

IPB CONFERENCE IN BERLIN

October 2016

Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI) PARTICIPATION Taxes for Peace not War - Winning the Human Right not to Pay for War WS B20, room MA 848, Sunday morning

Members and correspondents of CPTI were notified about this event and in the end 13 representatives from five countries applied to attend. They represented AKtie VRedesbelasting (VRAK) in Belgium; Netwerk Friedensteuer in Germany; Fredsskattalliansen in Norway; the National War Tax Resistance Co-ordinating Committee in the USA and Conscience – Taxes for Peace not War in the UK.

CPTI has never attended an IPB conference before, so we were very much finding out how the event works and how we might work together. Despite a few technical hitches, we all pulled together and made our workshop a success. There was an unfortunate clash with IPB's workshop on Global Military Spending which was on at the same time in the main building. We thought conference attendees might be split as to which to attend. In all there were 23 in the session, which compared well with the other workshops that members of our group had attended individually. Of course there were 13 of us from CPTI already, so in fact we were almost matched by the same number of previously unknowns. However they were all very interested and asked good questions. There may be benefits for our national organisations. In particular there was a keen Belgian who refused to pay the proportion of his taxes that his government planned to spend on new warplanes. A Finish lady declared that there was no peace tax movement in Finland but there will be now! Another felt moved to sing Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song' for us.

Robin opened the workshop with a description of conscientious objection to military service (COMS) but also to military taxation (COMT) - we are all conscripted into military service through our taxes. This included a brief history of COMS and COMT which reaches back to the 12th Century. He went on to explain there are different forms of war tax resistance and campaigns are different in each country, according to the laws and customs which prevail. There are also different proportions of the tax pool which go for war preparations. He pointed out that COMS is now recognised by the UN and ECHR as a human right under articles 18 and 9 respectively: "The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". He finished with a brief history of CPTI, how it formed and its role at the UN.

After this five representatives from national organisations gave a short resume of the work they are doing and the different approaches they are taking. Finally there were some questions and discussion of the issues raised.

We note that in the final 'Agenda for Action', IPB made no mention of COMT, but in their list of 'Specific Measures' there was one to: *Establish a system of taxation (peace tax) to generate resources for the work of peace organizations.* This seems to encroach on our area of interest without giving us our voice. Indeed some war tax resisters would like their withheld tax money to go to peace organisations rather than a government run peace fund, but IPB seem to have side-stepped the issue of personal conscience. We understand that this line relates to the recent Colombian peace treaty where they proposed a peace tax to assist civilian peace building efforts throughout the country. We hope that in future conferences IPB will incorporate more about conscientious objection to both military service and military taxation. We note that at the beginning of the Agenda for Action, IPB state: *Our principal focus is the high levels of tax revenues used to fund the military.* It is a short step to realising every citizen should have a right to refuse to pay for this and instead have those taxes spent on building peace.