THESIS

What was the response to us war resisters on the international, federal and community level and how did this effect Canadian nationalism?

INTRODUCTION

The Vietnam War took place from 1954 to 1975 and was a deeply controversial conflict that prompted significant opposition both within the United States and internationally. Many young Americans decided to resist what they saw was an immoral and obscene misuse of American power by avoiding the draft, seeking refuge in other countries. This essay examines the response to US war resisters on the international, federal and community level, and how this contributed to Canadian nationalism.

BACKGROUND/HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Spanning from 1954-1975, the Vietnam War, was a deeply divisive conflict that many opposed. In response to the war, some young Americans chose to resist in various ways such as draft dodging or deserting. These war resisters viewed the war as immoral, illegal and unjust, believing the US had violated Vietnam’s right to self-determination by establishing a puppet government in the South. (Confronting, 14) They condemned the war for its widespread devastation, which lead to the death of thousands of civilians and the destruction of the landscape. (Confronting, 14) Due to strong opposition to the war, coupled with compulsory military service through the Selective Service, many Americans sought to leave the country or evade conscription. (David Churchill, Chapter 1, p. 5) “Of these increasing young men who refuse to cooperate with an immoral war are surely the most courageous. Their choices are not easy; all, including a move to Canada, involve a grave personal risk.” (PS letter to editor… 6)

Part of the problem was not just the conscription; it was that the selective service system that drafted American men was biased and often chose working class minority men to fight over upper-class white men. Students and graduate students were also given deferments to avoid being drafted. (Confronting, 10-11) Students were thought to be “being educated for the future benefit of the nation” (Confronting, 10-11) and it was of national interest to keep them home. While construction workers, gas station workers and many lower-class workers were not. (Confronting, 13) Resisters and their supporters acted on the premise that when the government sets illegal, immoral policies, such as military conscription, citizens are obligated to disagree with them, even to disobey if necessary and to accept the legal punishment. While some considered this a patriotic duty of citizenship others charged it with being unpatriotic, cowardly and disloyal. (Confronting, 14) Many war resisters wanted to be prosecuted for dodging the draft, in hopes that with the amount of disobedience cases would overwhelm the justice system, bringing it to a halt and causing disruption. (Confronting, 14)

To escape the draft cost money, and costs someone else to take their place. (Confronting, 12) resulting in most successful draft-dodgers in Canada to consist of young, educated, middle-class urban Americans. (David Churchill, chpt 1 pg 6) It is estimated that a quarter million young Americans avoided the draft by omitting to register on their eighteenth birthday. (Jessica Squires, 27) Parents bought fake medical records and deferment papers to keep their sons out of Vietnam. (Confronting, 12) In New York City and Cleveland Ohio, 38 fathers and sons were arrested for paying up to $5000 for false papers to get deferments. (Confronting, 12) The overarching, legendary myth of utopian, peaceful Canada was a beacon of hope for war resisters (Jessica Squries, 28) and Canada’s 1969 immigration legislation, which allowed people to immigrate regardless of their military status made Canada a viable escape. (David Churchill, chapt 1 pg 5) “Canada’s expansive wilderness, it’s liberal immigration policies and the cultural similarities between the two countries held the promise of refuge for the young Americans looking to escape what they saw as a future with limited possibilities.” (David Churchill, chapter 1 pg 5) Allen Mace, the secretary of the Toronto Anti-Draft program, told a fellowship in Toronto “A lot come as pacifists against all war, some are against the war in Vietnam… some just don’t want to go in the army … and there are those who just don’t want to be killed.” (PS Don’t want to get killed… 5) An estimated 250,000 immigrants came to Canada between 1966-1969. An estimated 30,000-100,000 were draft resisters, (David Churchill, 228) 40% of draft dodgers, settled in BC. (David Churchill, chpt 1 pg 6)

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO DRAFT DODGERS

Draft-dodgers and deserters fled to 30 different countries including Canada, Sweden, France, Mexico, Britain, West Germany and others. (Luke Stewart, 70) Countries all responded differently to the US draft dodgers. (Luke Stewart, 70) Sweden broadened its policy to grant haven to Americans seeking to escape military service in 1968-1969. (PS Softer line by Sweden… 4) as well as gave generous benefits to US soldiers. This caused strain on US-Sweden relation because Sweden was a neutral country and did not support the Vietnam war. (Luke Stewart, 70) Relations got so bad between the US and Sweden that the US pulled their ambassador out of Sweden. (Luke Stewart, 71) Meanwhile, France was not antagonistic towards its US immigrants, but when the Paris peace treaties broke down in 1968, resulting in mass US protests in Paris, France came under public push back by its own people. (Luke Stewart, 70)

GOVERNMENT REACTION AND POLICY MAKING

Canada and the US have always had a special relationship due to their close proximity and economic bond. (Luke Stewart, 72) This relationship is further solidified in several agreements and policies such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) and numerous trade agreements throughout the 20th century. (Luke Stewart, 72) Canada highly profited from the Vietnam war, making about $3,17 million in arms selling to the US from 1964-1966 alone, and from 1965-1973 made $2.47 billion in sales of hardware, napalm and agent orange. (Luke Stewart, 72) This connection between the US made a complicated mix when it came to creating policies and laws surrounding the draft dodgers. Canada did not want to insult or betray its closest ally but between 1965-1973, there was no direct communication from the US about returning the draft dodgers. (Luke Stewart, 68) It was an intricate political combination of immigration policy, sovereignty, Canada-US relations, public opinion, Canadian nationalism and media that influenced the creation. (Luke Stewart, 74) Canada originally took a two-track policy from 1965-1969, which separated draft dodgers and military deserters, treating them differently. (Luke Stewart, 74)

Previously it was generally believed by the public that policies were made to cater to the US, instead of for Canadian interests. (Luke Stewart, 69) The draft dodgers became a symbol of Canadian nationalism and sovereignty during the Vietnam War because they defied US foreign policy. “To bow to US pressure on draft dodgers would only unleash a latent Canadian nationalism which naturally disdained this growing American influence in the country.” (Luke Stewart, 66-67)

In 1965, Canada’s stance was that there was no law preventing US draft-dodgers from coming to escape military service but clarified that it did not encourage draft dodging or military deserting. (Luke Stewart, 75) From 1966-1969, there were 5 revisions to Canadas border policy, known as the Operations Memorandum 117. Originally issued in 1966 as a comprehensive policy for the growing concerns of draft-dodgers crossing the border. (Luke Stewart, 75) This policy would provide border guards with more guidance and described that Canada would “not get involved” if someone was choosing to escape compulsory military service and that it was between the man and his country to solve that dispute. Border guards were not allowed to discriminate based on draft status and were not allowed to ask someone’s draft status. (Luke Stewart, 75) Draft dodgers received landed immigrant status, but military deserters were less welcome, not completely banned but restricted. (Luke Stewart, 76-77)

In 1967, Canada revised the Operations Memorandum 117 because of accounts of harassment along the border towards males aged 19-26 who were suspected of draft-dodging. The update restated that border guards could not ask the draft status of incoming immigrants. (Luke Stewart, 78) In 1969, there was still growing discrimination against draft-dodgers at the border, and a growing campaign from anti-war activists to completely open the borders to deserters. (Luke Stewart, 84) In 1969, the Liberal party of Canada temporarily submitted a new policy that banned deserters from obtaining immigrant status completely, claiming: it supported US enemies, gave a controversial message to Canadian deserters, and would put them at odds with other friendly countries that banned and returned deserters. (Luke Stewart, 85) Ultimately this policy did not go through as the party did not want to lose the support of the Canadian youth, it was also thought that the war would end soon and was not needed. (Luke Stewart, 85) Instead, in May 1969, Canada opened the borders to all, draft-dodgers and deserters alike. This resulted in a massive flock of war resisters to Canada, tripling each month. (Luke Stewart, 85)

The lack of acknowledgment from the US caused a lot of concern and internal debate between Canadian political parties about what to do regarding the draft dodgers. (Luke Stewart, 77) Not until 1972, during the presidential election, was the topic finally officially brought up but ultimately resulted in no changes to the status quo. (Luke Stewart, 68) President Richard Nixon did not demand the war resisters back after he got elected in 1968, but he also did not give them amnesty. In 1973, Nixon said deserters would “pay the price” if they returned to the US, otherwise they were welcome to stay in any other country that allowed them. (Luke Stewart, 68). In 1974, when President Ford took over after the Watergate scandal and reviewed the question of amnesty, he granted it, even pardoning Nixon, in hopes to reunite America. (Luke Stewart, 87) Roughly 50,000 American’s chose to stay in Canada even after the US government offered amnesty to draft dodgers in 1976. (David Churchill, chpt 1 pg 5)

The US foreign policy reflected that Canada was seen as a second-rate power by US officials, its primary source of importance came from geographical proximity and economic trade. (Luke Stewart, 71) The draft dodgers were, like Canada, a problem of lesser magnitude, (Luke Stewart, 71) and “Not worth straining Canadian American relations over.” (Luke Stewart, 82)

COMMUNITY REACTION (CHURCHES, ANTI-DRAFT MOVEMENT ETC..)

Although there was some discourse surrounding the value of draft dodging, assimilation and nationalism between group activists and resisters. Everyone ultimately agreed on: support for immigrants and political advocacy. (Jessica Squires, 45) Across Canada, self-aware activist groups created highly effective networks for sharing info and communicating. (Jessica Squires, 47) Some of these activist groups include the AMEX, a Toronto newspaper for American war resisters in Canada, the Canadian anti-draft movement, lawyers and church support.

Ronnie Nevin and Linda Krasnor, wives of two draft dodgers, founded the newsletter that became AMEX. (Jay Young, 121) AMEX was a newspaper that wrote about the community of war resisters in Canada, showing community and collective experience. (Jay Young, 115) From 1968-1977, the AMEX published articles and opinions concerning Americans who dodged the drafts, deserted the military, resisted the war via emigration and advocated for amnesty in 1973. (Jay Young, 116-117) Starting as a small newsletter, it expanded to a bimonthly magazine, averaging 30-40 pages per issue with a global audience. It reported on and analyzed American war resisters in Canada and anti-Vietnam war movement across the globe. (Jay Young, 116) AMEX strived to print all letters sent to the editor, to create and maintain open and unrestricted dialogue. (Jay Young, 122) AMEX played an irreplaceable role in its first five years, providing resisters with solidarity, friendship, hope and a sense of community. (Jay Young, 145) Catered mostly to White male war resisters despite efforts to be all-inclusive. (Jay Young, 124) AMEX was a symbol of new left activism, it opposed colonialization, technocracy and other forms of oppression. (Jay Young, 117) It was an essential communication channel for war resisters and helped build a sense of community. (Jay Young, 117)

The Canadian Anti-draft movement also helped support incoming immigrants as well as shape the public and personal perception of anti-draft activists and groups in Canada. (Jessica Squries, 45) Some of the first Anti-Draft committees started in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto around 1966. (Jessica Squries, 49) Overall there were 23 groups of the Anti-Draft Program across Canada in places including Moncton, Charlottetown, Edmonton, Fredericton and more… (Jessica Squries, 47) By 1969, various committees worked together to become a network, sharing funding and information. (Jessica Squries, 45) These groups forged and maintained a domestic network of communication among themselves and with resisters. (Jessica Squries, 71) They provided headquarters, message boards, drop-in centers, counselling, legal advice, shelter and accommodations for new immigrants, through a vast network of sympathizers. (Jessica Squries, 49) They also produced publications and pamphlets which were valuable sources of info about different activist groups, their history and their activities. One of these publications was the Manual for Draft Age immigrants to Canada which provided a snapshot of the culture at the time, aid group listings, immigration procedures and counselling services. (Jessica Squries, 60) The Manual had 5 publications between 1968-1971 each time updating the information to keep it relevant. (Jessica Squries, 60)

Lawyers played a key role in supporting immigration and providing accurate information to American immigrants. The Manual helped put immigrants in contact with immigration lawyers before the time of the Internet, Direct legal counsel. (Jessica Squries, 73)

Church groups and clergy also helped as activists via funds, donations, and church support housing. Many denominations helped, United, Methodist, Presbyterian, Protestant, Lutheran, Anglican, Mennonite and more, all supported the cause and received funding from places like Denmark, Germany, France and the Netherlands. (Jessica Squries, 74) Churches in Canada appealed to its members to donate to help support draft dodgers and deserters in Canada, to help with housing, medical and dental care as well as friendship in a new country. (PS Education Programs… 9)

EFFECT ON CANADIAN NATIONALISM

While there were many supportive activists at the time, there were two sides to Canadian nationalism at the time, one supportive of American war resisters and their representation in Canada and one that saw them as further American colonization of Canda.

New Canadian nationalism at this time manifested itself through the flag debate, the stationing of the US BOMARC missiles on Canadian soil, the meaning and value of the Canadian dollar vs. the US and the production of a supposed authentic Canadian culture. (David Churchill, 232)

The draft dodgers and war resisters became a symbol of Canadian nationalism and sovereignty during the Vietnam War because they were in opposition to US foreign policy, showing Canada’s independence from the US. (Luke Stewart, 69) American emigres were seen as potent symbols of Canadian Sovereignty and the ability of the Canadian federal government to chart a separate course, distinct from the US state department and foreign policy. (David Churchill, 230) On the other hand some saw them as unwanted US imports, and ongoing colonialization from the US. (David Churchill, 230)

Some of the New Left felt that Canada was too subservient to the US (Jay Young, 118) and that the growing American population would hinder Canada’s development of its own national identity. (David Churchill, 235) Robin Matthews, an English professor at Carleton University Ottawa wrote extensively about the unwanted American immigrants in the AMEX periodical and the Toronto-based publication Canadian Dimension. (David Churchill, 234) Matthew’s believed US emigrants were another form of US Imperialism, eroding at Canadian life. Also believed US influence would divert Canadian attention to US problems. (David Churchill, 236) He believed they were “Diminishing and diluting of Canadian political culture.” (David Churchill, 237) and we should limit the number of American students at Canadian schools who were taking Canadian places and jobs. (David Churchill, 239)

CONCLUSION(NEED TO DEVELOP)

Events of 1960’s opened the doors to political activism for many young Canadians despite being “American” issues, they served as entry points for future activism. (David Churchill, 258)