

Final Report on the 11th International Conference on Military Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Initiatives in Woltersdorf, Berlin, Germany, October 26-29, 2006

“Military Tax – Responsibility – Peace Tax”

The conference was attended by 54 participants and 6 speakers from 15 countries with a good balance of German and non-German guests.

Sometimes in the run-up to and during the conference there was an issue whether to invite participants also from countries where there are no active peace tax groups. Individually and by way of their reports from regions of conflict these participants demonstrated impressively why the conference theme continues to be important.

During planning it was discussed how many workshops should be set up and whether or not it would be preferable to have fewer workshops with longer durations. The 90 minute rhythm was retained and even the street theatre enthusiasts preferred to choose a second workshop.

The political situation in Germany has changed so that – unlike in 2002 – there was only a single politician available for a discussion before the conference – times are difficult.

The presentation of the “Manifesto against the Draft and the Military System” opened up vistas for developments in two directions: It was the first time conference participants heard about this campaign and its international support – as witnessed by the signatures. And the Berlin-based Gandhi Information Centre represented by Christian Bartolf showed openness to possibly network with other movements.

The global report on “Military Recruitment and Conscientious Objection to Military Service” with its many details constituted an impressive opening to the conference. Derek Brett had drawn up the study on behalf of Conscience and Peace Tax International /CPTI and presented it in Woltersdorf. The British Josef Rowntree Charitable Fund and the Quaker Office at the UN had provided funding.

There was also encouragement to be drawn from international activities to promote military tax resistance and peace tax initiatives. And national groups were asked to develop contacts with international organisations. The list of arguments developed for this purpose with the “pros and cons” proved a valuable tool taking up and developing a project of the last conference.

The conference focused on the issue of “responsibility”. Ilsegrit Fink, a retired pastor, and Frieder Otto Wolf, philosopher and politician, presented their views on some fundamental issues which were underpinned by Wolfgang Höhne, the mayor of Woltersdorf, who shared some practical experiences from GDR times.

The theme was taken up in a workshop prepared by the Germans. The result is an updated draft wording in two languages which can be used for future activities both at national and international levels: “Human beings are free to reject military violence. Therefore no person shall be compelled to participate in military violence, directly or indirectly”.

Special attention was given to two members of the British “Peace Tax Seven” group, seven individuals who intend to closely cooperate in their attempt to sue for the right to military tax resistance first in Britain and then at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. They would like to see similar group activities in other countries – a wish that may possibly come true.

Britain and the Netherlands presented examples of reaching out to young people and getting them involved – some of these examples will be copied elsewhere.

CPTI NGO held its annual conference on matters of business and elected a new board. The annual conference expressed their gratitude towards Marian Franz/USA, the retiring chairperson of the board, for her long years of service and valuable contribution and expressed their deep concern over Marian’s severe illness. After the conference we learned that she passed away on November 16, 2006.

In their final declaration participants primarily emphasized the individual’s right to freedom of conscience and to refusal of military violence. German military involvement in Afghanistan was criticized and a civilian-based conflict resolution was called for. The demand was raised to recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service and to grant asylum to conscientious objectors to military service and to deserters. Finally participants gratefully accepted Britain’s offer to host the 2008 conference and also took note of Canada’s readiness to host a conference.