

**“NO TIME OR ENERGY FOR VIOLENCE”:
JOHN M. SWOMLEY, JR., METHODIST PEACE ACTIVIST,
AND THE ANTI-CONSCRIPTION CAMPAIGNS**

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For more than seventy years until his death at age 95 in August, 2010, Methodist minister, seminary professor, social ethicists, author, lecturer, and political/social justice organizer John M. Swomley, Jr., was a leading peace activist within and beyond the Methodist community. Swomley's concept of peacemaking was more than pacifism; it was in his words: "a total commitment to peacemaking so as to leave no time or energy for violence. It rejected not only the violence of war and armed revolution but also the systemic violence of imperialism, racism, economic exploitation, poverty and the denial of equal rights to women, labor, political and religious minorities." Furthermore, "liberation from those systems of violence was an aspect of peacemaking." Swomley proposed that "It is even possible to say that violence is the original sin or evil" Swomley merits a full biography; however, this article focuses only on his first campaign, the anti-conscription battles of the late 1940s and the 1950s, that he called "the most demanding and significant episode of my life" and, in a more hyperbolic claim, "the most dramatic struggle in civil-military relationships in American history."¹

Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Swomley grew up very active in his local Methodist church. The winner of the Pennsylvania state oratorical contest at age seventeen, Swomley attended local Dickinson College, which he selected because he could work part time as a salaried page in the Pennsylvania state senate to defray expenses. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1936, he enrolled at Dickinson Law School, but resigned during the year. In the summer of 1937, a group of conservative Central Pennsylvania ministers prevailed on the young twenty-two year-old, who was known for his strong convictions, to attend the conference of the "radical and semi-autonomous" National Council of Methodist Youth. In Swomley's words, "They asked me to go to its meeting in the summer of 1937 to try to change it. Instead, I was changed, and began to examine all my previous convictions."²

He explained that he found young people running their own meetings and discussing racism, pacifism, and other social issues. He shared a room with James Farmer, who later founded the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE).

¹ John M. Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence: Memoirs of a Peace Activist* (Nyack, NY: Fellowship Publications, 1998), quotes from 4, 35, and 139. For a full explication of Swomley's conception of the hegemony of global violence, see John M. Swomley, Jr., *American Empire: The Political Ethics of Twentieth-Century Conquest* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

² Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 2.

Swomley remarked that this was his first real experience with “Negroes” and he reflected, “For the first time in my life I was confronted with the radical dimension of the Christian faith in a group of committed young adults, and forced to rethink everything.” He continued that he left behind “his racist, militarist and nationalist” past and “After much reading I became a pacifist, studied at Boston University School of Theology, and became politically active.” He got involved with the Greater Boston Student Christian Movement and on campus formed a small group of pacifists who met regularly; by his graduation the group had grown to 55 activists. He joined the executive committee of the National Council of Methodist Youth and from 1938-1941, served as vice president of the “radically active” organization under its president, the long-time peace spokesman, Herman Will.³

As Swomley’s social, political, and religious convictions developed, he rejected the modest reforms of liberalism for “a more radical analysis of history and contemporary events and for more radical action” for peacemaking, reconciliation, liberation, and the building of a free society. This transformation came as the United States moved toward war in Europe. Swomley exceeded other peace activists who emphasized the U.S. avoiding involvement or who focused on the protection of the personal conscience of those individuals who could not participate. Swomley totally rejected violence in any form; reconciliation was the only just cause. Conscription was particularly corruptive because it “is a system of violence that is covert because it has been institutionalized and legitimized.” Later invoking the words of historian/philosopher Lewis Mumford, Swomley called conscription “the systematic regimentation of a whole population” that legitimized indoctrination, kidnapping, and imposition of values destructive to the entire society.⁴

After earning a master’s degree in theology and spending the summer of 1939 as an assistant pastor at a church serving auto workers in Dearborn, Michigan, Swomley in 1940 began his long career with the nation’s leading pacifist organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation.⁵ He served as the youth secretary in the national office in New York City, and he continued as the vice president of the National Council of Methodist Youth. In the latter capacity, at the request of Dr. Charles F. Boss, Jr, executive secre-

³ Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 3; and Swomley, *Confronting Church and State: Memoirs of an Activist* (Amherst, NY: Humanist Press, 1997), 2-3.

⁴ Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 4; and Swomley, *Liberation Ethics*, 36-37. See Mumford quote, in Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine, The Pentagon of Power* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 240.

⁵ Swomley reports that the Central Pennsylvania Methodist Conference was not likely to grant him membership because of his work with the National Council of Methodist Youth and the powerful Methodist leader G. Bromley Oxnam did not consider his work with F.O.R. to be a proper ministerial role, so not until 1955 did Swomley apply for membership and become ordained in the New York East Methodist Conference. Many years later when he was teaching at St. Paul’s School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, the Missouri West Methodist Conference was reluctant to accept his transfer from the New York East Conference so he transferred to the Kansas East Methodist Conference, where he remained for the rest of his career (Swomley, *Confronting Church and State*, 20-21).

tary of the Methodist Commission on World Peace, Swomley testified in the Congressional hearings against the bill that ultimately became the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. This public forum launched what would be the primary focus of the young minister's activities for the next decade and a half.⁶

The Selective Service Act contained provisions for conscientious objectors, but many pacifists refused to participate to any degree, including the act of registering as a conscientious objector. Swomley had lobbied for full administrative relief for non-registrants and he did not intend to register. However, in deference to his father's plea not to go to jail, Swomley did register on the official Registration Day of October 16, 1940, but he refused to fill out subsequent paperwork from his New York City draft board. He reports that the clerk of the local board covered this up and Swomley did not come to the attention of the draft board until November, 1941. At the time, he rejected any form of participation including entering the Civilian Public Service (CPS) program of alternative service. In February 1942, he received a 4-D ministerial deferment so the personal impact of the draft for him was moot.⁷

During World War II most of the energy of the American pacifist political organizations focused on the Civilian Public Service program. Under an agreement with the U.S. government, the pacifist organizations created and funded the National Service Board for Religious Objectors to administer CPS under federal directives.⁸ Conscription issues surfaced a few times during the war. In April, 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt advocated a postwar youth training program modeled on the Civilian Conservation Corps; military training would be a significant part, but not the sole purpose of this experience. In January, 1944, the chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee Andrew J. May (a Kentucky Democrat) introduced a bill that proposed a year of universal military training (UMT) for all seventeen-year-old males. Numerous military spokesmen, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the National Chamber of Commerce, and Eleanor Roosevelt endorsed UMT during the year. In the following months, attempts to authorize special drafts to acquire labor for war industries and nurses for the military failed to win Congressional approval, but the proposals kept the topic of conscription very much alive.

Concerned about this threat, the existing Peace Strategy Board, a coali-

⁶ The definitive study of the campaigns for and against the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 is J. Garry Clifford and Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., *The First Peacetime Draft* (Lawrence: UP Kansas, 1986). For the period leading up to 1940, see Robert K. Griffith, Jr., *Men Wanted for the U.S. Army: America's Experience with an All-Volunteer Army Between the World Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

⁷ Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 13-15.

⁸ An extensive literature exists on this wartime program with studies about the experiences of most of the historic peace churches written at the time. The place to start is Mulford Q. Sibley and Philip E. Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience: The American State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1952).

tion of approximately fifteen peace groups, in October, 1944, formed a new letterhead front, the Committee Against Permanent Conscription, housed in the Washington office of the National Council for Prevention of War. Each of the Peace Strategy Board organizations contributed a staff member to the new committee. Besides lobbying, publicity, and appearances at public hearings, the committee founded a weekly bulletin, *Conscription News*, whose purpose was to gather information and organize local committees against conscription. Swomley, who represented the Fellowship of Reconciliation, was named the editor of the newsletter and was charged with organizing local committees. *Conscription News* quickly became the voice of the various components of the Washington peace lobby. Weekly it collected anti-conscription materials from magazines, newspapers, and the media and provided editorial commentary; each issue enclosed “action sheets” with the strategy and tactics for the moment.⁹

Other anti-conscription organizations emerged during the war, often with overlapping personal and strategy. One of the most prominent, the National Council Against Peacetime Conscription Now, constituted in January, 1945, from previous iterations, in November, 1945, merged with a new organization, the National Council Against Conscription (NCAC) that featured prominent individuals from outside the historic pacifist community. The new body struggled financially and administratively during its first year until in October, 1946, Swomley was named the NCAC director and the organization adopted *Conscription News*. Swomley continued his full-time position with the Fellowship of Reconciliation and served NCAC on a part-time basis without salary. His staff consisted only of an office secretary, but the staff of the National Council for the Prevention of War, which provided free office space for the first four years, mailed out *Conscription News*.

NCAC technically was not a pacifist organization. The approximately 250 “members” represented a wide spectrum of political views. The Administrative Committee and the Executive Group included non-historic pacifist notables such as Roger Baldwin, chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union; Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of *The Christian Century*; Dennis Cardinal Dougherty of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Philadelphia; Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, pastor of New York City’s Riverside Church; President Frank P. Graham of the University of North Carolina; President Mordecai Johnson of Howard University; civil libertarian Zechariah Chaffee, Jr.; and Chester H. Gray, former Master of the

⁹ John M. Swomley, Jr., “A Study of the Universal Military Training Campaign, 1944-1952,” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1959), 61-79. Swomley’s dissertation, henceforth cited as “UMT Campaign,” a personal history of the activities in which he was a leading figure, is a memoir and thus an invaluable primary source for details not available elsewhere. His book, *The Military Establishment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), drawn from the dissertation, is broader but a less valuable resource. Also two chapters in Swomley’s memoirs, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, cited above, “The Campaign Against Universal Military Training” (35-56), and “The Draft and Conscientious Objection” (57-66) cover the same material in concise form.

National Grange. New York University professor Dr. Alonzo F. Myers, a World War I infantry officer and former president of the National Council Against Peacetime Conscription Now, served as president of NCAC for its entire history from 1946 through 1959. However, the organization was clearly an instrument of the Washington peace lobby. Swomley noted that over its years of operation the organization held only a few called meetings. Strategy decisions were made informally within the Washington community or at regular meetings of the Consultative Peace Council in Philadelphia. For the most part, he and other staff members within the peace community made organizational decisions and spoke in the name of the prominent individuals and organizations on the letterhead of the NCAC.¹⁰

Swomley's primary focus was Congress. His activities included organizing various groups to testify in the several Congressional hearings on conscription, personally testifying, and developing and mobilizing a local level anti-conscription network.¹¹ Local organizations were formed in at least twenty three states, and Swomley served as an effective coordinator between pacifists and non-pacifists and between Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders in the pre-ecumenical era. *Conscription News* was the primary action vehicle. The weekly four-page bulletin, a compendium of anti-conscription material, surveyed Congressional testimony, provided statements on the subject by prominent individuals and public figures, excerpted press coverage and periodical articles, and tracked the views of individual Congressmen. Faithful readers sent in accounts of local and regional activities. Although the bulletin's mailing list never exceeded 7,500, it targeted key constituencies such as newspaper editors, community opinion leaders, and political figures, including most members of Congress. Swomley bragged that several members of Congress cited the periodical or contracted his office for assistance in their opposition to particular conscription legislation. Swomley was quite proud of *Conscription News* and boasted about the newsletter's thoroughness and accuracy; however, as its critics pointed out and even some of its supporters recognized, the bulletin was characterized by zealous advocacy and overstatement.¹²

The *Conscription News* mailings often included leaflets, pamphlets, and NCAC news releases, which were statements or resolutions by well-known groups. Examples included *Neither Peace Nor Security, An Historical*

¹⁰ Swomley, "UMT Campaign," 78-79.

¹¹ Scholarly literature on church Congressional lobbying is quite scant. The prevailing work at the time was Luke Eugene Ebersole, *Church Lobbying in the Nation's Capital* (NY: Macmillan, 1951). James L. Adams's *The Growing Church Lobby in Washington* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) added detail and update for the era. Other than memoirs of participants and some monographs on specific issues, the only significant more recent general study is Allen D. Hertzke, *Representing God in Washington: The Role of Religious Lobbies in the American Polity* (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1988).

¹² Full sets of *Conscription News*, 1944-1959, are located in two sources: John M. Swomley, Jr. Papers, 1940-2002, DG 226 (henceforth Swomley Papers); and National Council Against Conscription Records, 1944-1960, DG 52 (henceforth NCAC Records), both at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA.

Comment on Universal Military Training, signed by twenty-six prominent historians, and *Should 18-Year-Olds Be Soldiers?*, released over the names of thirteen noted educators and clerics. The publications that received the greatest attention were NCAC’s responses to the reports of three special Presidential advisory commissions on Universal Military Training (UMT) in 1947, 1951, and 1953.¹³ Each commission declared UMT necessary for American national security. In 1947, NCAC distributed 30,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled *An Analysis of the Report of the President’s Advisory Commission on Universal Training*; the Presbyterian Church, USA, disseminated another 10,000 copies. Many newspapers, including front page coverage in some major city dailies, cited the report. In response to the 1951 commission, NCAC issued another visceral response entitled *The Facts Behind the Report*. Although NCAC criticized the 1953 report, it did not issue a pamphlet.

Conscription News weekly “action sheets” attempted to mobilize the newsletter’s audience. In a typical action sheet in late 1947, Swomley designated January, 1948, as an important month for countering the American Legion’s pro-UMT promotion. Swomley asked readers to organize and lead UMT discussions in their churches, clubs, unions, PTAs, and any other venue possible.¹⁴ Letter-writing campaigns were the most common tactic. Each week different segments of the mailing list received various targets, including periodicals, newspaper editors, community and local political leaders, and always, members of Congress. Swomley also solicited anti-conscription letters from prominent individuals; he arranged visits with members of Congress; and before important votes, he orchestrated massive telegram and phone call blitzes.

Although the energetic young proselytizer proudly asserted his success in influencing news reporting, he continually claimed media bias. Following a survey conducted in late 1947, *Conscription News* charged the Associated Press, *New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Washington Post*, and several other major urban dailies, as well as popular periodicals such as *Atlantic Monthly* and *Saturday Evening Post*, with unfair, biased treatment of the anti-conscription position.¹⁵

Financing *Conscription News* and other NCAC activities remained a constant challenge. Expenses varied depending upon the status of conscription legislation before Congress. In peak years, expenditures reached as much as

¹³ *A Program for National Security, Report of the President’s Advisory Commission on Universal Military Training*, May 29, 1947 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1947); *Universal Military Training: Foundation of Enduring National Strength, First Report to Congress by the National Security Training Commission, October, 1951* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1951); and *20th Century Minuteman, Report to the President on Reserve Forces Training Program*, December 1, 1953 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1954).

¹⁴ “Action Sheet #126” *Conscription News*, December issues, 1947.

¹⁵ *Conscription News*, December 11, 1947; and Swomley “UMT Campaign,” 370-377. A study by a reporter not connected to NCAC but from the church community, at the same time published an article that alleged this bias, particularly in the *Washington Post*; see Marc Hill, “News Treatment of U.M.T.” *Presbyterian Tribune* (December, 1947), 17-18.

\$25,000; in relatively quieter years, they were as low as \$5,000.¹⁶ Swomley was an effective solicitor. His periodic mail and telephone appeals targeted the *Conscription News* mailing list, and the newsletter exchanged its mailing list for the subscription list of magazines and a few colleges related to the historic peace churches released their alumni lists.

In the decade after World War II, two forms of conscription periodically came before Congress. One was the issue of renewing Selective Service or as it was popularly called, the draft. The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, passed in the atmosphere of impending war, was the nation's first peacetime draft. The draft was renewed during the war and came up for renewal several times in the postwar decade. Selective Service drew on a small portion of the populace to do mandatory military service for a period of time. More extensive were several proposals for the military training of all young males for a briefer period. Some might chose to remain in the military services while the others would constitute a partially-trained reserve to be mobilized if needed. The UMT proposals, which begin to surface during the war, differed greatly in terms of length of service and other details, but all shared the commonality of mandatory universal service of one form or another. Selective Service and UMT were quite different in conception, but the anti-conscription lobby opposed both of them.

Congressional hearings on Selective Service or on UMT were held in one or both houses every year from 1945 through 1952 (with the exception of 1949), and in 1955 and 1959 as well. Scores of proponents and opponents appeared at each hearing. Eight separate hearings on UMT alone by March, 1952, produced 4,500 pages of testimony.¹⁷ Swomley or NCAC president Dr. Alonzo Myers testified at almost every hearing. In Congressional testimony and other activities, Swomley and NCAC focused on two themes: the draft and UMT were unnecessary and the impact on society was too great a cost to bear. The issue of the role of the militarization of the nation with a heavy military voice in policymaking, the national economy, science, education, industry, and other segments of American life remained a persistent charge. Two booklets written by Swomley, *The Militarization of America* (32 pages, 1948) and *New Evidence of the Militarization of America* (64 pages, 1949), each published over the names of prominent Americans such as Albert Einstein, Pearl S. Buck, Victor Reuther; leaders of farm, church, and labor organizations; and several college presidents, pursued this theme. Ten years later in an article in the liberal magazine *The Progressive* Swomley

¹⁶ As examples, expenditures reported in the minutes of NCAC finance reports include \$17,000 (1947), \$9000 (1949), \$21,200 (1950), \$6300 (1954), \$16,000 (1955), NCAC Records, and Swomley, "UMT Campaign," 78.

¹⁷ The two best books on wartime and postwar conscription are James M. Gerhardt, *The Draft and Public Policy: Issues in Manpower Procurement, 1945-1970* (Ohio State UP, 1971), and George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence: UP Kansas, 1993). Useful as well is George Q. Flynn, *Lewis B. Hershey, Mr. Selective Service* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1985). For a concise overview of the history of UMT, see Joe P. Dunn, "UMT: A Historical Perspective," *Military Review* LXI, 1 (January, 1981): 11-18.

continued to warn about the dangers of militarization.¹⁸

Swomley provided spirited testimony in hearings. Like his writing in *Conscription News*, he was detailed, emphatic, and zealous. However, his theme that conscription constituted a military indoctrination of American youth and indeed of the entire nation that he compared to kidnapping, brainwashing, and imperialism did not resonate with most members of the Congress.

Congressmen considered it politically expedient to be polite and deferential to religious representatives and to allow all such groups to schedule appearances, but for the most part, Congressional committee members did not take them, particularly pacifists, very seriously. Congressmen regularly challenged Swomley’s statistics, generalizations, and scenarios.¹⁹ Although Professor Myers emphasized that he was not a pacifist, he fared little better in his appearances in Congressional hearings.

Because achieving their agenda was a difficult challenge, Swomley and his allies took tactics very seriously. They cultivated their relationship with the limited number of anti-conscription friends on Capitol Hill; services included supplying statistics and other information, producing reports for Congressmen to sign, and writing speeches for delivery. Isolationist and libertarian Senator Robert Taft, Republican Senate majority leader in the 80th Congress, was a staunch ally. NCAC worked closely with Taft’s personal staff and the Republican Policy Committee. Many conservative Republicans saw UMT as Democrat big government social reform in the New Deal/Fair Deal tradition, so an anti-UMT coalition could be cobbled between conservative, isolationist Republicans in league with a few liberal, anti-military Democrats. Swomley missed few opportunities to exploit partisan politics or to invoke secondary issues to fragment conscription support.²⁰

In another tactic, to mitigate strong Southern Democrat support for both the draft and UMT, Swomley backed civil rights groups’ demands for full integration provisions in all conscription legislation. In 1947, Swomley helped form and provided some funding for the Committee Against Jim Crow in Military Service and Training headed by Grant Reynolds and A. Philip Randolph.²¹ In June, 1948, NCAC issued *Conscription is Too High a Price to Pay for Prejudice*, a report on racial segregation in the armed forces. Race continued to be a divisive issue in 1955 when conscription supporter Congressman Carl Vinson (a Georgia Democrat) held hostage

¹⁸ See booklets in both Swomley Papers and NCAC Records, and John M. Swomley, Jr., “The Growing Power of the Military,” *The Progressive* (January, 1959): 24-32.

¹⁹ See representative examples of Swomley’s testimony and responses in the following hearings: U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, *Selective Service Extension* (79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946), 226-234; Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Selective Service Extension Act of 1950 and Manpower Registration and Classification Act* (81st Cong., 2nd sess., 1950), 55-67; House of Representatives, Subcommittee No. 1, Committee on Armed Services, *National Reserve Plan* (84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955), 2132-2144.

²⁰ Swomley, “UMT Campaign,” 452-453.

²¹ NCAC Minutes, October 29, 1947, NCAC Report; Swomley, “UMT Campaign,” 165-167; 346-350.

the Eisenhower administration's National Reserve Plan until he extracted National Guard units from compliance with desegregation provisions in the plan.²²

However, the primary tactic against conscription was postponement, stall, and delay. From the beginning of the UMT fight, opponents advocated deferring any decision until a more appropriate time. During the last year of World War II, when UMT passage appeared likely, opponents argued that the decision should be postponed until a more dispassionate climate at the end of the war. Later they called for delay until demobilization was completed and the true peacetime manpower needs were evident. In the late forties, they countered that if UMT had not been necessary during the war or immediately afterward, why raise the issue now. With the outbreak of the Korean War, they reverted to the earlier stance that wartime was not an appropriate time for such deliberations.

At each conscription hearing, dozens of peace spokesmen representing a wide array of organizations demanded to be heard. In a concerted, coordinated effort to forestall momentum toward passage, the opposition attempted to prolong hearings and delay bills from being reported out of committee. When a bill was reported, opponents called for recommitting the bill to allow more groups to testify.²³ *Conscription News* constantly alleged that opponents were not allowed ample opportunity to make their case. However, any objective overview of the hearings' agendas demonstrates that Congress was generous in time allotments for opponents and religious spokesmen were granted particular favor.

One interesting delaying ploy came early in the conscription debate. Dorothy Detzer of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom entreated House Minority Leader Joseph Martin (an Ohio Republican) to sponsor a resolution to explore the international abolition of conscription before the U.S. pursued the draft. Congressman Martin introduced a resolution in July, 1945, and Senator Clyde R. Hoey (a North Carolina Democrat) did the same a few months later. The House held perfunctory hearings in February, 1946, and the idea quickly faded away. A similar resolution was introduced in 1947 but it received no attention. The idea of international abolition of conscription was reminiscent of the idealism of William Jennings

²² Gerhardt, *The Draft and Public Policy*, 201-203; and Swomley, "UMT Campaign" 165-167. As late as 1980, Swomley still used the race card against the U.S. military, John M. Swomley, "Too Many Blacks? The All-Volunteer Force," *Christian Century* (October 1, 1980): 902-903.

²³ For example, early in 1948 NCAC sponsored a press release, "An Appeal to Congress to Recommit the Bill for Compulsory Military Training," signed by nineteen religious and educational leaders. This proved unnecessary as House Rules Committee Chairman Leo Allen (R., IL), a UMT opponent, kept the bill bottled up in his committee for the entire session. *Conscription News* called for letters in support of Allen's "courageous" action and Charles F. Boss, Jr., executive secretary of the Methodist Commission on World Peace and a member of the NCAC Executive Group, contacted ministers in Allen's district and dispatched a representative to organize a telegram and letter campaign in support of the Congressman. On the other side of the scale, Jim G. Lucas, "This Little Man . . ." *Washington Daily News* (February 20, 1948), condemned the chairman's dictatorial activity.

Bryan’s campaign for the international abolition of alcohol or the Briand-Kellogg Pact to outlaw war; but as a tactic, advocates hoped that it might forestall consideration of the draft and UMT, and it was consistent with their desire for an international community.²⁴

Despite his condemnation of “the fallacious reasoning of the military mind,” Swomley readily invoked military leaders when their statements could be employed against conscription. When at the end of World War II Generals Douglas MacArthur and Dwight Eisenhower raised questions about the efficacy of UMT, Swomley flaunted the remarks as the wise counsel of leading military experts. He followed military testimony carefully and *Conscription News* constantly cited alleged inconsistencies and disagreements from military spokesmen. For a period of time, NCAC brandished its own general, U.S. Military Academy graduate Brigadier General (Ret.) H.C. Holdridge, head of the self-proclaimed Veterans League of America and other similar bogus organizations, who served briefly as an honorary chairman of NCAC. Holdridge railed prolifically against UMT in the late 1940s and early 1950s and testified at most hearings. A virulent anti-Catholic, Holdridge, a socialist, pontificated that Wall Street, Pentagon militarists, the Vatican, and communists were all engaged in a mass conspiracy for World War III. He campaigned for the Presidency in 1948 on the Peoples Party ticket and in 1952 under the banner of the American Rally; he twice announced his candidacy for the 1960 elections but did not go beyond that action. The eccentric general quickly became an embarrassment and Swomley removed his name from NCAC literature. For several years, Holdridge continued to seek Swomley’s endorsement and assistance for his various political ventures, but Swomley artfully kept his distance.²⁵

Although a professed radical, Swomley considered himself within the mainstream of American democratic politics, and he assiduously avoided any hint of communist affiliation. During World War II, the American Communist Party and front groups such as American Youth for Democracy advocated universal military training and denounced pacifists. Under Soviet dictates after the war, the Party changed its stance. Anticipating this change, Swomley in August, 1945, warned his peers that communist front groups might attempt to infiltrate established anti-conscription organizations, and in October the Party’s *Daily Worker* came out against UMT.²⁶

In December, 1947, John Darr of the United Christian Council for Democracy, a communist front group, approached Swomley about NCAC participation in a National Youth Assembly Against UMT. Swomley as-

²⁴ Swomley, “UMT Campaign,” 331-335.

²⁵ See H.C. Holdridge, “American Militarism,” *The Christian Century* (March 19, 1947): 365-367, distributed as a pamphlet entitled “Shall the United States Adopt Universal Military Training?” by the Methodist Commission on World Peace, and other materials in the Holdridge File in NCAC Records. See also Herbert C. Holdridge Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, OR, <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/speccoll/index.html>.

²⁶ *Conscription News*, August 9, 1945; Swomley, “UMT Campaign,” 353-356.

serted that NCAC would not involve itself with any group influenced by communists. Nevertheless, the National Youth Assembly listed NCAC as a source for further anti-conscription information. Concerned about an implied connection, Swomley repudiated the new organization and issued another warning about potential communist infiltration. To counter the appeal of the front organization, NCAC formed its own Youth Division, which brought together leaders from religious and college youth organizations, the YMCA, the Student League for Industrial Democracy, the Young People's Socialist League, and other groups. William Leuchtenburg, executive secretary of Students for Democratic Action, served as national chairman. Although Swomley was not able to dissuade General Holdridge, who at the time was still a NCAC honorary chairman, from speaking at a National Youth Assembly rally, the NCAC director emphasized to the press that no affiliation existed between the two groups, and he reiterated his warnings against communist front group penetration of local anti-conscription organizations.²⁷

More successful were Swomley's charges against the Army's model UMT unit. In late 1946, the Army created an experimental model UMT unit at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, to demonstrate how UMT would function if adopted. The Army issued pamphlets, fliers, news releases, and sponsored dozens of articles in newspapers and popular periodicals on the unit. Military speakers touted the training in the unit and funded civic, women's, church, educational, and other groups to visit Ft. Knox. Swomley continually complained about the military's "propaganda" budget. In the spring of 1947, he toured the model unit and wrote an expose series in which he accused the Army of false claims, misrepresentation of the facts, and misappropriate use of government funds for propaganda. At the same time, in a *Christian Century* article, another Methodist minister filed similar accusations.²⁸ A subsequent Congressional hearing found the Army guilty of overzealous behavior that constituted "propaganda supported by taxpayers' money to influence legislation now pending before the Congress." Although Swomley admitted that little substantive resulted from the hearings, he still considered it an impor-

²⁷ John Swomley, "Memorandum on Contacts with John Darr," February, 1948, NCAC Records; "Action Sheet #129, accompanying *Conscription News*, January 1, 1948; Swomley, Letter to NCAC sponsors, January 15, 1948; and Swomley, "UMT Campaign," 356-359. William Leuchtenburg later became one of America's most eminent historians as a respected scholar of the New Deal.

²⁸ *Conscription News*, January 16, February 6 (with accompanying "Action Sheet #92"), May 8, May 15, May 22, May 29, 1947; Alexander Stewart, "Is 'UMTee' the Answer?," *The Christian Century* (May 28, 1947): 680-682; and Swomley, "UMT Campaign," 187-192, 338-340. Swomley's charges included that the Army asserted that UMT trainees were not allowed to use profanity, drink, or engage in immorality. Swomley bragged that he sneaked off from the tour, hid in the bathroom, and listened to the trainees, who demonstrated that all these claims were false. On a more substantive level, Swomley contended that the military could not possibly devote the money and resources per individual (almost a one-to-one ratio of cadre to trainees) to a larger UMT program that it did for the small, highly-selective "showcase" model.

tant victory.²⁹

The anti-conscription campaigns peaked in the UMT battles of the late forties and the early fifties and virtually disappeared by the end of the decade. The last major UMT confrontation ended in early 1952 when a Senate bill was sent back to committee and died. The Eisenhower administration's National Reserve Plan in 1955 had a brief flurry of attention, but it never got off the ground. Several factors doomed UMT even at the height of the Cold War. The major powers in the fiscally-conservative Republican 80th Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Robert A. Taft, Senate Majority Leader Whip Kenneth S. Wherry, Speaker of the House Joseph W. Martin, Chairman of the House Armed Service Committee Dewey Short, House Majority Whip Leslie C. Arends, and Chairman of the House Rules Committee Leo Allen, opposed UMT either in principle or because they judged it expensive, unproven, and smacking of New Deal reform. For Southerners the specter of desegregation was a grave concern. Partisan political opposition continued after the Democrats regained control of Congress in the fall, 1948, elections. Labor, farm, education, civil rights, and other groups opposed the temporary removal of large numbers of young males from their ranks, and the moral arguments against the declared impact of military values on tender youth were all too much for proponents to overcome. Finally, the rise of a powerful air force with global strategic bombing capacity made “air power” appear an attractive alternative to large military manpower resources. Although UMT never gained traction, Selective Service became institutionalized and with the exception of a one-year lapse in 1947-1948, the draft was continuously extended from 1940 until its termination in 1973.³⁰

The anti-conscription coalition largely faded away in the last half of the 1950s. Death and retirement removed many of the long-time pacifist warriors of the previous decades. The draft was an accepted fact of American society and after the Korean War ended, it actually touched few lives. Even Swomley, who had spent much of his time from 1944-1948 shuttling back and forth between New York and Washington to focus on the anti-conscription campaigns, was asked by F.O.R. executive director A. J. Muste to devote more time to other objectives. In October, 1950, Swomley became acting executive secretary of F.O.R. and brought together other Methodist pacifists to organize the Methodist Peace Fellowship. Named executive director of F.O.R. in 1953, Swomley faced a new host of initiatives, including countering military influence in public schools, opposing anti-nuclear testing and the development of nuclear weapons, and campaigning for African-American civil rights.

In April, 1957, Swomley submitted his resignation, but instead F.O.R.

²⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Publicity and Propaganda Subcommittee, Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, *Investigations of War Department Publicity and Propaganda in Relation to Universal Military Training* (80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947) and full committee hearings with the same title. House Report #1073. Also Swomley, *The Military Establishment*, 55-59.

³⁰ Dunn, “UMT: A Historical Perspective,” *Military Review*, 11-18.

granted him a paid one-year sabbatical beginning in September, 1957. Swomley employed the year to complete his residential course work and written and oral exams in a limited-residency Ph.D. political science program at the University of Colorado. He returned to F.O.R. in the fall of 1958, and by the end of 1959 while engaged in full-time employment, he completed his dissertation on his years in the UMT campaigns. The final pages of the dissertation were written virtually simultaneous with events as Swomley recorded the end of NCAC in 1959.

When the draft came due for extension in 1959, Swomley attempted to rally opposition, but his call to “end conscription in 1959” fell largely on deaf ears.³¹ The draft was extended for another four years by a 381-20 vote in the House and 90-1 in the Senate. As the year progressed, NCAC chairman Alonzo Myers and treasurer Richard Reuter both asked to be relieved of their duties, and Swomley, the director, received an offer from the American Friends Service Committee to coordinate a disarmament campaign as the threat of escalating nuclear weapons was now the prime concern of the peace movement. The last issue of *Conscription News* appeared in October, 1959, and in December, the executive group voted to dissolve NCAC. Swomley explained to the remaining faithful on the mailing list that conscription was no longer a dominant national issue and NCAC had never been conceived as a permanent peace society. He proclaimed the organization a success. He claimed that it had won the long battle against UMT and it had “also played a part in the defeat of the nurses’ draft, the labor draft, in opposing the extension of Selective Service, and in educating many of our nation about the growing power of the military.”³²

In 1960, Swomley accepted a position as associate professor of social ethics at St. Paul School of Theology, a small Methodist seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, that had just completed its first year. For the next 24 years, Swomley attempted to influence a generation of prospective Methodist ministers on peace and social justice issues and he remained extremely involved on the wide front of his own activist agenda. The commitment and the pace did not change after he retired from the seminary in 1984. Both before and after retirement, he continued his high-level involvements with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, American Civil Liberties Union, American Friends Service Committee, Methodist General Board of Church and Society’s Division of World Peace, Methodist Peace Fellowship, the National Council of Churches, and other local and national organizations and agencies. Among his interests were African-American and Native American civil rights, labor rights, women’s issues, immigration, educational freedom, and civil liberties. Advocacy of the separation of church and state was a lifelong mission. He lectured, attended conferences, and met with leaders around the world visiting a total of 79 countries, and he held visiting professor posi-

³¹ Swomley, “End Conscription in 1959,” *The Christian Century* (January 7, 1959): 14-17.

³² Swomley, “Report of the Director,” December 15, 1959, and letter to the mailing list, December 30, 1959, Swomley Papers.

tions in Argentina (1969), the Philippines (1973), and Rhodesia (1977). He was quite engaged in the Vietnam War protest movement and he traveled to North Vietnam in 1970. In 1993, he founded and served as executive secretary of the American Committee on Korea, which worked for disarmament and reconciliation between North and South Korea; he visited North Korea in 1994 and again in 1995.³³

Despite all the other items on his agenda, Swomley remained deeply concerned about conscription. In 1965, he helped organize a National Committee to End the Draft, and in 1968, he was active with the National Council to Repeal the Draft. He testified against conscription before the House Armed Services Committee in 1971, and he continued to campaign vigorously until Richard Nixon’s executive order ended the draft in January, 1973, at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, for Swomley the continued existence of the inactive Selective Service System remained an issue. President Gerald Ford halted draft registration in March 1975, but a postcard registration was reintroduced in 1980. Swomley participated in a demonstration against this renewed registration at the Kansas City main post office. As chair of the Church-State Committee of the ACLU from 1979 until 1996, he continued to speak out against any form of conscription and for the rights of conscientious objectors.³⁴

A prolific writer, Swomley published extensively, including approximately twenty books or major pamphlets, and he continued to publish into his late Eighties. In *American Empire* (1970), *Liberation Ethics* (1972), and *Confronting Systems of Violence* (1998), he spelled out his critique of political and Christian realism and most particularly its premier spokesman Reinhold Niebuhr as Swomley continued to articulate his lifelong defense of non-violence as a way of life and policy. He remained a regular contributor to the Fellowship of Reconciliation national magazine *Fellowship* and other “progressive” journals such as the Kansas City-based *The National Catholic Reporter*. In *The Human Quest* (formerly *The Churchman*), which he edited for many years, he voiced his activist stances on a host of issues.

The outspoken and seldom-modest Swomley never eschewed controversy. Throughout his career he was a champion of ecumenicalism and he constantly forged bonds with Jewish and Catholic leaders. However, the separation of church and state and women’s rights were among the most important issues in his worldview. This put him in conflict with official positions of the Catholic Church establishment. Swomley’s connections were primarily with “progressive” Catholic voices outside the establishment such as *The National Catholic Reporter*. In his later years, as president of Americans for Religious Liberty, he confronted the Catholic Church over official political decrees, parochial schools, historical and contemporary support for oppressive foreign Catholic regimes, abortion, birth control, and women’s

³³ For brief discussion of most of these travels and campaigns, see Swomley, *Confronting Church and State*.

³⁴ Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 60-66.

roles within the church. He particularly accosted Catholics and “right wing Protestants” for subordinating “the life and health of pregnant women to embryos and fetuses” and in 1999 he published *Compulsive Pregnancy: The War Against American Women*, a collection of his many previous writings on abortion in the 1990s. He charged that the Vatican’s position on contraceptive birth control in the face of “many countries with too little arable land or water and too many people, and dire poverty, massive economic migration and ‘population wars’” constituted a form of covert violence. He stated that Catholics and other Christians often were deeply involved in such practices of violence, and concluded, “The rhetoric of the Pope will generally oppose war and favor peace but rhetoric is no substitute for the reality of acceptance of violence.”³⁵

Although his pacifism and social activism were rooted in his interpretation of Christianity, Swomley’s thought and actions were also shaped by secular and political forces. Differing with other pacifists within the historic peace church tradition, his pacifism was seldom pacific. Personal witness of conscience was not sufficient. His conviction demanded confrontation against the evil of violence in all its forms. The church itself or any Jewish, Christian, or Muslim group became part of the problem rather than the solution if it compromised with violence in any overt or covert manner. As a eulogist commented in Swomley’s obituary, “Few people I have known have been as quick to spot injustice or to mount a campaign to eradicate it. And whatever organization he was part of, religious or otherwise, he was always ready to hold it accountable as well.”³⁶ Swomley admitted that his colleagues proclaimed that “I was the most aggressive pacifist they had ever met. I was impatient to achieve quick results and at times irritating to friends and colleagues who did not see issues with the same clarity I thought I saw them. Inevitably I found efforts at personal discipline as much a challenge as efforts to achieve social change.”³⁷

Swomley spent most of his career working in or with the Fellowship of Reconciliation and other secular and religious organizations of the historic pacifist community; however, he was proud that he was an ordained United Methodist minister invested in a range of social actions within the denomination. He wrote statements on policy matters for, and spoke on the floor at, Annual Conferences. He often preached in both Methodist Churches and churches of other denominations. Twice he served as an interim minister, once for twenty-two months, albeit at a United Church of Christ church. His strong convictions and views often put him at odds with his peers and denominational leaders in his local Conference. Asked several times why he

³⁵ Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 140-142 and Swomley, *Compulsive Pregnancy: The War Against American Women*, (Amherst, NY: Humanist Press, 1999). Also see George LA Piana and John Swomley, *Catholic Power vs. American Freedom* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003).

³⁶ Thomas C. Fox, “John Swomley, long time pacifist, dead at 95,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 1-3.

³⁷ Swomley, *Confronting Systems of Violence*, 5.

remained a Methodist, he emphasized his heritage and pride in the Methodist tradition, and he believed that he had an important role to play as a voice for social justice and activism within the denomination and the ecumenical community. Indeed, Swomley did reflect one strain of Methodist involvement in the social and political arena during the cold war and post-cold war eras.

Judged through the eyes of the dominant "realist" perspective on American foreign policy in the cold war, Swomley and the other anti-conscriptionists were sanguine in depreciating the national security threat of the Soviet Union. And their influence on public policy should not be overly emphasized. Given his perspective, Swomley can be forgiven for overstating the importance of his coalition against UMT. True, the coalition played an organizational role, but Swomley's characterization of "catalytic," is too strong. As stated earlier, concrete reasons explain why UMT was not adopted. Moreover, the anti-conscription political lobby's only triumph against the Selective Service draft was the constant attention brought to bear for full conscientious objector provisions. Swomley attributed too much political power to the military, spoke about the military industrial complex in apocalyptic language, and exaggerated the military indoctrination of the nation, but one must understand that his theology of the corrupting sin of violence was the ground of his being. Raising challenges to the predominant mode of cold war thinking served a legitimate function. One can appreciate such conviction even if one does not hold the same view.