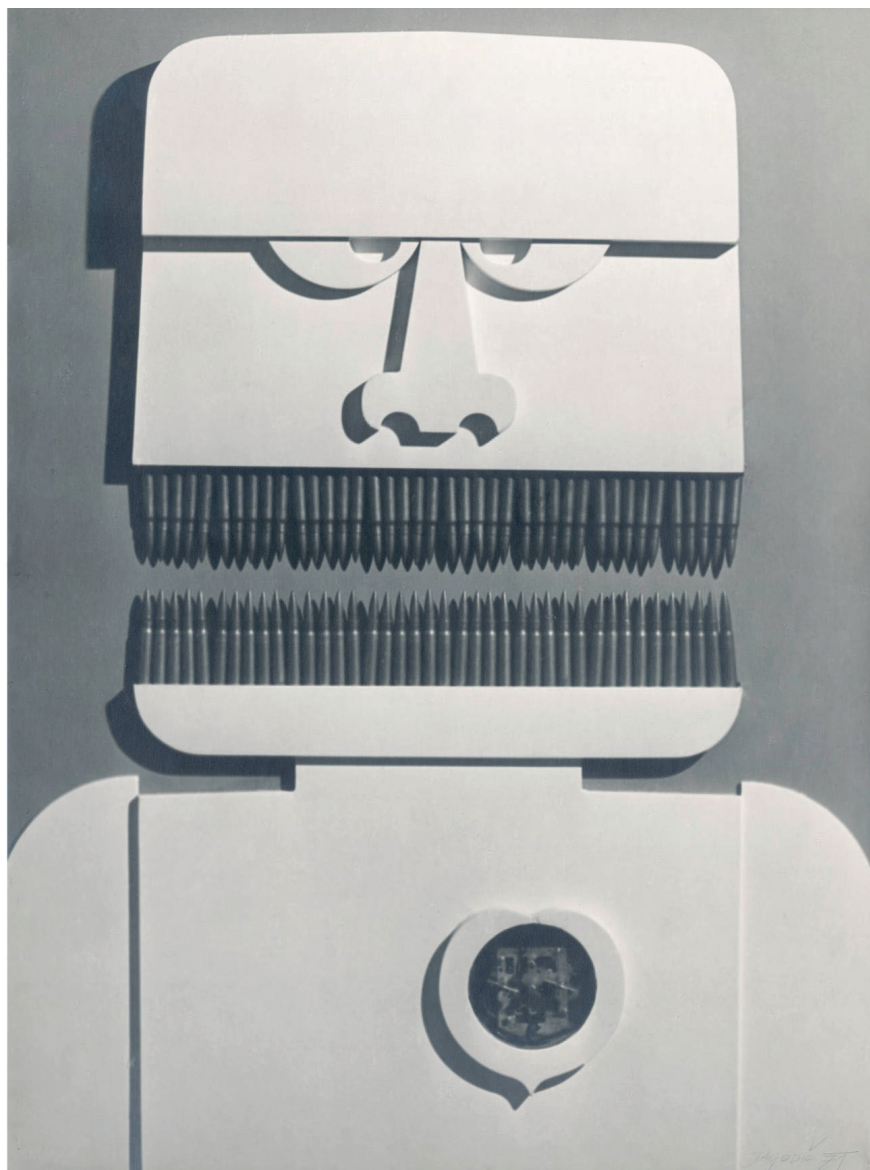


Peace Policies and Practices in Yugoslavia and Beyond



PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Edited by
Sanja Petrović Todosijević and Martin Pogačar

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UNCONDITIONAL!



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Belgrade, Ljubljana
2025

PEACE, UNCONDITIONAL!

Introduction → 11

11 → Martin Pogačar, Sanja Petrović Todosijević

Peace. Unconditional.

The Vestiges of Peace and the Socio-Political Frameworks of War

The Idea of Peace → 27

29 → Tomaž Mastnak

Unconditional Peace?

The Idea of Peace in Political Context

45 → Peter Klepec

On the Cruelty of War

63 → Petra Svoljšak

The War to End All Wars: A Broken Promise of Peace

81 → Nemanja Stanimirović

Yugoslav Dissidents as Agents of Peace in the Era of Détente

107 → Gal Kirn

Balkan Route to and from War: Reflections on Peace in Šejla Kamerić's *Cease* (2023) and Nika Autor's *Sunny Railways* (2023)

Political Practices of Peace → 127

129 → Srđan Mičić

Yugoslavia's Pacifist Foreign Policy and Actions in the League of Nations, 1920–1933

165 → Rastko Lompar

War and Peace within Interwar Yugoslav Radical Right Circles

191 → Zoran Janjetović

Indemnification for Nazi Victims, the Federal Republic of Germany and Yugoslavia

215 → Luka Savčić

“Struggle for Peace” as a Form of Yugoslav Internationalism:
A Case Study of Anti-colonialism

233 → Natalija Dimić Lompar

Entering the Cold War “Struggle for Peace”:
Yugoslavia and the International Forum for Peace, 1951–1954

265 → Jovan Čavoški

Yugoslavia, Formation of the Asian-African Group and Issues of Peace in the United
Nations, 1950–1953

289 → Luka Filipović

From Czechoslovakia to Chile, in the Shadow of Vietnam:
Anti-War Movements and the European Communists, 1968–1974

311 → Petar Dragišić

Yugoslavia and the Helsinki Summit in 1975

Images of Peace → 323

325 → Zdenka Badovinac

Peace as a Space for the Third

339 → Katja Kobolt

Pictures of War, Pictures for Peace: Memory of the People’s Liberation Struggle
in Yugoslav Children’s Literature

357 → Stanislava Barać

“Lest We Forget”: Desanka Maksimović’s Remembrance Politics and Anti-War Engagement

389 → Ovidiu Țichindeleanu

On Seeing the Socialist Culture of Peace

Peacemakers → 413

415 → Nika Grabar

Building Non-Peace

439 → Tina Filipović, Ana Kladnik

Non-State Actors as Active Agents of Peace in Cold War Europe

461 → Svetlana Stefanović

International Women’s Year (1975) and the United Nations Decade for Women:
Equality, Development and Peace, 1976–1985 – The Yugoslav Answer

481 → Sanja Petrović Todosijević

International Children’s Friendship Meeting, 1976–1988
Social Organisation of Children in Socialist Yugoslavia and Education for Peace

513 → Vladimir Petrović

Anatomy of a Lost Chance:
Vance-Owen Peace Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina in Geneva, January 1993

547 → Nataša Kostić

Teaching History and Learning about the Dissolution and Wars of the 1990s
in Reconciliation Processes

569 → Martin Pogačar

Anti-Militarism in the Art of Stane Jagodič

Postscript → 575

575 → Martin Pogačar

Pax Ante Futurum

580 → Notes on Contributors

Petra Svoljšak*

The War to End All Wars: A Broken Promise of Peace**

Abstract This article explores the historical contradiction between the ideal of ending all wars and the brutal reality of the First World War, which was supposed to end all wars. It aims to analyze the paradoxes of peace efforts before, during and after the war and thus focuses on the origins and evolution of some pacifist movements, the role of women and socialist organizations and the failed peace efforts before and during the war. Highlighting key figures such as Bertha von Suttner (1853–1914) and Romain Rolland (1866–1944), the article shows how diverse peace initiatives clashed with nationalism and militarism. It concludes by evaluating the outcomes of the Paris Peace Conference and argues that the Treaty of Versailles sowed the seeds of future conflicts instead of securing lasting peace.

Keywords peace movements, Bertha von Suttner, socialist movement, First World War, Paris Peace Conference, Austria-Hungary

Introduction

The War That Will End War is the title of H. G. Wells' 1914 book in which he optimistically declared:

This, the greatest of all wars, is not just another war – it is the last war! England, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, and all the little countries of Europe, are heartily sick of war; the Tsar has expressed a passionate hatred of war; the most of Asia is unwarlike; the United States has no illusions about war. And never was war



Stane Jagodič, *Goodbye, Daddy!*, photomontage, 2014

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begun so joyously, and never was war begun with so grim a resolution. In England, France, Belgium, Russia, there is no thought of glory. We know we face unprecedented slaughter and agonies; we know that for neither side will there be easy triumphs or prancing victories. Already, in that warring sea of men, there is famine as well as hideous butchery, and soon there must come disease. Can it be otherwise? We face, perhaps, the most awful winter that mankind has ever faced. But we English and our allies, who did not seek this catastrophe, face it with anger and determination rather than despair. Through this war we have to march, through pain, through agonies of the spirit worse than pain, through seas of blood and filth. We English have not had things kept from us. We know what war is; we have no delusions. We have read books that tell us of the stench of battlefields, and the nature of wounds, books that Germany suppressed and hid from her people. And we face these horrors to make an end of them. There shall be no more Kaisers, there shall be no more Krupps, we are resolved. That foolery shall end!”¹

But already in these introductory statements, the author explained Britain’s reasons for entering the war, the blame was on all of Germany; thus, it was his clear stand that:

This is already the vastest war in history. It is not a war of nations, but a war of mankind. It is a war to exorcise a world madness and end an age [...] Beside the Kaiser stands the firm of Krupp, a second head to the State; on the very steps of the throne is the armament trust, that organised scoundrelism which has, in its relentless propaganda for profit, mined all the security of civilisation, brought up and dominated a Press, ruled a national literature, and corrupted universities. [...] For this is now a war for peace. It aims straight at disarmament. It aims at a settlement that shall stop this kind of thing for ever. Every soldier who fights against Germany now is a crusader against war.²

The idea of ending war for good, though the author clearly wrote about who was to blame and why, stemmed from the conviction that all the realities of the ongoing war were things of the mind, thus the “fight was not to destroy a nation, but a nest of evil ideas”.³

1 Herbert George Wells, *The War That Will End War* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1914), 6–7, accessed 11 December 2023, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/57481/pg57481-images.html>.

2 Ibid., 26.

3 Ibid.

Wells framed the war as a moral crusade against militarism, blaming Germany entirely for its outbreak. He envisioned the conflict as a necessary purge of destructive ideologies, asserting that “every soldier who fights against Germany now is a crusader against war”. The conviction behind his rhetoric was that war horrors were mental constructs, and the ultimate fight was against “a nest of evil ideas,” not a nation.

Historical overview of peace movements

Before delving into the “last war” and its promise of lasting peace, it is necessary to examine the historical relationship between wars and peace movements. The first peace societies emerged in the United States and England between 1814 and 1816, followed by France and Switzerland in 1821 and 1830. Only after 1850 did other European countries begin to join the peace cause. Initially, continental European peace movements viewed wars for national unification as legitimate. However, in the last decades of the 19th century, new organizations began to advocate for conciliation and disarmament, reflecting the broader crisis of the international system during the age of imperialism. Pacifists started holding annual Universal Peace Congresses. The first notable gathering was in London in 1843, and the official inaugural Universal Peace Congress took place in Paris in 1889.⁴ That same year, lawmakers from several European nations established an annual inter-parliamentary conference, renamed the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to discuss important foreign policy issues, recommend measures to reduce tensions and promote reconciliation.⁵ The Universal Peace Congresses and the Inter-Parliamentary Union often shared delegates and host cities, acting as dual engines for the international peace movement. Though the conferences and peace summits grew over the years, the important influence of the Crimean (1853–1856)⁶ and the German-French (1870–1871)⁷ Wars cannot be overlooked. On one hand, they brought about some uncertainty because of hostile communications between foreign offices; on the other hand, they increased the peace efforts on the

4 “UPC Universal Peace Congress and the NYPS New York Peace Society.” Universal Peace Congress, accessed 31 March 2025, <https://universalpeacecongress.com/About-Universal-Peace-Congress-International-Peace-Commission.html>.

5 David S. Patterson, “Pacifism,” in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014). DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10125.

6 The Crimean War (1853–1856) was fought between Russia and an alliance comprising the Ottoman Empire, Britain, France and Sardinia, primarily for influence in the declining Ottoman territories. It is notable for modern warfare developments and ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1856.

7 The Franco-German War (1870–1871) was a conflict in which a coalition of German states led by Prussia defeated France. The war ended French hegemony in continental Europe and resulted in the creation of a unified Germany.

international level and promoted important figures of peace activism,⁸ such as the Russian novelist Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910).⁹

National context – Germany and Austria-Hungary

As the American historian David S. Patterson noted, resistance to militarism was particularly difficult in Germany due to its “blood and iron” (Blut und Eisen) policies that had brought about the German unification in 1871 and its semi-democratic government, which cultivated patriotic fervour and cultural superiority. Pacifists were dismissed as irrelevant or eccentric.¹⁰ The German peace movement was spearheaded by Alfred Hermann Fried, who, in 1892, alongside Bertha von Suttner, co-founded the *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft* (German Peace Society) to attract greater attention from politicians and public media, such as newspapers. Fried emphasized the peaceful resolution of international conflicts and believed in the power of economic and technological interdependence to achieve a lawful world order. His journal *Monatliche Friedenskorrespondenz* (Monthly Peace Correspondence) was later replaced by *Die Friedenswarte* (The Peace Watch, described as “the most efficient periodical of the Pacifist movement in the world”).¹¹ Fried’s focus gradually shifted from opposing war directly to addressing its root causes. In 1911, he received the Nobel Peace Prize “for his effort to expose and fight what he considers to be the main cause of war, namely, the anarchy in international relations”.¹²

In 1889, Bertha von Suttner published her influential novel *Die Waffen Nieder* (*Lay Down Your Arms*), which brought the ideals of the peace movement to the Habsburg Empire. The *Österreichische Gesellschaft der Friedensfreunde* (Austrian Peace Society) was established in 1891 and initially had around 2,000 members. Both Suttner and Alfred Hermann Fried cultivated extensive transnational networks and were vocal in exposing the horrors of war. They advocated for disarmament, supported the establishment of international institutions, and promoted the codification of international law. However, the foundational impulses behind the Austrian peace movement predated Suttner’s publication. Figures such as Viennese democrat Adolf Fischhof and Styrian liberal Robert von Walterskirchen – both prominent politicians – had already advanced

ideas on disarmament and international parliamentary cooperation. As early as 1880, Walterskirchen outlined proposals in this direction. It was during this same period that the term *pacifism* was coined (in 1901), referring to a general commitment to peace and international arbitration. As Daniel Laqua has noted, neither Suttner nor Fried categorically rejected violence; both conditionally accepted the legitimacy of defensive warfare. This position gave rise to a form of “patriotic pacifism” that would come to characterize many European peace activists of the time.¹³

In 1905, Bertha von Suttner, later hailed as the “Generalissimo of the peace movement”, became the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of “her audacity to oppose the horrors of war”. The Nobel Committee deemed her novel *Lay Down Your Arms!* one of the most influential anti-war works of the 19th century.¹⁴

Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907

The final decades of the 19th century witnessed tangible signs of an emerging international system. The International Peace Bureau was founded in Bern in 1891, and the First Hague Peace Conference was held in 1899, followed by a second in 1907 and plans for a third in 1915. These initiatives built on earlier efforts, such as those of Russian Tsar Alexander II, who convened an international military commission in St. Petersburg in 1868 to ban explosive projectiles under 400 grams. The preamble to that declaration emphasized the balance between military necessity and humanitarian principles.¹⁵

Peace advocates interpreted the Hague Peace Conferences as tentative but positive responses by the great powers to growing international aspirations for reconciliation. The 1899 Hague Convention codified laws on land warfare and included the controversial Convention (IV) on military occupation and civilian resistance. The Second Hague Conference of 1907 addressed naval warfare, particularly the need to safeguard international trade from the “surprises of war”. By combining legal standards with ethical concerns, the Hague Conventions established enduring principles for the conduct of warfare and affirmed the ongoing relevance of customary international law. They also laid the groundwork for an informal international arbitration court to mediate future conflicts.

8 Gerhard Senft, “Resistance Against the War of 1914–1918,” in 1914: *Austria-Hungary, the Origins, and the First Year of World War I* (New Orleans: Contemporary Austrian Studies, 2014), 189.

9 Leo Tolstoy was a Russian writer, a master of realistic fiction and one of the world’s greatest novelists. His best-known novels are also his longest works: *War and Peace* (1865–1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1875–1877), which are regarded as the finest novels ever written.

10 Patterson, “Pacifism,” 3.

11 “Alfred Fried – Biographical,” The Nobel Prize, accessed 31 March 2025, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1911/fried/biographical/>.

12 “Alfred Fried – Facts,” The Nobel Prize, accessed 31 March 2025, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1911/fried/facts/>.

13 Daniel Laqua, “Pacifism in fin-de-siècle Austria: the Politics and Limits of Peace Activism,” *The Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (2014): 200.

14 It is believed that Bertha von Suttner played a key role in persuading her friend Alfred Nobel to establish the Peace Prize in 1901.

15 “Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight,” Saint Petersburg, 29 November / 11 December 1868, IHL Database, accessed 30 March 2025, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/st-petersburg-decl-1868>.

The socialist movement and the collapse of internationalism – the Slovenian case

In the years leading up to the First World War, questions of war and peace increasingly preoccupied the socialist movement. The founding congress of the Second International in Paris (1900) included in its agenda a theoretical opposition to war. The corresponding resolution expressed the belief that standing armies provoked conflict, while a system based on national militias – “people in arms” – would resist unjust warfare. Abolishing standing armies and replacing them with militias became a central socialist demand. This resolution also reflected a broader optimism, as James Joll observed, that the global spread of socialism and its international coordination would suffice to prevent war.¹⁶

Since the Zurich Congress of 1893, May Day has symbolized not only labour solidarity but also the struggle for peace. However, it was not until the Amsterdam Congress of 1904, during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), that the real debate on resisting war began. The general strike was proposed as a method of opposing armed conflict. The most significant anti-war action by the International occurred at the Basel Congress of 1912, which met during the First Balkan War. The Basel Manifesto stated:

Working classes and their Parliamentary representatives in the countries concerned shall be bound, with the assistance of the International Socialist Bureau, to do all they can to prevent the breaking out of war, using for this purpose the means which appear to them the most efficacious, and which must naturally vary according to the acuteness of the struggle of classes, and to the general political conditions.¹⁷

Joll described the Basel Congress as the high point of the Second International’s optimistic belief in its own power,¹⁸ which faded in July 1914 and finally crumbled in August 1914 due to the socialists’ votes in favour of war credits in many European Parliaments. The pre-war resolutions of the congresses of Stuttgart, Copenhagen and Basel were soon forgotten, followed by a transition from internationalist to social-chauvinist positions. According to historian Elisa Marcobelli, the majority of socialists did not deny their patriotism, and the idea of defending the fatherland was shared by many of its adherents.¹⁹

¹⁶ James Joll, *The Second International 1889–1914* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1956), 109.

¹⁷ “Manifesto of the International Socialist Congress at Basel”, Marxists, accessed 6 June 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1912/basel-manifesto.htm>.

¹⁸ Joll, *The Second International 1889–1914*, 157.

¹⁹ Elisa Marcobelli, “Pre-war Socialist Pacifism,” in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10526/1.1.

The outbreak of the First World War effectively marked the collapse of the Second International – “both in formal terms (the severance of ties between individual social democratic parties, the inability to convene the International Socialist Bureau and international conferences) and in substantive terms (an internal ideological disintegration) – as it failed to fulfil its fundamental objective: the preservation of peace”.²⁰ In this context, it is worth mentioning the position of some social democratic parties that either did not vote in favour of war credits, as was the case of Russian and Serbian socialists, or voiced strong opposition to war, as was the case of the Slovenian Yugoslav Social Democratic Party. In the days of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, the party’s newspaper *Zarja* predicted the long-term and tremendous consequences if the Austrian government decided unwisely, commenting that there was little space between war and peace. The comment was censored, and the newspaper ceased to be published.²¹

The outbreak of the First World War

As the Austrian economist Gerhard Senft noted, the pre-1914 peace movement achieved an astonishing degree of diversity, ranging from bourgeois pacifism to social antimilitarism. By early 1914, the seemingly robust European peace movement included 190 peace societies, some with thousands of members, publishing 23 journals in 10 languages. The newly founded Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the United States even provided annual funding to the International Peace Bureau, which was redistributed to the European peace societies.²²

However, in the summer of 1914, rising belligerence and ever-stronger hate speech prevailed. European public opinion leaned toward defensive patriotism – peace was preferred, but war was tolerated under certain conditions. Politicians exploited “patriotic pacifism” to garner popular or even mass support for the war. Even notable pacifist voices felt the impact. The renowned Austrian-Jewish writer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942)²³ described the collective excitement as “electrifying”, German novelist and Nobel Prize laureate (1929) Thomas Mann saw war as “cleansing”, and the famous physicist and Nobel Prize winner in Physics Albert Einstein (1879–1955) observed that “all the learned men at the universities have accepted military service or jobs”.²⁴

²⁰ Avgust Lešnik, “Stališča socialne demokracije do vojnega vprašanja pred letom 1914,” *Zgodovinski časopis* 57, no. 1/2 (2003): 95.

²¹ The Slovenian digital library dLib has both censored and original issues of the paper from 25 July 1914, so the original text could be verified and the two issues could be compared.

²² Senft, “Resistance Against the War of 1914–1918,” 187–188.

²³ His memoirs *The World of Yesterday: Memoirs of a European* (German title *Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers*. Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag AB, 1942) are regarded as the most famous book on the Habsburg Empire.

²⁴ Senft, “Resistance Against the War of 1914–1918,” 109.

Yet, dissenting voices like that of Romain Rolland persisted. In 1915, Rolland was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his literary contributions – the ten-volume novel *Jean-Christophe* and his pamphlet *Au-dessus de la mêlée* (Above the Battle). Philosopher and political scientist Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson remarked:

M. Rolland is among the many who believe, though their voice for the moment may be silenced, that the spiritual forces that are important and ought to prevail are the international ones; that co-operation, not war, is the right destiny of nations; and that all that is valuable in each people may be maintained in and by friendly intercourse with the others. The war between these two ideals is the greater war that lies behind the present conflict. Hundreds and thousands of generous youths have gone to battle in the belief that they are going to a war that will end war, that they are fighting against militarism in the cause of peace. Whether, indeed, it is for that they will have risked or lost their lives, only the event can show.²⁵

In the Preface to *The Soul Enchanted*, Rolland states:

A great nation assailed by war has not only its frontiers to protect: it must also protect its good sense. It must protect itself from the hallucinations, injustices, and follies which the plague, lets loose. To each his part: to the armies the protection of the soil of their native land. To the thinkers the defence of its thought. If they subordinate that thought to the passions of their people they may well be useful instruments of passion; but they are in danger of betraying the spirit, which is not the least part of a people's patrimony. One-day History will pass judgment on each of the nations at war; she will weigh their measure of errors, lies, and heinous follies. Let us try and make ours light before her!²⁶

His article "Above the Battle", written in 1914, wasn't published in full until June 1915 due to censorship. He refused to learn hatred. He did not regard the war as a fatality, which was for him a soul without a will; for Rolland, "War springs from the weakness and stupidity of nations".²⁷

²⁵ Charles Kay Ogden, "Introduction of the translator," in Romain Rolland, *Above the Battle* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1916), 10, accessed 7 April 2025, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/32779/pg32779-images.html>.

²⁶ Rolland, *Above the Battle*, 15.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

The myth of widespread enthusiasm for war in 1914 is debunked by soldiers' diaries and letters. Many believed the war would be brief and victorious. From the beginning of the war, soldiers sought ways to evade combat – desertion, draft dodging and uprisings increased by the third year. Even fraternization across enemy lines, like the Christmas Truce, documented not only on the Western front but also on the Isonzo and the Carpathian front, showed resistance to war.²⁸

Emergency laws were enacted across nations. The Austro-Hungarian case demonstrates the enduring and self-destructive consequences of war governance.²⁹ In the Austrian part of the Habsburg Empire, governance shifted toward military control, introducing autocracy to ensure the loyalty of the citizens and the effectiveness of the army. Still, the general crises in the Monarchy deeply affected both the civilian and military spheres. In 1917, the US joined the war, and Russia withdrew due to the revolution. By the spring of 1918, the Russian-German peace treaty fractured Austria-Hungary's internal cohesion.

Strikes and protests erupted, including the January 1918 Kotor (Cattaro) naval mutiny, where sailors, inspired by the October Revolution, adopted Bolshevik slogans. Uprisings followed in May, fuelled by ethnic tensions, war fatigue and poor conditions. Slavic units led the revolts, inspired by experiences in Russian captivity. They had seen how a revolution could end the war. The leaders were ultimately executed to suppress dissent.

In contrast, the US maintained a strong pacifist tradition, delaying entry into the war. President Woodrow Wilson was re-elected in 1916 on an anti-war platform.

Women and peace activism

But not all voices were silenced, not even in Europe, with the women peace movement taking the lead. In April 1915, over 1,000 women from 12 countries gathered in The Hague for the International Congress of Women. Despite governmental resistance, they convened "[t]o protest the useless destruction of the highest fruits of civilization.

²⁸ Senft, "Resistance Against the War of 1914–1918," 201.

²⁹ For more on the topic see e.g., Mark Cornwall, *Disintegration and Defeat. The Last Years of Austria – Hungary: A Multi-National Experiment in Early Twentieth-Century Europe* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002); Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); John Deak and Jonathan E. Gumz, "How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy's Internal War, 1914–1918," *The American Historical Review*, 122, no. 4 (2017): 1105–1136; Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Hannes Leidinger et al., *Habsburgs schmutziger Krieg: Ermittlungen zur österreichisch-ungarischen Kriegsführung 1914–1918* (St. Pölten; Salzburg; Wien: Residenz Verlag, 2014); Richard Georg Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, and Arnold Suppan, *Innere Front: Militärassistenten, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918*. Bd 1, *Zwischen Streik und Meuterei* (Wien: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1974); Tamara Scheer and Nancy M. Wingfield, "Habsburg Home Fronts During the First World War and Beyond," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 2016.

To protest the mad national hatred. To protest the war and all its accompaniment. To protest not only with words, but with deeds; and this Congress was a deed”.³⁰ Their 20 resolutions – especially the five “Principles for a Permanent Peace” – framed a gendered critique of a gendered war.³¹ In the first resolution, they declared:

We women, in International Congress assembled, protest against the madness and the horror of war, involving as it does a reckless sacrifice of human life and the destruction of so much that humanity has laboured through centuries to build up.

They also protested the assumption that women could only be protected by means of modern warfare and “the odious wrongs of which women are the victims in time of war, and especially against the horrible violation of women which attends all war”.³²

The resolutions titled “Action Towards Peace” urged governments to begin peace negotiations, demanding permanent peace, based on the principles of justice, namely that:

no territory should be transferred without the consent of the men and women in it, and that the right of conquest should not be recognized. That autonomy and a democratic parliament should not be refused to any people. That the Governments of all nations should come to an agreement to refer future international disputes to arbitration or conciliation and to bring social, moral and economic pressure to bear upon any country which resorts to arms. That foreign politics should be subject to democratic control.³³

They ended the second resolution with the demand that women should be granted equal political rights as men. In the third resolution, they formulated the principles of a permanent peace – respect of nationality, arbitration and conciliation, international pressure, democratic control of foreign policy and the enfranchisement of women. The twenty resolutions on international cooperation called for the third Hague Peace Conference, recommended the creation of the Society of Nations to safeguard international peace, advocated for general disarmament and demanded that all secret treaties be declared void.

30 John Paull, “The Women Who Tried to Stop the Great War: The International Congress of Women at The Hague 1915,” ed. Andrew H. Campbell, *Global Leadership Initiatives for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global 2018), 254.

31 Paull, “The Women Who Tried to Stop the Great War,” 251.

32 Ibid., 257.

33 Ibid.

Notably, the London Memorandum/Pact/Treaty (*memorandum* being the official title of the document) was signed by the Entente powers and Italy on 26 April 1915, urging Italy to join the Allies. However, it had never been ratified by any parliament and only became public after the Bolshevik Revolution. The Congress emphasized educating children toward ideals of constructive peace. The environmental scientist John Paull pointed out some reactions to the Peace resolutions, some congruent with the women’s resolutions (e.g. British writer Bernard Shaw) and some completely opposite (e.g. British science fiction writer H.G. Wells and French writer Anatole France).³⁴ The congressional resolution was also forwarded to American President Wilson, who, in 1918, in the 14th point of his Fourteen Points,³⁵ envisioned the creation of a League of Nations at a future peace conference. A coincidence? The Women’s Congress proposed that women participate in peace negotiations – a vision not realized at the Versailles Conference, where no women were present. The 1919 Women’s Congress denounced the harsh terms imposed on the defeated nations, predicting a new war.³⁶

Slovenian women were central to the 1917 Declaration Movement,³⁷ supporting the Yugoslav deputies’ demand for monarchy reform. Over 300,000 signatures were collected, calling for peace and the return of loved ones from the frontlines.³⁸

That same year, the socialist movement began to reorganise either on the “alliance” basis or on pacifist grounds (in neutral Switzerland). At the Stockholm Conference (1917), a manifesto was drafted. The delegates reaffirmed the international proletariat’s will for peace and the prevention of future wars by means of international law and arbitration, which would be exercised in a democratic Europe.³⁹ The conference should have been attended by Slovenian delegates, and lawyer and politician Henrik Tuma drafted a 75-page-long memorandum in Slovenian and German, yet it never reached the event. Drawing on Russian socialist thinking, Tuma advocated for peace without annexations or reparations, backed by proletarian internationalism. Tuma blamed both Germany and Austria-Hungary for the war, but distinguished Germany’s goal of world domination from Austria-Hungary’s aim of suppressing the Slavs and Romanians.⁴⁰

34 Ibid., 260.

35 The Fourteen Points represent US President Woodrow Wilson’s post-First World War programme to end territorial disputes in Europe, promote international commerce and make the world safe for democracy and conducting foreign policy.

36 Paull, “The Women Who Tried to Stop the Great War,” 263.

37 The Declaration Movement followed the May Declaration, the most important declaration of the Yugoslav deputies in the Vienna parliament from 31 May 1917, in which they demanded the reformation of the monarchy and formation of the third autonomous South-Slavic entity. The movement consisted in gathering signatures in support of the declaration.

38 For more on the topic see Vlasta Stavbar, *Majniška deklaracija in deklaracijsko gibanje* (Maribor: Založba Pivec, 2018).

39 Marcobelli, “Pre-war Socialist Pacifism,” 3.

40 Branko Marušič, Franc Rozman, *Stockholmska spomenica Henrika Tume* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2011), 10.

Numerous other peace efforts – such as those by Pope Benedict XV, Emperor Charles I, and Germany's 1916 offer – also failed. Wilson's "Peace without Victory" speech⁴¹ and his Fourteen Points influenced the path to postwar negotiations, even if they were only partly accepted by the Allies. The lowest common denominator was that they failed to end the war and endure lasting peace.

The legacy of the Treaty of Versailles and its role in postwar instability

The war officially ended on 11 November 1918, when Germany signed the armistice and hostilities between the Allies and the Central Powers (Germany) ceased, but as Robert Lansing, the US Secretary of State, noted in his diary on 22 January 1919, "the Great War seems to have split up into a lot of wars",⁴² for there was fighting in the Balkans, Poland was at war with its neighbours, and civil war was still raging in Russia. Modern (Western) European historiography of the First World War has, therefore, upgraded the term "the Great War" to "the Greater War" to reflect the temporal and geographical (colonial) dimension of the war.

Preparations for the Peace Conference began under these un-peaceful circumstances. The conference opened without a clear agenda, with the German peace terms, the wider aspects of the European and global settlement and issues such as the League of Nations up for debate.

The conference itself had no major precedent in the past, the only precedent being the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), which "rounded off" the long Napoleonic wars; however, it should be noted that the tone of the negotiations at the Congress of Vienna was amicable, regardless of the differences between the winners and losers, whereas in Paris in 1919, the atmosphere and starting point were distinctly frosty. The armistice, the interval between the lowering and raising of the curtain, as Mr Clemenceau vividly put it, and later the peace agreements were based on the origins and nature of war.⁴³ However, Georges Clemenceau, French Prime Minister (1906–1909; 1917–1920), was unequivocal – the Germans were to blame for the catastrophe of 1914, and only a professional liar would doubt that. Twenty-seven victorious Entente states and five British dominions took part in the conference, while the losers were only allowed to accept the peace terms. A clear line

was drawn between the victors and the losers, although the position of the victors was not equal either, as their role in the war was not the same, nor were their losses and war damage. The most obvious and conspicuous absence was certainly that of Russia. In the first half of 1918, Russia's presence at a potential peace conference was still possible, and drafts were made for the territories along Russia's western border. Later, however, the Bolshevik regime came under a virtual blockade of the West, trade and diplomatic routes were cut off, and even the newspapers had recalled their reporters by early 1919. Of course, the absence of Russia, which had helped the Western Allies in many ways during the three years of war, also raised legal questions, as it was still technically an ally and at war with Germany, which had been forced to abrogate the Brest-Litovsk armistice when it accepted the terms of the armistice with the Western Allies. But Clemenceau insisted that Russia was a traitor because it had signed an armistice with Germany, giving the latter access to territory and raw materials and allowing the German army to continue the war in the West, opening a window for the Bolshevik regime to impose the Marxist millennium. In Clemenceau's view, this freed the Western Allies from any promises to Russia, including access to the straits between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. But Russia was omnipresent in its absence, shaping the peace in many ways, according to Wilson's supporter Ray Stannard Baker, and the borders of the new Baltic states and their neighbours could not be finalised until relations with Russia were defined.⁴⁴

Nothing was left to chance at the opening ceremony, and the losers were spared nothing. The German delegation was the last to be admitted into the hall and had to pass a group of French veterans with disfigured faces on their way to the balcony, their bandages covering the terrible wounds symbolizing the victims awaiting redemption. The French Prime Minister turned to them and said: "The French nation, which you represent here today, salutes you, who have paid for your victory with your own blood. Today's ceremony is nothing more than a first step towards reparation. And there will be many more steps to follow, I assure you".⁴⁵ These soldiers were not called to deliver a message of peace; they were victims of the horrors of modern technological warfare, and the passing German delegation had to reaffirm the moral condemnation of their crimes and, of course, war guilt, as enshrined in Article 231 of the future Versailles Peace Treaty. It was, therefore, also completely illusory to hope that the peace treaties signed at the Paris Peace Conference would bring (lasting) peace, because they were based on the nature of war itself, on its totality, its capillarity, on the complete mobilization of the mind by means of unprecedented propaganda, not least the demonization of the opponents with whom a peace treaty had to be concluded in 1919. It was true that it was questionable whether a just peace could actually be achieved if Article 231 of the future Treaty of Versailles exclusively blamed Germany for the outbreak of war, which was mainly a German post-

41 Mark E. Benbow, "Wilson, Woodrow," in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, DOI: 10.151463/ie1418.10168/1.1, 3

42 Alan Sharp, "The Paris Peace Conference and its Consequences," in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, DOI: 10.151463/ie1418.10149/1.1., 3.

43 Georges Clemenceau and Frederick MacCurdy Atkinson, *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* (New York: The Ryerson Press, 1930), 98.

44 Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919. Six months that changed the world* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002), 65.

45 Eckart Conze, *1919. La Grande Illusione* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2019), 9.

war interpretation, as that article “divided” the blame between Germany and its allies, which had either disintegrated or suffered substantial territorial losses, while on the other hand, the Western Allies were also convinced of Germany’s fundamental culpability for the outbreak of the war, which led to the formulation of a reparations plan to ensure that Germany would never again pose a military threat. The Treaty of Versailles was revised and amended in the following years, mostly in Germany’s favour. Nevertheless, according to many historians, the combination of a harsh treaty and the subsequent lax enforcement of its provisions paved the way for the rise of German militarism in the 1930s.

The new world order, known as the Versailles order, was based on nation-states and pseudo-national states in Central Europe; thousands of kilometres of new borders were created in Europe, and the new map reflected the outcome of wars and armed struggles.

The decisions taken at the Paris Peace Conference had far-reaching and lasting consequences – not only in Europe. They introduced population transfers as a means of resolving territorial disputes, contributed to the modern refugee crisis, reshaped the Middle East and left unresolved tensions that persist into the present. Even the creation of the League of Nations failed to secure lasting peace, and ironically, the US Senate rejected American participation in the very institution that President Wilson had envisioned.

Today, many scholars and observers agree that a historic opportunity was missed. As the British general Archibald Wavell, who served in both world wars, famously remarked: “The war to end all wars successfully made the peace that ended peace”.⁴⁶ In the aftermath, Paris became – in historian Margaret MacMillan’s words – “the world capital of First Aid, with a grand plan to create a new European and world order, but without the right tools to implement it”.⁴⁷

Summary

The article delves into the disillusionment surrounding the First World War, initially envisioned as a war to secure lasting peace. It begins with H. G. Wells’ idealistic claim and contrasts it with the harsh political and social realities of early 20th-century Europe. The text traces the historical development of peace movements from early 19th-century societies to the vibrant, international pacifist networks before 1914. Key figures such as Bertha von Suttner, Alfred Hermann Fried and Romain Rolland are highlighted for their transnational activism and contributions to peace discourse.

The article also examines the socialist movement’s ambivalent role in opposing militarism, with some parties resisting war and others succumbing to nationalist pressures. Special attention is given to the 1915 Hague International Congress of Women, which formulated groundbreaking peace principles and demanded women’s political inclusion. Despite numerous initiatives, the war continued, culminating in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference.

The Treaty of Versailles, shaped by the victors and marked by punitive measures against Germany, failed to achieve just or lasting peace. The exclusion of Russia, the marginalization of pacifist voices and the propagation of war guilt led to fragile post-war arrangements. The article concludes that while peace was the aim, the flawed processes and outcomes laid the groundwork for further instability, reinforcing the idea that the war that promised to end all wars ultimately created a peace that ended peace.

⁴⁶ Alan Sharp, *Versailles 1919: A Centennial Perspective* (London: Haus Publishing, 2018), 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

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