

Fourth International Conference of Peace Museums (May 2003)

Peace Education Through Peace (& Anti-War) Remembrance

This conference is taking place in Flanders, whose name - the world over - has become synonymous with the horrors of the First World War. The enormity of that war, and of the loss, suffering and devastation which it occasioned, is still today, eighty-five years after it came to an end, vividly brought home on its blood-soaked former battlefields by countless reminders: war cemeteries, war monuments, war museums.

Not only in Flanders but all over the world, similar reminders can be found of that terrible and long drawn-out human catastrophe. In the United Kingdom, and throughout what constituted until the Second World War its empire (now represented by the Commonwealth), the reminders of World War I are to be found in the smallest villages - most commonly in the shape of monuments in the village green or inscriptions (e.g. on entry gates or doorways to the local school) dedicated to those from the local community who lost their lives in that war. Last year (2002), the Imperial War Museum in London launched 'The United Kingdom National Inventory of War Memorials'. The archive already contains information on 48,000 memorials from the First World War and other conflicts; the number is expected to rise to 60,000 (see 'Mapping our war memorials', *The Times*, 28 October 2002). According to a recent study, there are approximately 5,000 war memorials in the Australian countryside - the vast majority, we can assume, referring to the First World War (cf. Jay Winter, 'Their name liveth for evermore', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 April 2002, p. 26).

The First World War also saw the emergence, especially among the English-speaking nations, of a group of 'war poets', whose work has become an important and popular part of the national school curriculum. *In Flanders Fields*, by the Canadian army doctor John McCrae, is undoubtedly the best known of the many poems inspired by World War I. It has even found its way onto the \$ 10 banknote of his native country (where it is flanked by a couple of doves, a poppy and the words 'Lest we forget'. The right-hand side

of the note depicts a memorial arch. The middle of the note pays tribute to Canada's involvement in UN peacekeeping and shows a blue helmet UN peacekeeper with binoculars against the outlines of a globe, with the words, 'In the service of peace'). The same poem's famous opening line has also been adopted as the name of the museum dedicated to the War in the Cloth Hall in Ieper and opened in 1998.

The persistence of the remembrance of the 'Great War' is also shown in the unique and moving daily ceremony under the Menin Gate in Ieper which has been taking place without interruption (save for the duration of the Second World War) since 1928. As regards the annual calendar, 11 November, known variously as armistice day, Remembrance Day (Canada), or 'Veterans Day' (USA), is among the most important national ceremonies in several countries whose soldiers were involved in World War I.

The continuing hold of that war on later generations is also demonstrated in various other ways, such as the appearance of new books - both scholarly and popular -, documentaries, films, the growth of battlefield tourism, etc.

There is, in short, no doubt that World War I has not been forgotten and is, instead, being remembered in myriad ways around the world. Indeed, so much is this the case that one wonders how the centenary of that war - just over ten years away as regards its beginning - will be commemorated. It is inevitable that many of the well known battles will be singled out for special commemoration of one kind or another. From the perspective of peace education, one can only hope that this prolonged occasion - four years! - will be used to strengthen the determination to avoid war and violent confrontation, and to highlight the means available for peaceful conflict resolution at all levels in society. Indeed, the anniversary presents an excellent opportunity to show the consequences of a world which was steeped in a culture of war, and the ongoing need to transform that culture into one of peace and nonviolence. This is of course not to say that we proclaim the possibility of a world without conflict; conflict - whether between states, nations, cultures, or individuals - is inseparable from life. But this recognition is not tantamount to a belief that the way in which conflict manifests itself, is managed, and perhaps eventually resolved, of necessity involves physical violence.

The remembrance of war comprises many diverse elements of which the cult of the dead soldier - which stresses sacrifice, heroism, courage, devotion to country, and the perpetual debt which his country owes him - is only one part. The enormous loss of life which both World Wars occasioned makes it almost inevitable that it is this aspect which has traditionally dominated public war remembrance. But the passage of time has also allowed hitherto neglected - and even repressed - aspects of war to come to the fore and become the subject for remembrance.

Such is the case, for instance, for the suffering and sacrifices born by the home front, and the disruptions and deprivations of daily family life which war inevitably brings in its wake. They have in more recent years become the subject of commemoration and remembrance. This can take the form of a public monument or sculpture, or - as exemplified in the controversial Showakan museum in Tokyo, about domestic life in Japan in the Second World War - an entire museum. In Japan also, plans are underway for a unique museum dedicated to women and war.

Another example concerns the fate of soldiers who were executed for desertion or cowardice, a subject which continues to be sensitive in several countries, and which in recent years has enjoyed much interest (cf. Piet Chielens & Julian Putkowski, *Unquiet Graves: Execution sites of the First World War in Flanders*. London: Francis Boutle Publ., 2000). A recognition has grown that these soldiers (many of whom were young boys) were frequently the victims of shell-shock who did not deserve the harsh punishment meted out to them. They should also be seen as belonging to the tragic casualties of war - while their families, even generations later, continue to grieve or feel burdened by shame. In Britain, a *Shot at Dawn Memorial* was dedicated in 2001 near Lichfield to the memory of the more than 300 British and Commonwealth soldiers who were shot for desertion or cowardice during World War I. The statue depicts a blindfolded boy soldier with his hands tied behind his back awaiting execution.

Other memorials have been dedicated in recent years to 'the unknown civilian', to mothers and widows, to orphans. Indeed, in 2001 the noted British animal rights campaigner and author Jilly Cooper launched an initiative to raise £ 1 million for an animal monument in London as a tribute to the fauna that died in two world wars - 'from the mighty elephant, who

built our armies' bridges, to the tiny glowworm, who lit the soldiers' maps' (cf. Valerie Grove, 'Diary', *The Times*, 14 June 2001). It is not surprising that in an age which increasingly takes animal rights seriously and which also recognises the interconnectedness of all life, the enormous loss of life which wars have inflicted upon animals deserves to be remembered.

At the same time, memorials continue to be inaugurated, to honour individual military leaders, special units of one or other of the armed services, or specific campaigns. It seems that, once wars are over, there is no end to their remembrance. Jay Winter has referred to the current 'memory boom, which began to emerge in the 1980s' and he talks of 'the continuing resonance of the cult of the Great War'. The popularity of war remembrance - and particularly of World War I - is well illustrated by the enormous success of the *In Flanders Fields* museum in Ieper, and also of the new museum opened more recently in the renovated IJzer Tower in Diksmuide. They can both be regarded as war museums with a strong anti-war message, unlike traditional war museums. The anti-war message in four languages on the IJzer Tower itself, and the messages conveyed in the annual pilgrimages to the war graves surrounding the Tower, leave no doubt about the nature of the museum.

A recent 'Guide to museums, cemeteries and military sites in Belgium and Luxemburg' contains, for Belgium, 102 entries. It is interesting to note that the word 'peace' is to be found in the names of only two of them: the 'Memorial for Solidarity, Peace and Liberty' in Brussels, and the "'Lange Max" Peace Museum' in Koekelare. This peace museum, the only one in the country so-named, is in effect a war museum since it documents the history of the German Navy corps in Flanders during their occupation of the Belgian coast in World War I. (It is from Koekelare that a big gun, called 'Lange Max', fired shells onto Dunkirk, 45 km away). The Memorial, for its part, informs the visitor about what life was like for Belgian citizens during the two World Wars. The Memorial's permanent exhibition is conceived in a spirit of profound gratitude to all those who, sometimes at the risk of their life, defended the freedom and dignity of Belgian citizens (cf. Jacky G. Delannoy, *Guide des musées, cimetières, et sites militaires en Belgique et au Luxembourg*. Nalinnes: Editions Rodbergg, 2002. The 102 Belgian sites can roughly be grouped into the following categories: Napoleonic and other historical sites, including fortresses [40]; Regimental museums, including

police museums [20]; World War I [15]; World War II [15]; Other sites, including those concerning Resistance, Liberation, Holocaust [12]).

In England, 2002 saw the opening of the *Imperial War Museum North* in Trafford Park in Manchester. Its parent organisation, the *Imperial War Museum* in London, is still going strong; it was founded already when the Great War was still in progress. In its publicity campaign, the new museum has been using the slogan 'War shapes lives', a message which is repeated at the end of the exhibition ('War still shapes our lives'). While obviously true, is this not too innocuous a statement which hides the essence of war, viz. that war 'mis-shapes' lives and, before anything else, 'destroys' lives? Particularly here, in Flanders, the evidence that war brings death and destruction is all around us. Unfortunately, that experience - of 'the war to end war' - has not prevented much further and equally horrific slaughter in later wars. Death and destruction, and misery and poverty - those have always been and continue to be the chief consequences of war. Voltaire's pithy characterisation of war has ever held true: 'this plague and crime ... which includes all plagues and all crimes'.

Of course, it is undeniable that war has a pervasive impact on society at large, as it has on individuals and their families. That history has been shaped by war is obvious. But it is all too easy in this new *Imperial War Museum North* as in many other war museums, for the visitor to gain the impression that war - having apparently been such a pervasive presence in human history, up to the present day - is an inevitability. Moreover, this impression gains in acceptance and credibility when combined with the view that war presents us with a balance sheet in which the negative consequences of war have to be seen against its positive achievements: people regaining their freedom, individuals and social groups being provided with opportunities for emancipation, scientific and technological advance spurred on by war's necessities and stimulating economic and material progress. The same argument is currently being advanced about the war against Iraq. Even if no weapons of mass destruction will be found, the violent overthrow of a tyrannical and murderous regime is regarded by the war-party as sufficient justification for the war and all it entails.

Again, it is undeniable that war 's influence is pervasive and far-reaching,

and that it has in various ways contributed to desirable social developments in the lives of individuals as of societies. And as Kant has argued, the experience of war itself has also been an important factor in driving an anarchic world of sovereign states towards the development of an international system which puts some restraints on their rights to go to war. It is no co-incidence that the great advances in international organization - the League of Nations and the Permanent Court of International Justice, and their successor organizations, the United Nations and the International Court of Justice - have all occurred in the immediate aftermath of war. Likewise, even before the 20th century which saw the birth of these global organizations, the International Red Cross and its promotion of the first Geneva Convention was the direct result of the Battle of Solferino (1859), which inspired Henry Dunant to create this humanitarian organization.

The world remembers war - and while for some this will inspire an aversion to it, for others it will be a reminder of the occasional necessity of war, of the need for sacrifice, of the precariousness of peace.

The point I want to make is this: while the world remembers war, it hardly remembers the efforts of those who have laboured to *avoid* war and who have struggled to bring about a world in which there would no longer be a place for war as a means for states or peoples to settle their conflicts. Our collective memory is grossly one-sided and fails to do justice to the other side of the coin. This is not only bad history, but it also means a denial and withholding of precisely those historical realities which can encourage, inspire, and empower people today.

It is only since the interwar period of the 20th century, and particularly since the 1960s, that a small but growing group of peace historians has emerged which is concerned with rescuing this important aspect of history from oblivion. As Merle Curti, the American historian who was one of the founders of peace history, has commented, 'clearly the search for an end to war cannot afford to ignore precedents'. And his Dutch friend and colleague, Jacob ter Meulen, said: 'The crusade for peace is a history of pioneers, full of beautiful examples, of sacrifices and of struggles. One finds strong heads ... practical spirits ... sages ... martyrs ... prophets ... They were all heroes. Today, it is not easy to be a pacifist and still less so to remain one in time of war. But in the past it was even more difficult to be a

crusader for peace. However, we are convinced that the day will come when in school-textbooks the pacifists of the past will be mentioned side by side with the great heroes of war'. That day has not arrived yet, and is unlikely to arrive in the near future.

Perhaps, before they will be given their due in school history textbooks, the lives of peace heroes - together with their ideas, campaigns and struggles - will be displayed in peace museums. It is of course already the case that many peace museums highlight the ideas and achievements of leading figures from the peace and non-violence movements, such as Gandhi, M. L. King, and the Nobel peace prize laureates. Indeed, museums fully dedicated to a single peacemaker are among the most inspiring of peace museums. They show that preventing war and violence, and building a world of freedom and justice by nonviolent means, is no less challenging than war. Apart from those museums dedicated to Gandhi and King - the 20th century's best known peace heroes - mention should be made of the Franz Jaegerstaetter House in the Austrian village of St. Radegund, the Yi Jun Peace Museum in The Hague, and the Oka Masaharu Memorial Peace Museum in Nagasaki. These museums pay tribute to courageous and sometimes tragic heroes of peace (Jaegerstaetter and Yi Jun, like Gandhi and King, paid with their lives for their commitment to the cause of peace and nonviolence). Other 20th century peace heroes - from Henry Dunant to Nelson Mandela, and from the Dalai Lama to Aung San Suu Kyi - will be collectively honoured and remembered in the Nobel Peace Center which will be opened in two years time in Oslo, the home of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The history of this prize itself reminds us of the rich ferment of peace ideas and campaigns to abolish war in the period preceding the First World War. It was precisely because he became convinced that the peace movement of his day was not a utopian enterprise but represented a promise which deserved support that Alfred Nobel - a hard-headed scientist, inventor, and businessman - established a prize for peace, first awarded in the opening year of the 20th century. With only few exceptions, those honoured with the prize - individuals as well as institutions - have been among the most dedicated and inspirational actors for peace. Regrettably, and perversely, even *their* work has been largely forgotten. How much more is this the case for the many other workers in the great cause of peace and internationalism

who may have been nominated for this singular honour but who did not become Nobel peace laureates. And we should not forget the many nameless - or at least fame-less, who have dedicated their lives to the same cause.

Since we find ourselves on the battlefields of World War I, where hundreds of thousands of soldiers lost their lives, it would seem that those who struggled - in the decades preceding it - to prevent this man-made catastrophe from happening should not be left without a reminder. Is it fanciful to imagine that such would be the posthumous wish also of an overwhelming number of those soldiers, and hailing from all sides? Is it far-fetched to assume that, having experienced the reality of war and having paid with their lives, they would, with hindsight, wish to pay homage to those of their contemporaries and compatriots who warned of the impending catastrophe and who frequently suffered ridicule, opprobrium and hostility in consequence? Moreover, what about the feelings of those countless soldiers who survived the hell of the trenches, but who returned home with their lives destroyed, the victims of trauma, or their bodies severely maimed?

There is perhaps no need for us to imagine too much. There are believed to be fewer than forty First World War survivors left in Britain. A month ago, in early April, those still able and willing to do so - nine - gathered for their final reunion under the auspices of the First World War Veterans' Association. One of those survivors, 105-year old Arthur Barraclough, was a student in Bradford when he was called up in 1917. Interviewed by *The Times*, 85 years later, he said: 'Our war in 1917 was hell, so is Iraq now. *Wars are always a mistake*' (emphasis added). His best friend, Arthur Slater, also from Bradford, was killed by an artillery shell. Questioned about the war in Iraq, Barraclough said, 'I hate this war ... Sending our young lads out there to get killed ... Young men are dead and they've seen nothing of life yet. They ought to shoot the Prime Minister' (*The Times*, 3 April 2003, 'Memories of the trenches: A WW1 veteran remembers his war - and explains why he is against this one', T-2, pp. 4-5). The oldest soldier present at this last reunion, 108-year old Jack Davis, sadly commented: 'We were meant to stop all this fighting. Has the First World War ever been justified? For what?' (cf. 'Veterans recall disquiet on the Western front', *The Times*, 9 April 2003).

Although it is difficult to generalise, and it cannot be claimed that veterans' organizations are mainly pacifist in their orientation, frequently they - or sections of them - have been in the forefront of campaigns against militarism and war, and have been an important pillar of a country's peace movement. This is for instance the case with the Flemish Union of Veterans, VOS - *Verbond van Vlaamse Oudstrijders* - whose origins go back to the First World War (cf. Peter Lemmens, *70 Jaar VOS. Een geschiedkundig overzicht* [70 Years of VOS. A historical survey]. VOS, 1989).

It is right that we do not forget those who died (and who were also compelled to kill). But truth and justice demand that recognition be given also to those who struggled to prevent mass slaughter. It is most appropriate to mention one such figure here, because he was the founder of the world's first peace museum. When the great English writer, H.G. Wells, visited the battlefields of Soissons and Arras in northern France in September 1916, he commented that they 'were samples of the deadlock war; they were like Bloch come true'. Wells called Bloch 'the prophet who emerges with the most honour from this war'. The reference is to Jan Bloch, the Polish-Russian banker and railroad entrepreneur who in his six-volume work, *The War of the Future*, published in 1898, had given a detailed and prophetic description of what a new great war would be like. It would be, he wrote, 'like a *rendez-vous* with death'.

Bloch spent the next few years, until his death in 1902, in a heroic campaign to warn the world of the impending danger and to prevent it from happening. The International Museum of War and Peace, which he founded in the Swiss city of Lucerne and which opened in June 1902, was the most ambitious and inventive of his educational efforts. Despite his merits, Bloch is virtually unknown to the public at large. Fortunately, the centenary of his pioneering museum was celebrated in Lucerne last year, and since the 1980s the Jan Bloch Society in Warsaw has striven to promote his memory (in his native Poland and beyond). In the run-up to the centenary of the start of the First World War, it is time that his memory also be honoured in the midst of the killing fields of the Western front.

One of the terrible innovations witnessed at that front, near Ieper, was the

gas attack which German troops launched on 22 April 1915. The release of chlorine 'was brilliantly successful, killing some 10,000 Allied troops most horribly' (cf. Terence Kealey, 'Chemical warfare started with a racist egomaniac', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 2001). The world's first gas attack was the brainchild of, and directed by, the German scientist Fritz Haber. Incredible as it appears to us now, only a few years later, in 1919, he was awarded the Nobel prize in chemistry. His equally brilliant wife, Dr. Clara Immerwahr, had in vain tried to dissuade him from returning to the front to initiate the chemical warfare attack. In despair, she took her own life a few days later. For many years, the motives for her tragic act were covered up, and it was believed instead that she was mad. Largely forgotten and deliberately misunderstood, this noble and tragic life is now remembered in the annual prize instituted in 1991 by the German section of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) - the *Clara Immerwahr Auszeichnung*. Should she also not be remembered near the memorial dedicated to the Canadian soldiers who took the brunt of the attack, and who died an agonizing death?

Jan Bloch and Clara Immerwahr engaged in heroic efforts meant to preserve life, not to destroy or maim it. Unknown to the general public, they represent a whole tradition of artists, educators, philosophers, scientists, and activists who devoted their lives to safeguard their societies from the catastrophes of war. They were, in Sandi Cooper's felicitous phrase, 'patriotic pacifists' who saw the avoidance of war through the building of a world of peace, justice and humanity as the greatest contribution they could make to their society (Cf. Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe, 1815-1914*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991). They continue to provide inspiration and hope for later generations who are still faced with the same challenges.

One of the ways in which war remembrance can contribute to peace education is by acknowledging also the efforts for peace, war prevention and war resistance. The judicious juxtaposition of such peace and anti-war remembrance next to war memorials and war graves will provide an opportunity for enhancing their peace message.

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