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December 15, 2010  
MCC paper

### Fifty Cents for the War Machine

As our US economy falters and the US falls deeper and deeper into debt, the military portion of the federal budget seems to keep growing. This year the United States increased military spending once again, reaching a monstrous one trillion dollars directed to the Pentagon (National Priorities Project, 2010). This number should be appalling to both Christians and non-Christians alike. The increase comes at the expense of many poor, homeless, sick and aging Americans; therefore, it is necessary to inspect and re-arrange the government budget so as to benefit the common people of the United States and of the world.

The government's federal budget currently tells us that only 24% of our taxes are funding the Department of Defense (Chantrill). In addition to that, the government has asked for an additional \$159.3 billion to help fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These numbers have been given to us by the government. However, some believe the government has been purposely misrepresenting the actual amount of money flowing into the military by adding Social Security into the federal budget (Bernardo). This throws off the percentages cited by the government because Social Security is in its own fund, and Congress cannot designate those funds to other purposes, therefore making military spending seem like only a fourth of our nation's spending tax dollars. War Resister's League also points out that the government does not include borrowed money that is being used to pay for military expeditions of past wars when stating the spending into the military portion of the federal budget. According to War Resister's League, for the Federal Budget of the 2011 fiscal year, 48% of the Federal Funds will be flowing to current or past military spending (War Resisters League). That's close to taking fifty cents out of every tax dollar paid and giving it to the military!

Another very frightening fact about our military spending is how the USA compares to the rest of the world. The USA has not only the highest military spending of all the other countries of the world, but it also accounts for 43% of the money spent on military in the entire world (AFP)! According to the Center for Arms Control, the USA spends more money on their military than the next forty-five countries combined (Hellman)!

Because so much money is needed to fund the military “needs” of the US, the government ends up borrowing a great deal of money from other countries. This causes the US government to have an unbelievably high debt. Some groups believe that up to 80% of the United States debt is related to the military (War Resisters League).

Due to this massive amount of money flowing into military operations and warfare, other departments in the government are given a much smaller budget. The Departments of Agriculture and Transportation, for example, receive less than 6% of the federal funds (War Resisters League). These two departments are essential to our livelihood and national security. Small US farmers work very hard to feed the US and the world, but often struggle making a living. They are some of the people who are overlooked by the Congress when the federal budget is written up.

In addition to that, there are still many people in the US who need the basic necessities for life. It is estimated that 1.6 million citizens around the US are homeless and use emergency shelters or transitional housing (National Coalition for the Homeless). Life is extremely hard for these people. The government could do so much more for them if it spread its resources into these areas of need instead of funding the military bases across the globe, nuclear bomb programs, and ongoing fighting in the Middle East. The people who profit from the government’s military spending are politicians, generals, and corporate executives that already

have more than enough (Andreas). The homeless, hungry, unemployed, and poor are to some degree left to fend for themselves. By most measurements we live in a prosperous society, but it is an unjust and unequal one that upholds the rich and powerful while overlooking the lowly and meek.

Obviously cutting military spending would mean a huge change for the government and its budget. There are many military bases around the world in friendly countries, begging the question: "Why are we there?" It does not seem very practical to keep military stations open in places where there are no immediate threats. Many of those bases could be disbanded, saving precious money used to keep them up and running (Lutz).

One of the most enraging actions of our military budget right now is the increasing amount of money designated to improving nuclear weapons and making them more powerful and faster to produce (Pincus). President Obama has stated that the National Nuclear Security Administration will receive 6.4 billion dollars in 2010, and its funding will keep increasing to 9 billion dollars annually by 2018. Factories are being built to mass produce parts for nuclear weapons for quick construction in "emergencies." This seems to go contrary to President Obama's plan to eventually wean ourselves of nuclear weapons. Many people are resisting and protesting these new facilities that are being planned or built, for example, the plant near Kansas City (The Kansas City). By significantly cutting down or terminating our nuclear weapons program instead of increasing its funding, we could save a lot of money and resources that could be used for more human friendly causes.

Many people cite the loss of jobs as a major negative to cutting military funding. Currently in South Dakota, the Ellsworth Air Force Base is the biggest military operation in the state. In 2005, there was talk of closing thirty-three major military bases in the US, including

Ellsworth (Jim Miklaszewski). Senators John Thune and Tim Johnson were vehemently opposed to the closing and fought for it to stay open (Reha). Thune stated its necessity to the state: “Ellsworth directly employs many South Dakotans and sustains numerous other businesses in the Black Hills region that provide critical services to the base” (Thune). Currently there are about 8,000 people living at Ellsworth. This includes military personnel, their families, and civilian workers (Ellsworth Air Force). Although it may be true that military bases give employment and commerce for local businesses, according to a study done in 2007, one billion dollars put into education, transportation, or health care would create more, and in some cases, better paying jobs than one billion dollars put into the military (Pollin/Garrett-Peltier). This would benefit more people and help take care of the unemployment crisis that we are currently in.

Some Mennonites protest such a big portion of their taxes going to the military by holding back that portion, and instead, send it to a non-profit organization. This way the money makes a positive impact rather than supporting the war machine. Holding back taxes is not legal and there could be major consequences such as going to jail or being fined \$25,000 (Mish). The National Campaign for a National Peace Tax Fund has been working towards making it legal for conscientious objectors to pay their taxes to a separate fund that would be guaranteed not to go to military funding. A bill was introduced to Congress in April of 2009, but we have yet to see the outcome (Peace Tax Return). Were this bill to pass, conscientious objectors could pay their taxes and not worry about fifty percent of their taxes going to the military (Bernardo).

Although a National Peace Tax Fund might put some Mennonites and Anabaptists at ease about where their tax money goes, it still does not solve the problem of the extremely high portion of our budget that goes to the military. To fix this problem, concerned citizens need to actively speak to their representatives and congressmen/women about a change in the federal

budget. It will not be easy to change people's mind and views on issues such as the budget and cutting military spending in a society that has an economy and political system so heavily dependent on military spending. Therefore, letters need to be written and sent, and we must raise our voices as one body to bring about this change. We need to bring to the government's attention the injustice done to the homeless, sick, and hungry who are forgotten in the streets of the US when we use more than half of our annual budget to fund the war machine that can only bring about destruction, and which historically has not been proven to bring about lasting peace.

While our government spends billions of dollars on the war machine, we Anabaptists should put pressure on our government officials to reprioritize the federal budget. We also need to educate ourselves and educate others on what really happens to our tax money. If we profess to be peacemakers and conscientious objectors to participation in warfare, how can we knowingly give our money to fund warfare? We must be more aware of what our money is buying. As Wally Nelson, a long time war tax resister, plainly puts it, "What would you do if someone came to your door with a cup in hand asking for a contribution to help buy guns to kill a group of people they didn't like?"

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