
TEACHING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Two ex-teachers from Wrexham Peace and Justice Forum recently offered sessions on peace and justice issues to all six Wrexham secondary schools. Ruabon School was the only school which took up the offer. Staff told us that their sixth formers were studying for the Welsh Baccalaureate and we were asked to provide two one hour sessions on global citizenship for about 25 students each session.

The short Oxfam document, "A Curriculum for Global Citizenship", was the main reference we used. We developed suggestions for ground rules and for exercises aimed at encouraging students to reflect on their experiences of communal decision making in their school, their localities and their country. We invited them to show how strongly they felt involved in each of those settings. We asked about their experience of democratic processes and how many of them on the electoral roll intended to vote.

In varied, and sometimes lively, discussion we tried to help students explore conditions, responsibilities and opportunities of local, national and international citizenship. Several students were aware of Fair Trade issues, and most seemed interested in how their

purchasing power could influence conditions for workers here and abroad.

We found the students polite, co-operative and receptive. Some seemed diffident in the fairly large groups and, if the invitation to return to Ruabon next year holds, then we want to encourage discussion in smaller groups so as to get more students to talk through their views.

We want to help students to clarify what they think and feel about peace and justice issues, not just to get them to listen to our ideas. What we heard from Ruabon sixth formers prompted more thinking in ourselves, and we'd like to develop that.

If you are involved with a school, college or youth group and are interested in hosting a similar session with Wrexham Peace & Justice Forum, please contact Michael Still or Brian Matthews at wrexhamsaw@yahoo.com or by writing to: WPJF, PO Box 661, Wrexham LL11 1QU.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF NON-VIOLENCE

The title may have sounded a bit high-flown but a wide range of 48 people from North Wales attended a Study Day on this topic on January 14th at Capel y Groes, Wrexham. They were guided through an interactive event by Brendan McGeague. Originating from N. Ireland, he worked for Lancaster Diocese Justice & Peace Commission before moving to Australia. His closest contact has been with the U.S.A.-based Franciscan Movement 'Pace e Bene'. This movement organises single events and extended courses to examine the underlying principles and the essential practices for coping non-violently with conflicts in daily life.

Nation-states have a desperate need to manage their differences without sliding into military action, even as a last resort. All human relationships are liable to be complicated by prejudice, suspicion, dislike and hatred, and it is here that we have to unravel the ease with which righteous or unrighteous anger turns into mindless violence. The study day helped us to see that wars all begin in the human mind and heart, and we contribute to world peace by learning to understand and manage even personal conflict in non-violent ways. We must then insist that political leaders do not fail us by demonising their opponents, make them insecure and humiliated, sometimes on false premises, and set in motion violent military action on a wave of pseudo-patriotism and self-righteousness. There are alternatives if we make use of the valuable experience of those who have studied the possibilities of non-violent conflict management and real peacemaking.

A FRESH APPROACH TO RESOLVING INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

A new coalition of groups in the U.K., U.S.A. and Canada, entitled 'The International People's Initiative for Departments of Peace' has issued on March 2nd an important statement under the above title, in the hope that it will receive wide support.

The U.K. Movement for a Ministry for Peace as part of government, aided by a watchful and helpful citizens' committee, managed to get a private members' bill in the House of Commons a year ago, under the leadership of John McConnell M.P. with considerable cross-party support. The ideas have been refined and extended since linking up with U.S. Senator Kucinich's initiative and others in Canada. They have together produced a short "statement" where they call for a change in the manner in which conflict is dealt with so as to meet the fundamental needs of all humanity for security, mutual respect and justice.

The petition form for public signatures (copies available from Owen Hardwicke) follows the sentence: - "It is time to create a world in which we all pursue the non-violent resolution of conflict. The stakes are too high for any other course of action."