

13 Introduction from *Peace Movements in International Protest and World Politics Since 1945 (the Postwar World)*

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The peace protests which captured public attention in the years since 1945 took place in response to immediate dangers, but they were nevertheless, linked to a much longer history of peace campaigning. Some of the organizations now active in opposing war and war preparations date from earlier in this century. Some go back very much further: the Quakers, for example, arose in the seventeenth century. Moreover, recent campaigners not only respond to contemporary concerns and arguments but draw also on a much longer tradition of thinking about the problems of war and peace. There are many continuities between past and present peace action, and to gain a full understanding of the present we need to begin by looking very briefly at the history of thought and action relating to peace before the Second World War.

Origins of peace activity

The belief that war is immoral is rooted in early Christianity, which at first prompted a pacifist refusal to take part in war. In due course Christian belief was adapted to political realities and the requirements of rulers, as St Augustine and later Catholic philosophers elaborated the doctrine of Just War. In addition to a specifically Christian rejection of war there is a humanist strand of thought, which stresses the brutalizing and corrupting nature of warfare, that can be traced back to classical Greece. Humanism surfaced in the Renaissance and led thinkers like Erasmus to denounce the barbarities of war. Later, secular rationalism prompted theorists in early eighteenth-century Europe to propose forms of international organization to secure permanent peace. One of the best-known treatises was by St Pierre, who published his essay on *Perpetual Peace* in 1712. Towards the end of the century both Rousseau and Kant produced their own critical reflections on this topic, raising questions about the relevance of the internal organization of states if the aim of international peace was to be realized.

The first organized peace groups, however, were founded immediately after the Napoleonic Wars, in the USA and in Britain. The growth of peace activity might be seen as part of the new spirit of democracy which prompted popular agitation not only for extension of the franchise but for a range of social and humanitarian reforms, and created aspirations for the transformation of society. It is, nonetheless, significant that the new peace societies were founded after a Europe-wide conflict that had effectively lasted twenty-five years. The Napoleonic Wars are often seen as marking a critical change in the nature of modern war, popularizing the idea of 'the nation in arms' and promoting a new form of total war. Certainly the wars prompted a romantic nationalism and a glorification of war and the figure of the soldier. But there was also awareness of the destructiveness and waste of war, of the thousands of fighting men killed, the ravages of famine and the burned and sacked towns and

villages.¹ Goya's etchings of 'The Disasters of War' depicted the mutual atrocities resulting from the Spanish people's guerrilla resistance to the Napoleonic army of occupation.

The first peace societies also drew upon a much earlier commitment to oppose war, since Quakers played a key role in founding them, aided by Unitarians and other free-thinking Protestants. The Quaker commitment to peace stemmed from their belief in recapturing the spirit of early Christianity and conviction that waging war was incompatible with respecting 'that of God in every man'. While a number of religious sects which arose at the time of the Reformation believed bearing arms was forbidden by the Christian gospels, most of these were primarily concerned about personal morality and salvation, and so avoided compromise with the world of politics. The Quakers, however, were formed during the religious and political ferment of the English Civil War in the 1640s, and under one of their leaders, William Penn, were able to found a Quaker government in America. So they always had a concern with the politics of this world. Indeed, Penn anticipated St Pierre in drawing up his own plan for a league of states to preserve international peace. Quakers therefore quite naturally sponsored peace groups, which also drew on the ideas of early nineteenth-century liberalism.

The first peace societies stressed that differences between states could be settled without recourse to war, and relied heavily on the role of enlightened public opinion and on rational discussion of conflicting interests. The American Peace Society, created in 1828 through the merger of thirty-six societies from different areas, called in its constitution for 'amicable discussion and arbitration' between states, and for 'settling all controversies by an appeal to reason'. The institutional basis for devising such settlements was to be a 'Congress of Nations whose decrees shall be enforced by public opinion that rules the world'.² In order to promote and mobilize public opinion, the new peace societies engaged in extensive pamphleteering, sent speakers on long lecture tours and founded their own periodicals. The British Society, which laid particular emphasis on the power of the press, began to publish the *Herald of Peace* in 1819, and the first American peace paper was the *Friend of Peace*, founded in 1821. The franchise was still restricted, but the peace societies did not limit themselves to mobilizing those who had the vote. Women were involved early on in peace activity, while campaigners like the American Elihu Burritt set out to recruit workers in both the USA and Britain.

From the 1840s to the Crimean War

Thinking about peace acquired a more radical tinge when William Lloyd Garrison, best known for his efforts to abolish slavery, spelled out the implications of Christian 'non-resistance' and called for non-cooperation with all government preparations for war. Garrison drew up a Declaration of Principles for the New England Non-Resistance Society, which he helped to found in 1838. One of his colleagues, Adin Ballou, explained in more detail what this meant in a book entitled *Christian Non-Resistance*, published in 1846. Both Garrison and Ballou stressed that they were advocating not passivity, but an active moral resistance to evil, a resistance which did not involve inflicting physical violence.³ Garrison came to condone the use of violence to end slavery, but the idea of non-resistance was later to influence Tolstoy, who had read Ballou. Tolstoy himself had an impact on the young Gandhi, who translated non-violent resistance into an effective form of political action, first in South Africa and then in India. Through Gandhi peace activists were in turn inspired by the potential of non-violent resistance to oppose injustice, occupation and war.

The original Quaker-influenced peace groups acquired a new ally in the 1840s in the Free Trade Movement, led in Britain by Richard Cobden and in the USA by Charles Sumner and William Ellery Channing. Theorists of free trade believed that trade would create such

a strong economic interest in peace that even governments adhering to obsolete attitudes would be prevented from launching wasteful and destructive wars. The Free Traders gained support from businessmen for their economic defence of free trade, and were able to ally with the peace societies on a limited programme and help finance a number of international peace congresses, starting in London in 1843.

Peace societies flourished in countries where Protestantism in religion, liberalism in politics and a free enterprise economy provided a favourable setting. Hence the predominance of peace activity in Britain and the USA. The relative isolation of both these countries from the rivalries and conflicts of Europe encouraged opposition to war, although Britain could not entirely escape its great power 'obligation' to maintain a European balance of power, and the USA was to face similar dilemmas in the twentieth century. Peace organizations did spread to various parts of continental Europe, but were in the early nineteenth century often initiated by British or American activists; and the international congresses were organized and dominated by the Anglo-American groups. Continental Europeans had a different view of the ideal international order. After the Napoleonic Wars much of Europe was subjected to the enforced stability laid down at the Congress of Vienna. The Concert of Europe was designed to settle territorial boundaries, but under Austrian and Russian influence it also meant that peace was purchased at the price of suppressing liberal, democratic and nationalist aspirations. So, in the short run, armed rebellion seemed the obvious means of securing freedom from autocratic and imperial rulers. In the long run, European thinkers looked to the goal of a United States of Europe.

The Anglo-American concept of internationalism did not embrace any form of supranational organization: its vision was rather of independent sovereign states meeting in periodic conference and resolving their disputes by reasoned negotiation or voluntary acceptance of arbitration. By 1848 the theme of disarmament had been added to the platform of the second Universal Peace Congress, and an appeal was made to the two major liberal powers, Britain and the USA, to give a lead in reducing their arms. It was the ideas of the British and American peace societies which prevailed in international congresses up to 1853, though they themselves were split between the more committed pacifists and the conventional liberalism of the free trade movement. The former wished to oppose all wars and promote Christian non-resistance, the latter to give primacy to free trade. Both emphases were omitted from compromise policies designed to gain support in Europe.

Despite the very moderate programmes adopted at these congresses and the generally respectable middle-class character of the peace societies, they attracted the hostility and contempt of the political establishment and its press. *The Times* denounced the 1843 Universal Peace Congress as a particularly extreme and pernicious example of the 'disease' of the 'fanaticism of association'. It commented scathingly on 'the vagaries and delusions of those unhappy individuals who . . . profess no less than the total abolition throughout the terrestrial globe of war. . .'.²⁴

The settlement of Europe imposed by the Congress of Vienna was challenged by the wave of revolutions which swept across Europe in 1848–49, and asserted democratic and nationalist justifications for violent rebellion and wars of liberation. Belief that some types of war were just and necessary, and that democratic or nationalist freedoms must be secured as the basis for just and lasting peace, had (as noted above) separated many European radicals from the Anglo-American ideology of the early peace societies. But the conflict between maintaining peace and securing justice caused a crisis among American pacifists, also, over the issue of slavery. Some committed abolitionists, such as William Garrison, abandoned their pacificism and the Civil War divided the peace societies.

From the Crimean War to the First World War

The collapse of the first international peace movement was directly caused, however, not by the problems posed by just wars but by the outbreak of another European war based on the balance of power principle of curbing Russian territorial ambitions: the Crimean War of 1854–56. There followed a period of wars in Europe for Italian and German unification, and no international peace congress was held between 1853 and 1871. Nevertheless, new peace groups were springing up in Europe, representing the democratic republicanism which had been suppressed. The developing socialist movement also had a commitment to resist war. The convergence of various strands of radical thought with the more traditional pacifist internationalism of the early peace societies was demonstrated by the appearance of the flamboyant anarchist Bakunin at the Peace Congress of 1871. The development of the independent Socialist Internationals marked a divergence between the liberal and pacifist peace societies and the more militant war resistance espoused by the Second international. But the peace societies and the socialists held certain views in common, assuming peace would ensue once arbitrary and corrupt forms of government and sinister interests had been overthrown by popular democratic pressure. The liberals, however, relied primarily on an enlightened middle class, whereas socialists looked to the working class and the overthrow of capitalism. By the turn of the century both the peace groups and socialist parties were specifically pointing to the role of imperialist rivalries, the vested interests of armament manufacturers and the momentum of the arms race as threats to peace.

Peace societies multiplied after 1870. By 1900 there were 425 in existence, concentrated mainly, but not exclusively, in north-west Europe and the USA. Parallel to this growth of peace groups, many lawyers and parliamentarians became increasingly interested in promoting international law and international arbitration of disputes, creating their own international organizations. The predominant emphasis of the peace movement represented by the Universal Peace Congresses, held annually after 1892, was on negotiations between governments and arbitration to settle conflicts. The International Peace Bureau was set up as a permanent coordinating body to promote these aims, and it still has a secretariat in Geneva a century later. Even governments themselves were receptive to this approach in the late nineteenth century, and were often willing to accept arbitration. They met for the first time specifically to discuss peace at the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, which issued Declarations prohibiting use of some particularly inhumane weapons, dum-dum bullets and poison gas. The 1907 convention also sought to prohibit deliberate killing of civilians during the course of war.

Belief in the possibility of securing peace, or at least of limiting the horrors of wars if it occurred, was destroyed by the First World War. It exposed the inadequacy of the liberal peace groups' reliance on rational compromise and awareness of common economic interests in peace, and demonstrated the strength of nationalist and *realpolitik* arguments for going to war. The outbreak of war demonstrated too that public opinion was not necessarily a force for peace, and showed how powerfully nationalism and martial attitudes could grip the popular imagination, as had the Crimean War sixty years earlier.⁵ The utopian nature of socialist hopes for united working-class action to prevent war was also revealed in 1914. Many socialists were convinced, once war seemed inevitable, that a victory for Germany (or in the case of German socialists, a victory for Tsarist Russia) would disastrously strengthen the forces of reaction. Most socialist parliamentarians in all the belligerent countries voted for war credits. The Second International collapsed.

The peace movements from 1914 to 1945

War is often the greatest test of the convictions of those committed to oppose resort to armed violence. Despite the change in popular mood in 1914 many individuals did speak and write against the war, and some men refused to fight. One of the strongest grounds for resisting conscription was Christian pacifism, but men also disobeyed orders to enlist on socialist or anarchist grounds. There were liberals, too, who opposed the principle of conscription. The best known was Bertrand Russell, who helped to found the No Conscription Fellowship in Britain, and was jailed for an article opposing the war. Conscientious objection was adopted on the largest scale in Britain and the USA. After conscription was introduced, in 1916 in Britain, 16,500 men became COs, about 6,000 were court-martialled and over 800 of the most uncompromising resisters suffered more than two years of very harsh imprisonment – while a few were threatened with execution. The USA only entered the war in 1917, but nearly three million men were conscripted and about 4,000 refused on conscientious grounds, despite often brutal army measures to force them to obey orders. Christian pacifism was espoused by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, set up in 1914 in Britain and in 1915 in the USA. A minority of socialists continued to oppose the war, and forty-two delegates from Western and Eastern Europe met at Zimmerwald, Switzerland, in September 1915, in an attempt to reconstruct socialist internationalism.

If the outbreak of war in 1914 was disastrous for groups committed to work for peace, the total experience of the First World War proved a powerful impetus to peace sentiment and peace campaigning for the subsequent twenty years. The static trench warfare on the Western Front rapidly disillusioned the soldiers who suffered the constant shelling and horrors of the trenches, and who knew that each offensive for a small strip of ground brought mass slaughter and mutilation. The change in mood is illustrated by contrasting the poems of Rupert Brooke and their romantic patriotism with the bitter verses of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. The increasing anger among the common soldiers was expressed in 1917 by mutiny in the French army and by revolt on the Eastern Front among the ill-clothed and ill-fed Russian troops who supported revolution inside Russia. Although civilians were insulated from knowledge of the conditions under which the soldiers fought, the mounting death toll and casualties affected millions of families who lost sons, brothers, husbands, fathers and friends. After the war, novels, plays, films and autobiographies dramatized battles such as those fought on the Somme and at Passchendaele, recreating the terror of poison gas and helping to promote popular revulsion against war.

A succession of progressive movements and modes of thought had embraced the quest for creating permanent peace: liberalism, democratic republicanism, socialism and anarchism. The rise of feminism, which became politically significant by the 1900s, also embodied the hope that womanly influence in politics would result in an end to the peculiarly masculine pursuit of war. Women had been active in the peace campaigns of the previous century and had their own peace organizations, but by 1900 the cause of votes for women had been linked to anti-war sentiment. Feminists, like other progressives, split when war broke out in 1914, with some suffrage campaigners becoming ardent patriots and others moving into the ranks of war resisters. The First World War in fact evoked the first explicit feminist initiatives to end the fighting. One such initiative took place within the socialist movement. Clara Zetkin, a prominent anti-war socialist in Germany, managed to organize an International Women's Socialist Conference in Switzerland in 1915, bringing together women from both the warring alliances and from the neutral states. An international women's conference was also held at The Hague in 1915, initiated by a leading Dutch suffrage campaigner, to reaffirm the struggle for women's

right to vote and to explore peaceful means of settling international conflicts. The women returned home to lobby their own governments. The Hague Conference gave rise to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which remained active after 1918 and mounted a major campaign round the 1932 World Disarmament Conference.⁶

After the First World War widespread anti-war sentiment was expressed in No More War demonstrations in Germany, but in the political and economic turmoil of the early 1920s only a few gave priority to peace campaigning.⁷ A new anti-war international body, based on resistance to conscription, was founded in 1921 when groups from Germany, Austria, The Netherlands and Britain met in Holland to form PACO (Esperanto for 'peace'). The Dutch group was primarily inspired by anarchism, the others by a mixture of pacifism and socialism. This grouping soon changed its name to the War Resisters' International (WRI) and at its first proper international conference in 1925 there were representatives from twenty countries. The WRI could claim sections in an impressive range of countries: during the 1920s groups were allowed to exist in the Soviet Union and by the Fourth International Conference of 1934 the Secretary reported that new sections had been formed in Japan, Hong Kong, Mexico and Canada. Lithuania had been added to a long list of European countries where the WRI had groups. The WRI also had some influential supporters – Einstein cooperated with it for a time. Nevertheless, the absolutes of WRI's position in not only opposing military service but all forms of alternative service meant that its support in most countries was limited to a small minority, and it was not in agreement with other peace organizations. The WRI concentrated on support for conscientious objectors (COs) often treated harshly by military courts. (In France, for example, objectors were sent to the notorious prison camp on Devil's Island, made famous by the earlier incarceration there of Alfred Dreyfus.) The spread of fascism and the German occupation of much of Europe meant that war registers had to confront extreme political repression. One of the founder members of PACO, a German Catholic priest, was hanged by the Gestapo in April 1944; others, for example in Holland and Norway, were active in non-violent resistance to Nazi rule.⁸

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) was founded in 1919. It was an explicitly Christian body, and primarily based on Protestant support, although a few Catholics cooperated with it. The IFOR was a response to the failure of the churches to transcend national interests in the First World War and an attempt to promote Christian pacifism. Despite the rather purist and exclusivist approach implied by this goal, the American section of the IFOR had some importance in the wider politics of the Left. It embraced the goal of the social transformation of society and increasingly saw capitalism as the primary cause of injustice and war. Leaders of the American FOR included a number of figures known as socialists or social reformers, including Norman Thomas and Jane Addams. But the extent of FOR's social commitment led some of its members to question whether non-violent methods were adequate to secure social justice. Reinhold Niebuhr, who became one of the most eminent theological critics of Christian pacifism, left the organization in the mid-1930s calling for violent resistance to overthrow capitalism.⁹ A. J. Muste, another leading figure in the FOR, also left to become a Trotskyist, but after visiting Europe in 1936 reverted to his belief in non-violence. A. J. had come with his parents from Holland in the 1890s to the Mid-West, become a Minister in the Reformed Church in 1909, but embarked upon a life-long career of radical protest when he opposed the War in 1917 and found himself leading a major textile strike in Massachusetts in 1919. After he returned to his Christian pacifism in 1936 he became one of the most respected figures in both American and international peace circles until he died in 1967. At eighty-two he was one of the 'few social activists and theorists over thirty' to whom an impatient generation of radical youth was prepared to listen.¹⁰

A much greater political impact was achieved by groups which during and after the First World War revived the liberal internationalist and legalistic proposals for resolving conflict. For example, a League of Nations Society was formed in Britain as early as 1915, and towards the end of the war there was increasing sympathy with the idea of an international body to prevent aggression and to arbitrate or adjudicate disputes. These ideas did influence governments and led to the creation of the League of Nations and the International Court of Justice. The League was based on the concept of collective security and so embodied willingness to use force to prevent aggression. Support for the League was therefore natural to those who sought to avoid further wars, but did not imply a strict pacifism.

The pacifist commitment not to fight in or support any war did win surprisingly widespread support for a period in the 1930s in Britain, where memories of the First World War influenced the attitudes of many to the prospect of any new war. The movement was launched when Canon Dick Sheppard issued a public appeal in 1934 for signatories to a pledge to renounce war. It became an organized campaign in 1936, with eminent support, up to 800 local groups, mass meetings and its own newspaper. The Peace Pledge Union (as it became known) was, however, founded at a time when pacifist policies became increasingly difficult to uphold, as the Left committed itself to oppose the victory of fascism in the Spanish Civil War and Hitler's aggressive ambitions became more obvious. Some eminent supporters of the pacifist cause, such as Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell, became convinced of the need to fight fascism by military means. After war began in 1939 many former peace campaigners decided that they had to fight, although a significant minority remained committed to opposing the war and became COs. The Peace Pledge Union itself and its journal, *Peace News*, continued to uphold pacifist principles and when necessary defied wartime restrictions to do so. Provisions for conscientious objection were much more liberal than in the previous war, and about 60,000 men and 1,000 women applied to tribunals to be registered as COs.¹ Some took an absolutist stand and refused to do anything which might directly or indirectly assist the war effort; others, such as members of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, gave medical and humanitarian aid to both soldiers and civilians wherever their services were required.

During the late 1930s the failure to impose economic sanctions against Italy, after it invaded Abyssinia in 1935, and the inability of the League of Nations to halt the Japanese invasion of China destroyed the hopes of those who had looked to international organization to prevent war. Peace campaigners who believed in collective security could, however, without any crisis of conscience support a war against the Axis Powers. Moreover, despite the weaknesses displayed by the League, Allied governments had decided before the Second World War was over to create a new body designed to promote international order and peace – the United Nations. During and after the war groups pursued the idea of supranational organization as a means of ensuring peace: this belief motivated the founders of the European Community and in the early post-war years inspired the campaign for world government. The World Federalists tended, however, to oppose the campaigns of the later 1950s against nuclear weapons. The more broadly based United Nations Associations supported negotiations for nuclear and conventional disarmament, but also diverged from more radical anti-nuclear and pacifist organizations.

Notes and references

- 1 See, for example, letter written by a young officer in 1813, quoted in Geoffrey Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770–1870* (London, Fontana, 1982), p. 194.
- 2 Quoted in F.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between*

- States* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 94. See also, Merle Eugene Curti, *The American Peace Crusade 1815-1860* (Durham, N. Carolina, Duke University Press, 1929).
- 3 Extracts from Garrison and Ballou and brief comments on their position can be found in Peter Mayer (ed), *The Pacifist Conscience* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966).
- 4 Quoted in Hinsley, p. 98.
- 5 Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (London, Temple Smith, 1978), pp. 45-6.
- 6 Jill Liddington, 'The Women's Peace Crusade: the History of a Forgotten Campaign', in Dorothy Thompson (ed.), *Over Our Dead Bodies: Woman Against the Bomb* (London, Virago, 1983), pp. 180-98.
- 7 Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 72.
- 8 Peter Brock, *Twentieth Century Pacifism* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970), pp. 110-12 and *The War Resister*, 50, 1945 and 51, 1946.
- 9 Brock, pp. 142-50.
- 10 Nat Hentoff (ed.), *The Essays of A.J. Muste* (Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1967), p. xiv. The essays include Muste's 'Sketches for an Autobiography'. See also Nat Hentoff, *Peace Agitator; the Story of A.J. Muste* (New York, Macmillan, 1963).
- 11 Brock, pp. 158-60.