

“Lay Down Your Arms!” Man Awake! “War is the glorification of violence”

War is the glorification of violence

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For anyone seriously thinking about how the Third World War can still be stopped and a possible “final solution of the human question” prevented, Bertha von Suttner’s novel with the stirring appeal “Lay Down Your Arms”, published in German in 1889, is to be recommended. Her thoughts, hints and suggestions can still be used as a guide today. At that time, no one could adequately explain why the children of mankind were repeatedly ordered to battlefields by rulers, why they obediently followed these orders and why they were “slaughtered” there. This question was only answered by the findings of psychological research.

“World peace is not a question of possibility, but of necessity.”

“Bertha von Suttner wrote her novel ‘Lay Down Your Arms’ at a time when Europe’s peoples, although still facing the two world wars, were embroiled in a series of bloody conflicts (...). Even as a young woman, Bertha von Suttner asked herself and others whether people were not capable of better things than killing each other. These questions about why people inflict and tolerate suffering end with Bertha von Suttner’s stirring appeal ‘Lay down your arms’ – but it does not stop there.” (1)

These are the words of former German Chancellor Willy Brandt on 1 June 1977 in the preface to the second edition of the book.

Bertha von Suttner’s leitmotif of her life struggle for peace was:

“World peace is not a question of possibility, but of necessity. (...) The higher development of the world must be based on world peace.” (2)

This quote is taken from the introduction to the second edition of the book by the Austrian cultural historian Friedrich Heer. It is still valid today.

The first edition of the book "Die Waffen nieder!" appeared at the end of 1889. It was translated into almost all European languages. According to Friedrich Heer, the great Russian poet Leo Tolstoy, prophet of non-violence and inspirer of Mahatma Gandhi, wrote in a letter to Bertha von Suttner: *"The abolition of slavery was preceded by the famous work of a woman, H. Beecher-Stowe. God grant that the abolition of war may follow her work."* (3)

On 10 December 1905, Bertha von Suttner became the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, which she herself had suggested. All her books have helped shape modern European consciousness.

War is the glorification of violence

Bertha von Suttner was firmly convinced that war was an institution inherited from the times of barbarism, which had to be eliminated by civilisation. The true face of war was the face of "senseless, brutal destruction and annihilation". For them it was barbarism, cannibalism, human sacrifice and "the preparation for the 'final solution' of the human question" (4). There is nothing to add to this.

In her book, Bertha von Suttner quotes an interlocutor with the following statement:

"Every war - whatever its outcome - inevitably contains within itself the germ of a subsequent war. Quite naturally, an act of violence always violates some right. Sooner or later this right makes its claims and the new conflict breaks out - is then brought to a head anew by violence pregnant with injustice - and so on into infinity." (5)

On the relationship of the Church to war, the left-wing Catholic intellectual Friedrich Heer adds:

"The most significant stimulus Bertha von Suttner received in the West, in Paris at first, came from the English and American peace movements. While the mainstream European churches still cling to the 'God of Hosts', to the alliance of 'throne and altar', to the approval of war (whereby any war can be passed off as a 'defensive war'), a tradition of religiously based pacifism has developed in American and English religious non-conformism, in Protestant free churches, but above all among the Quakers from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Man is obliged to be a 'peacemaker' to man (...): a man who gives peace, makes peace, establishes peace." (6)

Causes of the war

Sigmund Freud introduced a very controversial concept into the theory of psychoanalysis between the two world wars: the death drive. Albert Camus then spoke in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize of a hidden death and suicide urge in the society of the time.

In Friedrich Heer's view, Bertha von Suttner saw through the "weakness of life" of many men and contemporaries. He writes:

"This weakness of life is closely connected with weakness of thought and weakness of love, and produces that uncanny fatalism of 'letting go', of cowardice before the responsibility of guarding life. (...) Most do not think."(7)

In the foreword Willy Brandt states:

“In the conversations she recorded with her father, husband and many friends, with clergymen, ministers and high officers, the thinking of that epoch is reflected so vividly that even now one can relive what moved people at that time. We find those who believe that war is the root of all that is noble, great and beautiful. We see others who, in dull devotion or because they were brought up that way, do not think at all about why grown men who have never done anything to each other suddenly lash out at each other like wild animals and kill each other. And there we find the thoughts of those who seek a peaceful solution to the conflicts among nations.” (8)

Even if the explanatory approaches mentioned are not wrong and the educational problem has already been mentioned, it is only the findings of scientific psychology that clarify the fact that human beings do not possess genetically determined death, suicide or aggression instincts and that it is therefore not in their nature to kill themselves or their fellow human beings.

The fact is that wars are good business for the rulers and their politicians and people of all ages are unfortunately unable not to heed the call of these “authorities” to genocide. The authoritarian upbringing has so affected their emotional life that they have to leave. They carry this feeling of absolute obedience from childhood with them into old age, but they are not aware of it. Therefore, we cannot and must not condemn them. But they can become aware of these unconscious emotional parts and change their behaviour.

Character (personality), behaviour and intellectual abilities also develop within the framework of the socio-cultural milieu.

If we assume that the human being “becomes” in upbringing, then human emotional life is not to be understood solely as the result of the parent-child relationship, the position in the sibling line and other family constellations. What is decisive are the values prevailing in a culture and the feelings corresponding to them, as whose mediators parents, teachers and educators approach the child on a daily basis.

Bertha von Suttner, for example, grew up in a family of officers who considered it great luck to be allowed to fight and die for their prince on the field of honour. Although she had been influenced by this socio-cultural milieu, she courageously took up the fight against her fellow human beings who were misguided by a wrong upbringing.

According to the motto that it is not the human being who is ill, but society, everything should be done today by enlightened contemporaries to create a social order that corresponds to all human beings. The world will only recover and humanity will only progress if people unite (associate) in absolute voluntariness and non-violence and consider how they can solve their problems together. Bertha von Suttner can also contribute something to this from her life experience.

How to change public opinion?

Taking the aforementioned Western peace movement as a starting point, Bertha von Suttner worked out the guidelines of her own struggle for peace. According to Friedrich Heer, these can be summarised roughly as follows:

“Whoever wants to fight for peace must study the political, economic, social conditions

in every case that can become a case of war. Whoever wants to change public opinion must come to terms with a thousand years of fatalism preached by the churches, with a thousand years of sanctification of war by theologians. Whoever wants to fight for peace must appeal to the masses – Suttner became an excellent speaker who was able to adapt very well to the emotional climate – be it in France, in Germany or in America – and he must make an effort to approach those responsible, the statesmen, the leading politicians, the influential men in business, society, the press. Bertha von Suttner takes all this on herself: a woman who takes on the lethargy, the dull sense of the masses, the inbred belief in war of women, especially of women in the leading strata of society, the conformism of men, who often ‘go along’ against their better judgement.” (9)

Man awake – to your human duty

This appeal by Immanuel Kant, the greatest thinker of peace in Germany, is also invoked by Bertha von Suttner. On this, Friedrich Heer writes at the end of his introduction:

“The call ‘Man awake’, raised by Bertha von Suttner between 1889 and 1914, will no longer be silenced and will be nourished and strengthened by the thinking power and drive of the woman who dared to declare this in 1899: ‘The 20th century will not end without human society having abolished the greatest hostage, war, as a legal institution’.” (10)

A few weeks before the start of the First World War, of which she had repeatedly warned, the great Austrian pacifist, peace researcher and writer died. According to a surviving obituary, her last words were:

“Lay down your arms! – – tell it to many – – many.” (11)

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He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

Notes

(1) Suttner, Bertha von (1977). Die Waffen nieder! With a foreword by Willy Brandt and an introduction by Friedrich Heer. Hildesheim, p. V

(2) op. cit., p. XVII

- (3) op. cit., p. XIV
- (4) op. cit., p. VII
- (5) op. cit., p. 123
- (6) op. cit., p. XIII
- (7) op. cit., p. XI
- (8) op. cit., p. V
- (9) op. cit., p. XIIIf.
- (10) op. cit., p. XXI
- (11) https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertha_von_Suttner

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