

Bertha von Suttner

Nobel Lecture

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(Translation)

The Evolution of the Peace Movement

The stars of eternal truth and right have always shone in the firmament of human understanding. The process of bringing them down to earth, remolding them into practical forms, imbuing them with vitality, and then making use of them, has been a long one.

One of the eternal truths is that happiness is created and developed in peace, and one of the eternal rights is the individual's right to live. The strongest of all instincts, that of self-preservation, is an assertion of this right, affirmed and sanctified by the ancient commandment "Thou shalt not kill."

It is unnecessary for me to point out how little this right and this commandment are respected in the present state of civilization. Up to the present time, the military organization of our society has been founded upon a denial of the possibility of peace, a contempt for the value of human life, and an acceptance of the urge to kill.

And because this has been so, as far back as world history records (and how short is the actual time, for what are a few thousand years?), most people believe that it must always remain so. That the world is ever changing and developing is still not generally recognized, since the knowledge of the laws of evolution, which control all life, whether in the geological timespan or in society, belongs to a recent period of scientific development.

It is erroneous to believe that the future will of necessity continue the trends of the past and the present. The past and present move away from us in the stream of time like the passing landscape of the riverbanks, as the vessel carrying mankind is borne inexorably by the current toward new shores.

That the future will always be one degree better than what is past and discarded is the conviction of those who understand the laws of evolution and try to assist their action. Only through the understanding and deliberate application of natural laws and forces, in the material domain as

well as in the moral, will the technical devices and the social institutions be created which will make our lives easier, richer, and more noble. These things are called ideals as long as they exist in the realm of ideas; they stand as achievements of progress as soon as they are transformed into visible, living, and effective forms.

"If you keep me in touch with developments, and if I hear that the Peace Movement is moving along the road of practical activity, then I will help it on with money."

These words were spoken by that eminent Scandinavian to whom I owe this opportunity of appearing before you today, Ladies and Gentlemen. Alfred Nobel said them when my husband and I visited with him in 1892 in Bern, where a peace congress¹ was in progress.

His will showed that he had gradually become convinced that the movement had emerged from the fog of pious theories into the light of attainable and realistically envisaged goals. He recognized science and idealistic literature as pursuits which foster culture and help civilization. With these goals he ranked the objectives of the peace congresses: the attainment of international justice and the consequent reduction in the size of armies.

Alfred Nobel believed that social changes are brought about slowly, and sometimes by indirect means. He contributed 80,000 francs to Andrée's attempt to cross the North Pole². He wrote to me that this could contribute more to peace than I would believe. "If Andrée attains his goal, or even if he only half attains it, it will be one of those successes that stimulate a spate of talk and excitement which open the way for the generation and acceptance of new ideas and new reforms."³

But Nobel also saw a shorter and more direct way before him. On another occasion he wrote⁴ to me: "It could and should soon come to pass that all states pledge themselves collectively to attack an aggressor. That would make war impossible, and would force even the most brutal and unreasonable Power to appeal to a court of arbitration, or else keep quiet. If the Triple Alliance included every state instead of only three, then peace would be assured for centuries."

Alfred Nobel did not live to see the great progress and decisive events by which the Peace Idea was brought to life and made to function in a number of organizations.

He was, however, still alive in 1894 when Gladstone⁵, the great British statesman, went even further than the principle of arbitration in proposing a permanent international tribunal. Philip Stanhope⁶, a friend of the Grand Old Man, delivered this proposition to the Interparliamentary Conference of 1894 in Gladstone's name and succeeded in having a plan for such a tribunal forwarded to the member governments. Alfred Nobel lived to see the forwarding, but it was only after his death that any results were achieved: the calling of the Hague Conference and the founding of the Permanent Court of Arbitration⁷. It was of incalculable damage to the [peace] movement that such men as Alfred Nobel, Moritz von Egidy⁸, and Johann von Bloch⁹ were taken from it prematurely. It is true that their ideals and their work continue beyond the grave,

but had they still been living in our midst, how greatly would their personal influence and the effect of their work have contributed to the acceleration of the movement! With what courage would they have taken up the fight against the militarists who are at the present time trying to keep the shaky old system going!

That system is doomed to failure. Once a new system begins to emerge, the old ones must fall. The conviction that it is possible, that is necessary, and that it would be a blessing to have an assured judicial peace between nations is already deeply embedded in all social strata, even in those that wield the power. The task is already so clearly outlined, and so many are already working on it, that it must sooner or later be accomplished. A few years ago there was not a single minister of state professing the ideals of the peace movement. Today there are already many heads of state who do so. The first statesman in office to pledge his agreement to an interparliamentary conference officially, was, as I recall, Norwegian Prime Minister Steen¹⁰. It was John Lund¹¹ who brought this news - which caused a sensation at the time - to the 1891 Interparliamentary Conference in Rome. Moreover, it was the Norwegian government which was the first to pay the traveling expenses of members of the Interparliamentary Union and to make a grant to the **Peace Bureau** in Bern¹². Alfred Nobel had good reasons for choosing to entrust the administration of the funds of his peace legacy to the Norwegian Parliament.

Let us look round us in the world of today and see whether we are really justified in claiming for pacifism progressive development and positive results. A terrible war¹³, unprecedented in the world's history, recently raged in the Far East. This war was followed by a revolution¹⁴, even more terrible, which shook the giant Russian empire, a revolution whose final outcome we cannot yet foresee. We hear continually of fire, robbery, bombings, executions, overflowing prisons, beatings, and massacres; in short, an orgy of the Demon Violence. Meanwhile, in Central and Western Europe which narrowly escaped war, we have distrust, threats, saber rattling, press baiting, feverish naval buildup, and rearming everywhere. In England, Germany, and France, novels are appearing in which the plot of a future surprise attack by a neighbor is intended as a spur to even more fervent arming. Fortresses are being erected, submarines built, whole areas mined, airships tested for use in war; and all this with such zeal - as if to attack one's neighbor were the most inevitable and important function of a state. Even the printed program of the second Hague Conference [to be held in 1907] proclaims it as virtually a council of war. Now in the face of all this, can people still maintain that the peace movement is making progress?

Well, we must not be blinded by the obvious; we must also look for the new growth pushing up from the ground below. We must understand that two philosophies, two eras of civilization, are wrestling with one another and that a vigorous new spirit is supplanting the blatant and threatening old. No longer weak and formless, this promising new life is already widely established and determined to survive. Quite apart from the peace movement, which is a symptom rather than a cause of actual change, there is taking place in the world a process of internationalization and unification. Factors contributing to the development of this process are technical inventions, improved communications, economic interdependence, and closer

international relations. The instinct of self-preservation in human society, acting almost subconsciously, as do all drives in the human mind, is rebelling against the constantly refined methods of annihilation and against the destruction of humanity.

Complementing this subconscious striving toward an era free of war are people who are working deliberately toward this goal, who visualize the main essentials of a plan of action, who are seeking methods which will accomplish our aim as soon as possible. The present British prime minister, Campbell-Bannerman¹⁵, is reopening the question of disarmament. The French senator **d'Estournelles** ¹⁶ is working for a Franco-German entente. Jaurès¹⁷ summons the socialists of all countries to a united resistance to war. A Russian scholar, Novikov¹⁸, calls for a sevenfold alliance of confederated great powers of the world. Roosevelt offers arbitration treaties to all countries and speaks the following words in his message to Congress¹⁹: "It remains our clear duty to strive in every practicable way to bring nearer the time when the sword shall not be the arbiter among nations."

I wish to dwell for a moment on the subject of America. This land of limitless opportunities is marked by its ability to carry out new and daring plans of enormous imagination and scope, while often using the simplest methods. In other words, it is a nation idealistic in its concepts and practical in its execution of them. We feel that the modern peace movement has every chance in America of attracting strong support and of finding a clear formula for the implementation of its aims. The words of the President just quoted reveal full understanding of the task. The methods are outlined in the following objectives, which comprise the program of a peace campaign currently being waged in America.(1) Arbitration treaties.(2) A peace union between nations.(3) An international body with strength to maintain law between nations, as between the States of North America, and through which the need for recourse to war may be abolished.

When **Roosevelt** received me in the White House on October 17, 1904, he said to me, "World peace is coming, it certainly is coming, but only step by step."

And so it is. However clearly envisaged, however apparently near and within reach the goal may be, the road to it must be traversed a step at a time, and countless obstacles surmounted on the way.

Furthermore, we are dealing with a goal as yet not perceived by many millions or, if perceived, regarded as a utopian dream. Also, powerful vested interests are involved, interests trying to maintain the old order and to prevent the goal's being reached. The adherents of the old order have a powerful ally in the natural law of inertia inherent in humanity which is, as it were, a natural defense against change. Thus pacifism faces no easy struggle. This question of whether violence or law shall prevail between states is the most vital of the problems of our eventful era, and the most serious in its repercussions. The beneficial results of a secure world peace are almost inconceivable, but even more inconceivable are the consequences of the threatening world war which many misguided people are prepared to precipitate. The advocates of pacifism are well aware how meager are their resources of personal influence and power. They know that they are still few in number and weak in authority, but when they realistically consider

themselves and the ideal they serve, they see themselves as the servants of the greatest of all causes. On the solution of this problem depends whether our Europe will become a showpiece of ruins and failure, or whether we can avoid this danger and so enter sooner the coming era of secure peace and law in which a civilization of unimagined glory will develop. The many aspects of this question are what the second Hague Conference should be discussing rather than the proposed topics concerning the laws and practices of war at sea, the bombardment of ports, towns, and villages, the laying of mines, and so on. The contents of this agenda demonstrate that, although the supporters of the existing structure of society, which accepts war, come to a peace conference prepared to modify the nature of war, they are basically trying to keep the present system intact. The advocates of pacifism, inside and outside the Conference, will, however, defend their objectives and press forward another step toward their goal - the goal which, to repeat Roosevelt's words, affirms the duty of his government and of all governments "to bring nearer the time when the sword shall not be the arbiter among nations"

* The laureate delivered this lecture in the Hals Brothers Concert Hall to a large audience. The Oslo *Aftenposten* of April 19, 1906, reports that the laureate, dressed in black, her voice husky with emotion, held her audience from the first; that she spoke concisely, using no contrived appeals, no gestures, no change of facial expression. The translation is based on the German text published in *Les Prix Nobel en 1905*.

1. The fourth World Peace Congress, August 22-27, 1892. The conversation between Nobel and the laureate on this occasion is reported in *Memoirs of Bertha von Suttner*, Vol.1, pp. 429; 435-439.

2. Salomon August Andrée (1854-1897), Swedish aeronautical engineer and explorer, lost while attempting the first exploration by balloon of the Arctic.

3. This quotation, as well as the story of Nobel's connection with Andrée, is reported by Nicholas Halasz in *Nobel: A Biography of Alfred Nobel* (New York: Orion Press, 1959), pp. 257-258; 262-264.

4. Letter dated January 7, 1893, Paris; quoted in *Memoirs of Bertha von Suttner*, Vol. I, pp. 438-439.

5. William Ewart Gladstone (1808-1898), British prime minister (1868-1874; 1880-1885; 1886; 1892-1894).

6. Philip James Stanhope (1847-1923), member of House of Commons (1886-1892; 1893-1900), member of House of Lords after becoming Lord Weardale in 1905; president of two Interparliamentary Conferences (1890; 1906).

7. Commonly known as the Hague Tribunal, the Court was established by the first Hague Peace Conference (1899).

8. Christoph Moritz von Egidy (1847-1898), German officer and writer; forced to leave the army because of his pamphlet *Ernste Gedanken* which questioned some of the official dogmas of the established church; his broad concept of the Christian ideal involved taking a stand on all problems, including that of

peace.

9. Jean de Bloch (1836-1902), Polish-born industrialist, author, and peace advocate; wrote *The Future of War in Its Technical, Economic, and Political Relations* (English trans., 1899) which contends that modern war will become too deadly to be risked.

10. Johannes Wilhelm Christian Steen (1827-1906), member of Norwegian Parliament for many years; prime minister (1891-1893; 1898-1902); member of the Norwegian Nobel Committee (1897-1904).

11. John Theodor Lund (1842-1913), member of Norwegian Parliament; member of the Norwegian Nobel Committee (1897-1913). At the banquet honoring the laureate, Mr. Lund proposed the toast to Sweden and the memory of Alfred Nobel.

12. The Interparliamentary Union (1889), composed of members from the various parliaments of the world, had at this time the primary objective of furthering the cause of international arbitration. The Permanent International Peace Bureau (1891), commonly called the Bern Bureau, was an information center for organizations and individuals working for peace and an executive arm for the international peace congresses.

13. The Russo- Japanese War (1904-1905).

14. The Revolution of 1905 in which dissatisfaction with czarist autocracy, spurred by losses in the war with Japan, resulted in a series of strikes, insurrections, and assassinations, along with demands for a constituent assembly; the atmosphere of revolution was still strong at the time of the laureate's speech.

15. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836-1908), British statesman of the Liberal Party; prime minister (1905-1908); advocate of international arbitration and armament limitation.

16. Baron Paul Henri Benjamin Balluet d'Estournelles de Constant de Rebecque (1852-1924), co-recipient of the Peace Prize for 1909.

17. Jean Léon Jaurès (1859-1914), French politician; leader of the Socialists in the Chamber of Deputies; founder (with Aristide Briand) and editor of *L'Humanité* (1904-1914).

18. Yakov Aleksandrovich Novikov (1849-1912), Russian writer; author of *La Fédération de l'Europe* (1901).

19. President Theodore Roosevelt's fifth annual message to the U.S. Congress, December 5, 1905.

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