

The New Conscientious Objector (NewCO)

Quaker Peace Testimony and Conscientious Objection

The sources provide extensive references to the draft and conscientious objection (CO), detailing the historical evolution of the Quaker Peace Testimony from personal refusal of military service to a modern concept of holistic conscientious objection to systemic violence.

1. The Theological and Historical Foundation

The Quaker Peace Testimony is a foundational spiritual stance, rooted in the belief that violence violates "that of God" in everyone [1, 2].

- **George Fox's Declaration (1651):** When offered a commission in the army, George Fox famously declared that he "told them I knew whence all wars arose, even from the lusts...and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars" [1-4]. This statement establishes that true peace is a spiritual state that removes the root causes of conflict, like lust and aggression [1, 2].
- **Formal Codification (1660):** Early Friends formally stated to King Charles II, "We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever" [5, 6].
- **Civil Disobedience:** Quakers have a long history of defying state power when it conflicted with divine law, having been persecuted for refusing to swear oaths or serve in the military [7, 8]. The principle of civil disobedience under the guidance of conscience is affirmed as an honorable witness, though those led to it must carefully consider the spiritual basis and face the consequences of their actions [9, 10].
- **IYM(C) Guidance:** The Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) (IYM(C)) formally examines this concern using the **Advices and Queries**, asking members: "**Do we faithfully maintain our testimony against preparation for and participation in war?**" [11, 12].

2. Historical Practice of Conscientious Objection

The commitment to peace has been tested by conscription across generations, leading to escalating forms of resistance:

Conflict	Key Individuals & Actions	Consequence/Evolution
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Civil War (1861-1865)

Seth Laughlin (NC Friend) was forcibly conscripted but refused military duty [13-15]. He endured torture, including being suspended by his thumbs and sentenced to be shot. He prayed for his executioners, leading the firing squad to refuse the order [13, 14, 16, 17].

Young men were torn between the peace testimony and supporting the struggle against slavery [13, 14, 18].

World War I (WWI)

Many young men in the Yearly Meeting took the position of **conscientious objection** [19, 20].

The **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)** was founded in 1917 to provide COs the opportunity to aid civilian victims [21, 22].

Merlin Chamness (Iowa Friend) refused work orders at Camp Pike, Arkansas, believing they aided the "military machine." He was brutally beaten and confined to a dark dungeon [23-26].

The state provided categories for noncombatant service, but absolutist COs faced severe persecution [23, 24, 27].

Arthur Standing and Jesse Standing (Iowa Friends) refused military training and non-combatant service, later furloughed to the AFSC for reconstruction work in France [22, 28, 29].

The Yearly Meeting kept records of the number of conscientious objectors, a practice discontinued in the mid-1970s [30, 31].

WWII & Peacetime Draft

Many Friends participated in **Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps** for alternative service [32-35].

CPS camps served as a program for COs to perform "work of national importance" under civilian direction [35, 36].

Don Laughlin and Harold

Burnham (Scattergood School

teachers) refused to register under the **Selective Service Act of 1948** [33, 34]. Laughlin wrote that he believed the military program was a violation of God's laws and he could not participate, "even to the extent of registering" [33, 34, 37].

They were sentenced to 18 months in federal prison for non-cooperation [33, 34, 38-40]. This marked a radical step: refusing the state apparatus of conscription itself [41, 42].

Vietnam War (1960s-1970s)

Jeff Kisling (Scattergood student) was led to resist the draft in 1969, viewing CO status as the "safe alternative" that compromised his integrity [48-51]. He returned his draft cards, refusing to acknowledge he was performing alternative service, but rather working for peace on his own terms [42, 45, 52, 53].

The 1968 "Epistle to Friends Concerning Military

Conscription" declared that accepting conscientious objector (CO) status or doing civilian service with conscription made one "part of the power which forces our brothers into the military and into war" [42-47].

This position argued that the traditional CO path was a way to **co-opt people opposed to war** while deflecting criticism of the Selective Service System [43, 45, 48].

3. The Evolution to Holistic Conscientious Objection

The sources highlight a contemporary movement expanding the traditional anti-war objection to confront broader systems of injustice, driven by the realization that Quakers have historically maintained "two different and contradictory peace testimonies" [59].

- **The Paradox:** The traditional peace testimony applied primarily to "white wars," leading Quakers to refuse military service in conflicts like the English Civil War [59, 60]. However, the same community remained silent about and benefited from violence against Indigenous peoples, profiting from empire [59, 60].

- **Conscientious Objection to Colonialism:** This history demands an expansion of the peace testimony to reject the "Christian Colonial Capitalist Violence"—an interlocking system of oppression [61-63].

- **Holistic Objection:** Advocates call for a **holistic conscientious objection** to resist this entire system, akin to the resistance to military service [64-68].

 - Jeff Kisling noted that refusing to fight in a foreign war was also an act of refusing to be an agent of colonialism, asking: "**What could be more 'colonial' than participating in the military might of this country against other countries and peoples?**" [69, 70].

- **The "New CO":** The idea of "New CO" (new conscientious objectors) has been proposed as a way to engage Quakers with decolonial commitments (LANDBACK, Mutual Aid, and Abolition) using language they already recognize: **peace, resistance, and conscientious objection** [71, 72].

- **Abolition as Peace:** The concept of **Abolition** is reframed as "the necessary expression of the testimony of Peace," expanding the testimony to reject domestic instruments of state violence (police and prisons) that enforce the colonial order [73-76].

- **The Modern Epistle:** The modern "Epistle to Friends Regarding Community, Mutual Aid and LANDBACK" explicitly mirrors the historical anti-conscription language, stating: "**We conscientiously object to and resist capitalism and white supremacy**" [77-79].

- **Refusal of the State:** This holistic objection extends to refusing to grant legitimacy to the unjust system, including political action and voting, as the traditional CO refused to cooperate with the draft system [64, 80].