

Civilian Peace Service and Nonviolent Peaceforce Canada

By Sybil Grace

There is a new star on the peace horizon, growing brighter in Europe though just a glimmer in this hemisphere! Civilian Peace Service (CPS), an alternative to armed intervention, is the mundane title for such excitement.

By the time you read this article, Nonviolent Peaceforce Canada (NPC) will have held consultations in Ottawa, partnered by St. Paul University Conflict Studies. Invited were government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), police and military, religious groups and corporations — to discuss the feasibility and shape of a possible model in Canada for a peace army that might work with our armed services. This cooperation is a compromise we can accept until the day when an armed service is no longer seen as security.

For several years in Europe there has been a highly accredited training programme for “Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management.” This last year there were fifteen 12-day courses offered in nine countries (in English). The courses covered media relations, administration, human rights, etc. From these courses, a shared roster of trained peacekeepers is now available for peace teams to work overseas, or locally, on conflict issues such as race, refugee and aboriginal affairs. The European CPS is now supported by three governments: Germany, Italy and the Netherlands — and could grow to be a standing force.

With this in mind, NPC planned consultations for 7–9 February 2005 at St. Paul University, bringing Tim Wallis from the UK, and Helga Tempel from Germany. Tim has been administering a large Rowntree Foundation grant to facilitate a Civilian Peace Service; Helga, a Quaker, has been building towards CPS for at least ten years. In addition, David Grant of Washington DC, who is a staff member with the Nonviolent Peaceforce, brings his vision of an international standing peace army.

Hopefully, there is now a coalition of NGOs working on a suggested model for CPS, with a strong participation from NPC. As well, Prime Minister Paul Martin’s dream of a Canada Corps, which is actively being explored, might fit into the larger picture of CPS. There is also a convergence of working groups across Canada who are independently considering a federal Department of Peace, and whose ideas have fed into the broader picture of CPS for Canada.

When the Nonviolent Peaceforce grew out of the 1999 Hague Peace Conference, and the next spring reached us in Canada through Carl Stieren, we admired its hard-headed yet visionary management. Five years later, we have a strong international organisation (50 countries, 100 member organisations, endorsed by seven Nobel Peace laureates) with our first peace team active in Sri Lanka. Since the Nonviolent Peaceforce teams were in troubled spots on the east and south coasts, and this was the same area hit by the tsunami, relief work became paramount. In fact, the CBC often contacted Angela Pinchero, a Canadian team member near Batticaloa, for information.

As NPC began offering mini training programmes in Canada, we whetted people’s appetites to get involved in crisis work closer to home, but this was not possible under the original NPC mandate. When some form of CPS is established for Canada, there will be a focus for graduates from our programmes who are not ready to go overseas but want to work locally. Now it is up to NPC to broaden our base across the country, while we support whatever group effort will establish some version of a Civilian Peace Service in Canada.

Over the years Quakers have asked the Nonviolent Peaceforce Canada what was the difference between NPC and Peace Brigades International (PBI). Both organisations began with the same vision, and share

founding members Murray Thompson and Hans Sinn. One major difference is that NPC pays team members sufficiently to recruit mature professionals with dependents, and deploy them for at least two years while PBI and other groups like Christian Peacemakers Teams rely on volunteers. However, we all work very closely together, and two years ago NPC hosted a roundtable weekend for the various peace teams in Canada.

All this, plus Kofi Annan's call for input to a conference at the July United Nations in New York on

unarmed civilian defence, gives hope for a saner world ... and plenty of work for Nonviolent Peaceforce Canada. If you want to join in these new directions please contact: «info@magma.ca» or «sybilgrace@ncf.ca». Our website can be found at: «www.npcanada.org» and «nonviolentpeaceforce.org». *

Note: My thanks to June-Etta for this opportunity to speak more fully about NPC and CPS, after a confusion around the article that appeared in the December issue of The Canadian Friend.

Sybil Grace is a member of Ottawa Monthly Meeting.

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