

Cymdeithas y Cymod / Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales

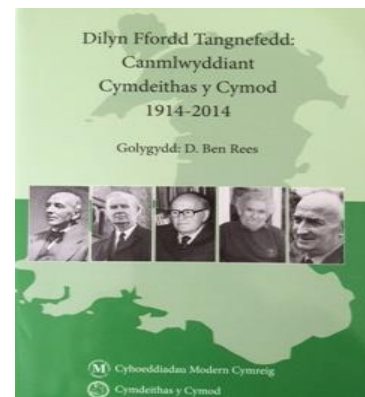
Report to EUFOR Gathering, Geneva, Switzerland – April 2016



2015 – 16 has been a period of relatively quiet witness for Cymdeithas y Cymod / Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales. Looking back on and reflecting on the year there have been achievements and challenges. And yet we are aware that, in the context of the commemoration of WWI and of world events – the war on Syria, the refugee crisis, the impact of climate change – the voice of peace and reconciliation needs to be heard louder than ever.

Remembering for Peace:

We are in the middle of the commemoration period for WWI and – thankfully – Wales seems to have largely not gone down the path of militaristic glorification, although there is an ever-present need to be alert to this happening. To commemorate the last 100 years of peace-making in Wales Cymdeithas y Cymod launched their own **commemorative volume ‘Dilyn Ffordd Tangnefedd’ (‘Following the Path of Peace’)**, which was launched on the Eisteddfod field in August 2015.



Cymdeithas y Cymod is a partner in the **‘Wales for Peace’** project. Based in the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA) in the Temple of Peace in Cardiff, this project aims to answer the question: *‘In the 100 years since WWI, how has Wales contributed to peace?’* This is an exciting opportunity to research and share Wales’ peace heritage, to ask critical questions about the past and to relate them to what is happening today and people’s attitudes towards war and peace. Some of the achievements of the project to date are:

- The creation of a **travelling exhibition** ‘Remembering for Peace’. Centred on Wales’ WWI Book of Remembrance with its 35,000 names of those who died in WWI, the exhibition raises questions about how we can commemorate loss and remember for peace. The Learning Coordinator has produced a workshop to go with this exhibition which helps young people think about the effects of war and about how they can work for peace.
- A ‘Remembering for Peace’ **schools conference** in Wrexham, North Wales.
- The uncovering of our first **‘hidden histories’ of peacemakers**, which are available on the [‘WCIA Voices’ blog](#).
- The creation and promotion of **learning materials**, including a [‘Teach Peace’](#) pack and [‘Voices of Conscience’](#) – a series of films about people who have stood against war in Wales in the last 100 years.
- Work with young people in North Wales to create [the 2016 Message of Peace and Goodwill](#) on the theme of **conscientious objection**. The text of their message in English is reproduced at the end of this report.

The work of the project will expand dramatically in 2016 – 17, as it involves more individuals and communities in Wales in discovering their peace heritage. **Two further travelling**

exhibitions will be created - one looking at the history of the Urdd's annual Message of Peace and Goodwill since 1922 and the other, a 'Belief in Action' exhibition, looking at how men and women in Wales have witnessed for peace on the basis of religious and political beliefs. There will be a variety of opportunities for schools to be involved, including a '**Peace Heroes' competition**, intergenerational and arts projects, and a third schools conference in Caernarfon in October. Increasingly people will be able to get involved in voicing and sharing their views on peace and conflict both as part of events and by taking part in an **online survey**. Our aim is to put peace on the map in Wales and to get more people actively involved in thinking about and working for peace on the basis of their insights into a very real peace heritage. Cymdeithas y Cymod members will be involved in various ways – from creating and translating materials to work in schools and supporting exhibitions.

Protest and Witness:

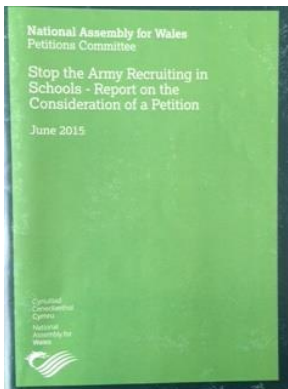
The four women who took part in a demonstration against the testing of drones for military purposes at **Llanbedr airfield** near Harlech and who refused to pay a fine for the 'criminal damage' caused appeared before Caernarfon court on 17th September. Sian ap Gwynfor gave a powerful statement refuting the fact that they had acted 'unlawfully'. Indeed, she said, they had acted according to a higher law: that to humanity as established in the Nuremberg trials and also to a higher divine law. Each of the group was given individual fines. As a result a **special fund** was formed which quickly reached the sum needed to cover the fines, and which will be used to adapt and translate the '[Fly Kites not Drones](#)' educational resource, produced by Quaker Peace and Social Witness. The Gwynedd Branch of Cymdeithas y Cymod continues to raise awareness of the developments at Llanbedr and to campaign against them. We are also working with CND Cymru and Drones Campaign Network Cymru to produce a new information leaflet about drones.

The Cardiff Group of Cymdeithas y Cymod has been reborn, and the first action we took part in was a protest against the **Arms Fair in Cardiff** on 16th March, 2016. The Fair included companies such as BAE systems who – amongst other countries - sell arms to Saudi Arabia and Israel, who have used weapons against civilian populations in the Yemen and Palestine. It was not all big companies however. Shamefully the Welsh Government Procurement Service had a stall at the Fair, as did the University of South Wales. Members of Cymdeithas y Cymod were prominent with a large horizontal banner and placards with the words '*NO to weapons of war*'. The Fair has in the last couple of years been moved from Bristol where protestors made its presence too uncomfortable. Our aim is to send a clear message that selling weapons is not acceptable in Wales either. Some Cymdeithas y Cymod members also joined a large **rally against the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system** in London on 27th February.



Cymdeithas y Cymod members continue to be supportive of **the initiative to establish a peace institute** in Wales. During the year the Peace Institute Initiative **produced two research reports**: one on the current extent of military presence in Wales, and a comparative study of peace institutes across the world. Both of these reports are available on the Societies Portal of the Wales for Peace website. Once the Welsh Assembly elections are over on 5th May, we will be canvassing AMs to support the setting up of an institute, as well as building up partnerships and raising funds.

Challenges:



In June 2015 the National Assembly Petitions Committee at long last produced their report on **our petition to stop the army recruiting in schools**. This petition was originally tabled by Cymdeithas y Cymod in November 2012. There were debates over the life of this petition as to whether what the army does in schools amounts to recruiting and also whether it disproportionately targets poorer and more vulnerable areas in Wales. The recommendations of the Petitions Committee were somewhat disappointing. They made **three recommendations** to the Welsh Government, namely that:

1. They should consider whether further research is needed into the reasons for the apparently disproportionate number of visits to schools in areas of relatively high deprivation;
2. They should review the Careers and the World of Work Curriculum Framework to ensure that guidance in relation to inviting the armed forces into schools takes account of their unique nature as a career and the need to encourage an open and honest exchange of views with pupils about their role; and
3. They should give further consideration to how schools, businesses and employers can best be supported to ensure that a diverse range of businesses and employers visit schools to provide pupils with information about the career opportunities they offer.

In other words, we need to keep a watching brief on the activity of the military in our schools. In this we have been working closely with the charity Forces Watch. The full text of the Petitions Committee report can be seen at:

<http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10253/cr-ld10253-e.pdf>.

Following the EUFOR meeting last year we had high hopes that FOR England and Wales could cooperate to organise a visit by **Junior Nzita Nsuami** in September – October 2015, during which he would attend an English course and have opportunities to go into schools to talk of his experiences as a child soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We got very close. All the arrangements were in place, including accommodation, a place on a language course, and plans for Junior's itinerary in England and Wales. However, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office refused to grant Junior a visa. The grounds? That there was insufficient evidence that Junior would return to his own country – in spite of the fact that we had a letter from FOR in Switzerland proving that he had been invited to speak there from 1st November onwards. We were bitterly disappointed. It was a sharp reminder of the political challenges that can stand in the way of peace and reconciliation.

In October 2015 we welcomed **Nasser Arafat** to Wales. Nasser is an architect from Nablus in the north of the West Bank, and has helped to restore some houses in the village where I served as an Ecumenical Accompanier in 2012. Nasser addressed our autumn vigil meeting in North Wales, and his language was uncompromising. He talked about the impossibility of negotiating for peace when the person you are negotiating with takes your watch and refuses to give it back: a powerful image for the unequal relationship which exists between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. At the same meeting Anna-Jane, who also works for Christian Aid, displayed a powerful exhibition of drawings by children from Gaza, illustrating the violence they have witnessed and the psychological suffering it causes.



Members of Cymdeithas y Cymod are regularly asked to contribute to radio programmes. This mostly happened when an international crisis situation blows up and the interviewers want a pacifist voice on the panel. This can be very uncomfortable, and we feel the need to discuss in more depth as a Branch **how we effectively answer challenging questions**. So *what would we do as pacifists against the threat of terrorism? Do we really think that non-violence works?* We aim to look in more depth at these questions during our Annual Council, with the help of Jacob Dafydd Ellis, who is studying for a Master's Degree in Journalism at Cardiff University.

There are, of course, huge challenges with the present refugee crisis and the tendency to shut doors and hearts, to refuse to look at root causes, and to build 'fortress Europe'. **What is the unique message of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in this situation, and how can we ensure that our voice is heard?** The pupils of Ysgol Maes Garmon from Mold in North Wales were clear in their answer. Young people can help to build peace, brick by brick. The full text of their message is printed below.

I send you every good wish for a successful EUFOR Gathering and am sorry I can't be with you. I travel on 1st April to Israel and Palestine, where I will be helping to facilitate Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops and meeting up with Israeli peace women to find out how we can support them in their work for peace.

Jane Harries
(Coordinator and temporary Secretary)

March 2016

Urdd Gobaith Cymru: Message of Peace and Goodwill, 2016

Choice & Conscience

We have no instructions as to how to build peace but this is what we believe are the foundations:

Peace is showing respect.

Peace is feeling safe.

Peace is unity.

Peace is...

You decide.

A hundred years ago in the First World War, men aged between 18 and 41 were forced to join the army.

"You have no choice!"

But to some, the voice of their conscience said that fighting was wrong.

So they created a choice for themselves. Objection.

This in itself was a battle, but they believed in peace and they chose peace.

It wasn't an easy decision but it was a brave decision.

Today, we are called upon to be brave, to listen to our conscience.

As we build a wall, every brick counts, and in building peace, every choice counts.

So...

...we choose to show respect.

...we choose to help others.

...we choose to take responsibility.

...we choose to accept others as they are.

Do you want to build together with u?

