

Report on Northern Friends Peace Board Meeting in Dumfries, June 2017.

In my last two reports on the work of Northern Friends Peace Board to Cumberland Area Meeting I wrote at some length about the proposed Nuclear Weapons Ban. You will recall that a large majority of UN states backed a resolution to put into place a conference in 2017 that would negotiate a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty. The hope is that this treaty, like the Land Mine and Cluster Munition Ban Treaties, will start the process of prohibiting and eliminating these most devastating of weapons of mass destruction. At the nfpb meeting in Bolton, Janet Fenton told us that she would be participating as a WILPF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) representative at the UN Global Weapons Ban Treaty conference. She was offered and accepted the proposal of support from the NFPB. We were reminded that the UK Government were boycotting the discussions.

We met in Dumfries in June at precisely the time that Janet Fenton and Tim Wallis, author of *The Truth about Trident*, were in New York for the second stage of the negotiations by the United Nations towards the Treaty. At the beginning of July the treaty was endorsed by 122 countries in the face of strong opposition from nuclear-armed states and their allies. Only the Netherlands, which took part in the discussion, despite having US nuclear weapons on its territory, voted against the treaty.

The 10-page treaty <http://undocs.org/A/CONF.229/2017/8> will be open for signatures from any UN member state on 20 September during the annual general assembly. While countries that possess nuclear weapons are not expected to sign up, at least at present, supporters of the treaty believe it marks an important step towards a nuclear-free world by banning the weapons under international law.

The NFPB hopes to embrace the opportunity that the new treaty will create for engaging with our own governments, of whatever political persuasion. Although these efforts are unlikely to lead to the end of nuclear weaponry immediately it is possible that they will increase the stigma attached to nuclear

weapons, and all the activities involved will remind people round the world of the dangers of nuclear weaponry.

NFPB has organised workshops devised by Tim Wallis on 'Having More Productive Trident Conversations', the first of which was held at Swarthmoor Hall. He used a series of exercises, general discussion, fact-finding, role-play and sharing hopes and fears. Participants considered how to prepare for the unexpected – such as a conversation with a friend or neighbour with opposing views – in a way that would open up the space for better understanding and the possibility of changed hearts and minds.

The other recurring theme which NFPB focused on in June was militarism in and schools. We heard from Castle Douglas Friends for whom this issue is a concern. A survey of schools suggested that the secondary schools stated that they did not experience involvement by the military. Subsequently it became clear that low level moves by the military in the community were taking place, and the school heads had not been wholly truthful.

Michael Gove stated "every child can benefit from the values of a military ethos", an agenda pursued by his successors. Since 2011, the government has committed £45 million for new programmes with 'a military ethos' [while slashing Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and mental health services for young people]. Military-led activities in national education policy include aggressive plans to spread cadet forces to state schools (550 by 2020); arms companies and the military sponsoring new academies and influencing what they teach; and military personnel going into classrooms as speakers, recruiters and teachers. All of this is taking place with virtually no public debate or wider scrutiny.

There is a short Quaker film, *The Unseen March*, available to watch on line:-

<http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/challenging-militarism-1#heading-1>

Jo Alberti, Keswick Local Meeting