

The international peace movement 1815-1914: an outline

*Script of an online lecture given by Guido Grünewald on 9 June 2020**

I will try to give an outline of the emergence and development of an international peace movement during its first 100 years. Since English is not my mother tongue and I haven't spoken it for a longer time I will follow a written guideline in order to finish the job in the short time I have.

The first peace organisations emerged in America and in Britain. This was no coincidence; while on the European continent after the end of the Napoleonic Wars restoration took over there were evolving democracies in the anglo-Saxon countries and a kind of peace tradition as for example carried by the quakers who renounced any kind of war. For those early societies the question if a war could be defensive and therefore justified was from the beginning a thorny issue. The New York Peace Society founded by merchant David Low Dodge followed a fundamental pacifism rejecting all kind of wars while the Massachusetts Peace Society (its founder was unitarian minister Noah Worcester) gathered both fundamental pacifists and those who accepted strictly defensive wars. With about 50 other groups both organisations merged to become the American Peace Society in 1828. The London Peace Society had an interesting top-tier approach: its leadership had to pursue a fundamental pacifist course while ordinary members were allowed to have different ideas about defensive wars. On the European continent some short-lived peace organisations emerged only later.

The formation of those first societies occurred under the influence of Quakers (one of the 3 historic peace churches which renounced violence) and of Christians who were convinced that war was murderous and incompatible with Christian values. But there were also worldly arguments: war is an outdated model for settling international differences. It is in conflict with reason and impedes the progress of mankind. War destroys property, thus doing harm to the prosperous class; but it also inflicts much greater hardship on the poor who do most of the fighting and finally pay the cost of war. War is a waste of man's resources. Politically war and militarism cripple civil liberties. And there was a biological argument: war kills the young and healthy, the flower of the human race.

So in a nutshell there were already many of the arguments which were elaborated later. The peace movement of the 19th century was essentially a movement of men from the middle classes; women played a greater role only in the years before WWI. Typical professions were clergy, physician, merchant or teacher. Pacifists were part of an awakening bourgeois society which claimed participation in politics and societal issues. They saw themselves as part of a broader movement for social reform which ultimately would prevail. The belief in unstoppable human progress culminated in the decades before WWI. Pacifists tried to inform and influence public opinion and to be heard by those in power. The means they used were the typical ones of bourgeois citizen: lecturing, debating in small circles, publishing (leaflets, booklets, books, monthly and annual journals), offering prizes for essay competitions on modes of achieving peace, tabling petitions and lobbying editors, members of parliament and governments. During the 1899 Hague Peace Conference prominent pacifists – among them Bertha von Suttner - lobbied diplomats in privately organized evening salons. It was the first time that a kind of civil society tried to influence an official state conference, some delegates promptly complained. Financially the movement was always weak, though occasionally it got support by some bankers and industrial tycoons like Andrew Carnegie later.

From 1843 to 1853 a first series of international peace congresses took place, visited mostly by American and British and a few European peace friends. The London congress occurred in the context of the anti-slavery movement. William Lloyd Garrison had founded the New England Non-Resistance Society in 1838 as an anarcho-pacifist organisation renouncing civil government altogether. Activists including women like Quaker Lucretia Mott practised civilian disobedience: boycott of slave-made goods; sit-ins in railway cars; walk-alongs in the street black and white arm in arm. In the last decades of the century followers of Russian writer Leo Tolstoy propagated a Christian anarcho-pacifism; outside Russia they gained some influence mainly in Britain, France and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands there developed also a socialist motivated nonviolent anarchism after 1900. The 1848 congress and the following ones were supported by the movement for free trade which had more resources than pacifists. English manufacturer Richard Cobden argued that free trade would create economic interdependence and thus lead to lasting peace. Cobden also promoted arbitration and disarmament and an international exchange of people. This was also an issue for the learned blacksmith Elihu Burritt who was mainly responsible for the organisation of the congresses. Burritt established the League for Universal Brotherhood in 1847. It was the first international secular peace organisation with branches in Britain and the USA and some outreach on the European continent. It aimed at organizing farmers and workers. 50.000 people signed a pledge of abstinence from any kind of war. In 1845 Burritt succeeded in influencing public opinion for a peaceful solution of the Oregon conflict between Britain and the USA by organizing an exchange of friendly letters between English quakers and American activists which were published as supplements in mainstream newspapers.

Beginning in 1867 a second stage of the establishment of peace organisations set in. The Ligue internationale de la Paix et de la Liberté was an attempt to gather radical republicans, socialists from different strands and national revolutionaries. It failed because there was no agreement how to define and realize its political and social aims. In the 1880s and 1890s a whole set of new organisations were founded. They were secular. Most followed the slogan „peace through law“ and strove mainly for the establishment of an international order based on law. Politically they were close to liberal parties; some prominent pacifists were liberal parliamentarians (Fredrik Bajer, Denmark) but also socialist deputies (Henri Lafontaine, Belgium) supported those efforts. In 1889 French pacifist MP Frédéric Passy founded with English labour organizer and MP William Randal Cremer the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) which focussed its work on arbitration and debated the idea of neutralizing larger parts of Europe.

In 1889 also a new series of Universal Peace Congresses began. At the third congress 1891 in Rome it was decided to create the „Permanent International Peace Bureau“ as the executive office of the International Union of Peace Societies. The IPB became an umbrella for the whole pacifist movement; fundamental pacifists as well as peace through law adherents and some antimilitarists joined. The IPB became responsible for organizing the Universal Peace Congresses, it published a bi-monthly journal and tried with limited success to coordinate pacifist activities. Though the Bureau got yearly subsidies from Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland (it was located in Berne) its financial and human resources remained weak. In 1905 it claimed 132 member organisations from 26 countries.

In the beginning the Peace Congresses were held in conjunction with the meetings of the IPU. Later many Interparliamentarians shyed away from too close links to the pacifists. If possible the Congresses were held at places where a World Fair took place. Pacifists wanted to show that they were part of the progress exhibited at those fairs. In the two decades before 1914 there was an

enormous optimism that the „civilized world“ was on its way to global peace and cooperation, despite growing international tensions, rising militarism and armaments and an increasing number of military conflicts. Growing economic and technical international cooperation and increasing personal exchange among people via telecommunication and new means of transport seemed to result in an internationalisation of the world. Especially Austrian pacifist Alfred Herrmann Fried believed this would naturally lead to an international system based on law and thus overcome the current state of international anarchy which provided not more than a truce among states between periods of war. Fried discussed methods of mediation and fact-finding commissions as a means to calm down nationalist emotions.

The optimism of European pacifists was further spurred by the remarkable rise of the peace movement in the United States. About 50 new peace organisations were founded till 1914. Their leaders came from the business and professional world and followed an elitist approach of enlightened leadership: the international reform they strove for had to come from above rather than from below. Soft-peddling the armaments question some simultaneously had prominent positions in the military-preparedness organisations. What European pacifists ignored was that the cause of peace had become respectable and even somewhat fashionable in the US but at the cost of deep personal commitment and an honest debate since even within the movement existing differences were glossed over.

At the Peace Congresses arbitration was a major theme: pacifists developed a graduated scheme beginning with individual arbitration treaties mounting up to a permanent court of arbitration. But they made reservations: issues of vital national interest and questions of „honor“ should be excluded. And they could not agree on the thorny question of sanctions: while some affirmed the use of force against nations which refused to submit their international disputes to arbitration or conciliation, the majority position was that sanctions should bear no military character. Economic sanctions were also seen sceptical because of its detrimental effect on workers.

Pacifists did not shake the principle of the sovereignty of states. They conceded states the right to armed defence and regarded defensive wars to be justified. Conscientious objection was rejected by an overwhelming majority. Before WWI there were a few religiously motivated objectors; an organized political campaign for conscientious objection was carried only by Norwegian and Swedish Socialist youth groups. Gaston Moch, a French former artillery captain, campaigned constantly for a popular militia composed of all able-bodied males, trained from the schoolyard up, as a democratic, inexpensive and truly defensive means. This resembled the ideas Socialist leaders August Bebel and Jean Jaurés had.

The 18th Universal Peace Congress 1910 in Stockholm adopted a Peace Code (code de la paix) consisting of 145 articles. The Code was the most thorough going statement of human rights devised since the peace movement had begun. It admitted no distinction between the morality of the individual and the state; nations had no more right to create their own morality than did individuals. And the Code declared these principles applicable across the globe including the colonies though the attitude towards the indigenous people remained paternalistic.

The relationship between the peace movement and the workers movement was a difficult one. Elihu Burritt had once pondered to call workers to strike against war. In 1870 Randal Cremer founded in Britain the Workmen's Peace Association. But many pacifists held conservative views in social terms. Though arguing that a reduction of arms would free resources to improve the life of workers

they took the issue not really serious. On the other side the position of the Socialist International was for a long time that war was an inevitable result of capitalism and that only after a socialist revolution lasting peace could be achieved. Only in the decade before WWI a mutual rapprochement took place. At the Universal Peace Congresses it was conceded that there existed economic roots of war and colonialism and that social reform for the benefit of workers was needed. Pacifists insisted, however, that abolishing capitalism didn't result automatically in the elimination of war. On the other hand the Socialist International now endorsed arbitration as a means to settle international conflict and encouraged its parliamentarians to join the Interparliamentary Union. A considerable number of smaller trade unions and cooperatives joined the IPB; 10.000 workers participated in a joint rally with prominent socialist speakers on the occasion of the Universal Peace Congress 1908 in London. In 1913 the IPB was mainly responsible for organizing in Berne a conference of German and French deputies who stressed the necessity of a peaceful settlement of the serious conflicts between the two nations; on the German side only Socialdemocrats participated.

Only in the decade before WWI the IPB issued statements on current conflicts and issues. In 1911 this led to a break with the Italian pacifists because the IPB condemned Italy's attack on the Ottoman Empire about Libya. Also demands for arms reduction and disarmament which had been overshadowed by the arbitration issue became more prominent. This was partly due to the voices of women who now joined the movement in greater numbers, Bertha von Suttner with her groundbreaking novel „Lay down your arms“ the most prominent one. With careers in social work, teaching and nursing women were inclined to connect military spending to persistent poverty and misery in working class families. Women had played a modest role in so-called Olive Leaf circles in England in the 1840s. During the Boer War 1899-1902 Emily Hobhouse confronted the government and large parts of the public by setting up a relief fund for Boer women and children which means for people of the „enemy“. Eleonore Selenka from Munich launched an appeal in support of the 1899 Hague Peace Conference gathering signatures from more than a million women as far as Japan. In France women school teachers demanded to change school history curriculum to stress humanistic values over patriotic warriors. Socialist women like Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg denounced militarism and propagated antimilitarist education but were not ready to cooperate with pacifists and bourgeois feminists. In the last years before WWI there was a rapprochement between the male dominated Peace Congresses and the progressive wing of the feminist-suffragist movement; peace was a major theme at the 1913 Congress of the International Women Suffrage Alliance in Budapest.

In 1898 banker and railway tycoon Jean de Bloch had published a six volume study predicting that a war between the two well-armed alliances in Europe would be suicidal. Detailing the technological revolution of the new weaponry, the dramatic changes the battlefield and the implications of a long, stalemated war for the European social order he farsightedly concluded that the result would be the elimination of European monarchy, vast rivers of blood with no victory, the likelihood of a socialist revolution and the destruction of Europe's global role. Later it was Bertha von Suttner who continuously warned against a great European war (for example 1912 in her booklet „The Barbarisation of the Air“). Suttner also complained about secret pacts between governments and that the decision about war and peace was taken by two dozen male rulers, an issue which would be taken up again in WWI. But it's also true that many pacifist were too optimistic believing that the catastrophe eventually would not occur; the start of WWI shocked and paralyzed them.

So how far had the movement got in 1914? Visible successes were rare: a few cases in which differences between states had been settled by arbitral award, some examples of citizen diplomacy

successfully preventing military conflict as in the peaceful dissolution of Norway from the enforced union with Sweden against war-mongering Swedish circles in 1905, a considerable effect on scholars of international law, the establishment of the Nobel Peace Prize as a symbol of great importance . But there was more: Nobel Peace Prize winner Alfred Hermann Fried was the first person to work professionally as peace journalist though his attempt to establish an international union of peace journalists failed; he also suggested to create a systematic and interdisciplinary science of peace which decades later would be established as peace research. Pacifists had succeeded to create an organisational infrastructure which mostly would survive the coming Great War. The convening of the Hague Peace Conference was a clear sign that the ideas put forward by the peace movement could no longer be dismissed as naive and utopian. Pacifists like Fried and Lafontaine persistently posed the question how durable peacebuilding structures and mentalities could be created in order to substitute the prevailing system of international anarchy by an international organisation based on law and cooperation between states. The League of Nations which came into being in January 1920 was a first incomplete and fragile attempt to realise this concept.

So even though in 1914 war still was almost universally considered an acceptable, perhaps an inevitable and for some people even a desirable way of settling international differences pacifists succeeded in creating a minority subculture which challenged this dogma and offered alternatives. Despite its flaws the movement in its first 100 years had paved the ground ; it was now up to the successors to further elaborate and hopefully realise alternatives to warfare.

* The script was slightly corrected and enlarged in the last section after the event. The online event is available following these links: <https://www.facebook.com/ipb1910/videos/2568870320044951/> or <https://youtu.be/VUeRTO8Yc9E>

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*Part I of the Webinar Series The History of Peace Movements
and the International Peace Bureau*

attachments to the lecture by Guido Grünewald on

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1815 New York Peace Society

1815 Massachusetts Peace Society

⇒ 1828 American Peace Society

1816 London Peace Society

1830 Société de la Paix in Geneva

1841 Comité de la Paix in Paris

International Peace Congresses 1843-1853

1. Congress London 1843
2. Congress Brussels 1848
3. Congress Paris 1849
4. Congress Frankfurt/M. 1850
5. Congress London 1851
6. Congress Manchester 1852
7. Congress Edinburgh 1853

1838 New England Non-Resistance Society
(William Loyd Garrison)

1847 League for Universal Brotherhood
(Elihu Burritt)

Establishment of new peace organizations 1867-1899

- 1867 Geneva Ligue Internationale de la Paix et de la Liberté
- 1867 Paris Ligue Internationale de la Paix (later Société des Amis de la Paix)
- 1870 London International Arbitration League
- 1871 The Hague Allgemeeene Nederlandsche Bond: Vrede door Recht
- 1880 London International Arbitration and Peace Association
- 1882 Copenhagen Dansk Fredsforening
- 1883 Stockholm Svenska Freds- och Skiljedomsföreningen
- 1887 Paris Association „La Paix par le Droit“
- 1887 Milan Società internazionale per la Pace „Unione Lombarda“

- 1889 Luzern Schweizer Friedensgesellschaft
- 1889 Brussels Société belge de l'Arbitrage et de la Paix
- 1891 Vienna Österreichische Friedensgesellschaft
- 1892 Berlin Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft
- 1895 Oslo Norges Fredsforening
- 1895 Budapest Hungarian Peace Society
- 1898 Paris Association „La Paix et le désarmement par les Femmes“
- 1899 Stockholm Swedish Women Peace Society

Universal Peace Congresses 1889-1913

1. Congress Paris 1889
2. Congress London 1890
3. Congress Rome 1891
4. Congress Bern 1892
5. Congress Chicago 1893
6. Congress Antwerp 1894
7. Congress Budapest 1896
8. Congress Hamburg 1897
9. Congress Paris 1900
10. Congress Glasgow 1901

11. Congress Monaco 1902
12. Congress Rouen 1903
13. Congress Boston 1904
14. Congress Lucerne 1905
15. Congress Milan 1906
16. Congress Munich 1907
17. Congress London 1908
18. Congress Stockholm 1910
19. Congress Geneva 1912
20. Congress The Hague 1913

IPB officers having received the Nobel Peace Prize till 1913

1901 Frédéric Passy (council member)

1902 Elie Ducommun (secretary general)

1902 Albert Gobat (council member)

1905 Bertha von Suttner (Vice-President)

1907 Ernesto Moneta (council member)

1908 Frederik Bajer (President)

1910 International Peace Bureau

1911 Alfred Herrmann Fried (council member)

1913 Henri La Fontaine (President)