



Women in Black London

International Conscientious Objectors' Day 15th May

Every year on 15th May we remember conscientious objectors, both past and present. Around the world many people are imprisoned or forced to flee their home countries for refusing to join the armed forces. On 15th May we stand in solidarity with them, as well as celebrating the memory of those throughout history who have resisted conscription.

Throughout the world, and throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, brave men (and some women) have refused to take up arms. There are many countries where conscription is in force, and recently others are considering whether to reintroduce it. Conscientious objectors are those who refuse. In Israel, Russia, Ukraine and many other countries, young people are following their conscience, often facing persecution, imprisonment, exile or worse.

There is concern among peace groups that there is a rising debate on military conscription in the UK. For the first time in generations, the threat of conscription seems very real and with increased insecurity and conflict we are hearing growing calls for the reintroduction of some form of compulsory national service. This would require Parliament to pass a new law, which could legislate for mandatory registration of young people (both men and women) as is happening in Germany, and/or some form of compulsory national service.

Conscription would primarily target young people, depriving them of liberty and political agency. Members of the armed forces are required to fight, kill and die at the behest of the government. They are stripped of many of their legal rights.

We reject conscription as a moral affront and an attack on human rights. To force military service on the population would involve a huge waste of funds, and during a cost-of-living crisis these resources are desperately needed elsewhere.

With war escalating around the world, and a record number of civilian casualties, now is the time to stand up for peaceful and cooperative approaches to conflict resolution. Joining the armed forces is a political and moral choice that should never be forced on anyone.

We call on the government to rule out any future introduction of conscription – whether mandatory national service or registration – and to assert and uphold the rights of conscientious objectors, ensuring protection for those who refuse to participate in the armed forces.

We stand in solidarity with all those who refuse to participate in military service, remembering all those who have done so in the past and supporting those who are currently suffering imprisonment or are forced to leave their homes because of the stand they have taken. Peace groups across the UK will be marking this day. In London we will be meeting in Tavistock Square, WC1 at 1.00. Please join us. For more information see: www.co-day.org Additional information from War Resisters International at www.wri-irg.org and from www.ppu.org.uk



Women in Black hold vigils every Wednesday between 6-7 pm at the Edith Cavell Statue, opposite the National Portrait Gallery, St. Martin's Place, London WC2. Our vigils are silent, women-only and, if possible, we wear black. We welcome all women who support our call for an end to militarism and war.

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