for true, deep changes in policies and a stop to the daily violations of human rights in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. We need to end 50 years of military rule over Palestinian civilians already. I guess that’s a bit of my story.

Legacy giving

As you are making out your will, please consider a bequest to the “Alliance for Global Justice project Courage to Resist.” For more information about bequest language in your estate plans, please give us a call: 510-488-3559.
Jailed whistleblower Reality Winner deserves your support

“Why do I have this job if I’m just going to sit back and be helpless?”

A young woman named Reality Leigh Winner has been jailed without bail since June 2017 for helping expose Russian hacking that targeted US election systems.

Charged under the Espionage Act, she faces ten years in prison, for making a good faith effort to hold President Trump accountable. Reality is the first victim of Trump’s “war on whistleblowers.”

After serving six years in the Air Force, Reality took a job as an NSA intelligence contractor in January 2017. On the day Trump fired FBI Director James Comey (May 9, 2017), Reality is charged with finding and printing a classified report entitled, “Russia/Cybersecurity: Main Intelligence Directorate Cyber Actors.”

The next day (May 10), Trump celebrated with Russian officials in the White House, bragging that he had fired “nut job” Comey in order to end any “Russiagate” investigation. Hours later, Reality allegedly sent the NSA report to the media (May 11).

“Why do I have this job if I’m just going to sit back and be helpless … I just thought that was the final straw,” Reality allegedly explained under interrogation. “I felt really hopeless seeing that information contested … Why isn’t this out there? Why can’t this be public?”

It’d be another week before the appointment of special counsel Robert Mueller (May 17) to investigate “Russiagate.”

Reality was an outspoken critic of Trump and an advocate for social justice causes, including Standing Rock, climate science, children with different abilities, animal rights, and Black Lives Matter. Those social media posts are now being used against her in Orwellian proceedings in which her lawyers are not allowed to see much of the evidence against her.

By the time her trial starts–Winter 2018, at the earliest–she’ll have spent a full year and a half behind bars. Meanwhile, the actual Russiagate indicted criminals, including Paul Manafort, Rick Gates, George Papadopoulos, and Michael Flynn, haven’t spent a day in jail.

Reality Winner’s case has precedent setting implications for whistleblowers trying to do the right thing, press freedom, election suppression, and the government’s escalating war on dissent. Reality took a risk to share something that Americans had a right to know.

Following a recent hearing in Augusta, Reality’s mother Billie Winner-Davis shared, “I think we felt really, really supported for the first time. The other hearings that we’ve gone to, it’s just been us so to have other people, other supporters there, we had an entire row filled and then we knew that there were people outside as well.”

Write to Reality directly:
Reality L Winner
Lincoln County Jail
PO Box 970
Lincolnton GA 30817

For updates and what else can be done, visit: www.standwithreality.org

Veterans for Peace President urges GIs to resist illegal orders continued (from front)

A US attack on Syria could lead to a nuclear war. Russian military forces in Syria will undoubtedly be among the targets of US missiles. Russia has said it will shoot down US missiles and attack the “platforms from which they are fired,” i.e. US ships.

There is no proof yet of a Syrian government gas attack, only a video made by a fundamentalist rebel group that wants more US intervention. Even if the reports are true, a military response will only lead to more death and destruction, and dangerous escalations. We are talking about a direct confrontation between the two nuclear superpowers. Why would the US risk nuclear war over dubious chemical weapons claims?

Veterans have longer memories than the press and the politicians. We remember how we were lied into the Iraq War with false reports of ‘weapons of mass destruction.’ US wars throughout the Middle East have caused millions of deaths and destroyed entire societies. Our soldiers and their families have also paid an extremely high price.

Veterans, GIs and their families will not accept another war based on lies. We will be protesting in the streets, in the suites, at media outlets and at military bases.

All military personnel, from low ranking GIs to the top generals and admirals, have an obligation to disobey illegal orders. Orders to carry out acts of war against a sovereign nation that is not threatening the US are illegal orders. We swore an oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic. Right now those enemies are those who would rush our country recklessly into another devastating war.