

Consultation on petition P-03-262 Wales Peace Institute
Response from Philip Steele



Philip Steele



6 December 2011

Dear Committee Members,

Petition for a Wales Peace Institute

I am writing to you in support of the proposition for a Wales Peace Institute.

I envisage this body as having statutory powers to audit or to investigate the implications for Wales of any policies or legislation regarding the arms trade, aerospace projects, military training and personnel policy, security and public safety issues, foreign policy and asylum issues, human rights and questions of social justice.

The Institute could investigate Welsh government policy, the effects of non-devolved policies on Wales, or the implications of commercial projects or transactions in the above fields. The body would not of course make policy or legislate, it would simply have the right if it so wished to present a report or research to the Welsh Assembly, with an obligation that its findings are at least considered and published if not necessarily acted upon.

The Institute would be constituted by all-party consensus. It would ask for input such as academic research from universities (eg departments of international law, economics, planning etc as appropriate), from lawyers, from industry, from trade unions, from county councils, from the Welsh Centre for International

Affairs, from non-governmental organisations such as Christian Aid or Oxfam, from faith-based and humanist groups, from community groups, from international link organisations such as Dolen Cymru-Lesotho, from campaigning organisations such as CND Cymru or from the Welsh Peace & Justice networks.

The Institute could operate with a very small staff and call in expert advice as necessary.

Why is the Institute necessary? Wales is already heavily involved in the defence industry and in all sorts of projects and endeavours affecting issues of peace, justice and international security. Democratic accountability is often overridden by commercial or political lobbying and PR, which is too often accepted without question. An auditing body would ensure that our elected representatives and the electorate themselves have access to the relevant facts as distinct from propaganda. It would encourage transparency, accountability and democracy.

It is these last three ideals which are being demanded increasingly by populations around the world. As a relatively recent political foundation, the Welsh Assembly has the chance of breaking the mould and standing up for a better system which could be admired worldwide.

Foreign policy might not yet be a devolved matter, but policies made or implemented in Wales do have international repercussions which deserve consideration in Cardiff. The promotion of peace and justice issues is a longstanding tradition in Wales, going back to the likes of Henry Richard MP (1812-88) and before.

I am impressed by the work of many other peace institutes in nations and territories around the world. I saw on video the presentation made to the Assembly by the Flanders Peace Institute and attended subsequently a meeting in Bangor in which Nelly Maes of that organisation made a compelling case for the work of her institute. Afterwards my question was not so much 'Can we afford to have an Institute in Wales?', as 'Can we afford not to have one?' in this troubled world: *A oes heddwch?*

I make this representation as an individual. I have worked for 40 years as a writer of children's books, some of which are concerned with international understanding, conflict resolution, current affairs and topical social issues. I am a founder member of the Bangor & Ynys Môn Peace & Justice Group and in the past have been a member of groups such as the Wales Anti-Apartheid Movement. However I wish to emphasise that a Wales Peace Institute would have to engage with all sectors of civil and political society to be effective, credible and useful.

Yours faithfully,

Philip Steele

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Steele". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

To: Committee Clerk, Petition Committee, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff
Bay CF99 1NA