

Why peace is possible at any time

Building on the European peace traditions

by Robert Seidel

Today, it can only be a matter of seeking ways to peace and supporting all forces embarking on this path. In the 21st century, all other options are obsolete due to the nuclear threat.

Here are some reflections and references to Europe's rich humanitarian tradition in these times of war.

"Typically appellative, bold, simplistic or downright naïve." These were the comments on *Leonard Frank's* publication "Man is Good!" during the First World War. Frank touched a nerve. The disturbing depictions bring war in all its madness into the consciousness of the reader. At the front his book was read secretly. Later it became a bestseller.

Reason and compassion eliminated

Beyond all intellectual sophistries, bubbles and emotionalised opinions generated by modern PR offices at political level, a human being remains a human being, even today. It is not in the "nature" of the individual to kill his fellow men. For this, a wide-range murderous machinery is necessary in the forefront to eliminate reason and human compassion.

Where have we ended up? Are we back at "Dying for the Fatherland!"? Just a few years ago, we would have shaken our heads in consternation. But thanks to PR, fake news finders and intensive mainstream "treatment", we have almost succeeded in getting the population in the mood for war and death again. It seems like a nightmare. Anchors of humanity that were thought to be secure are being surrendered by officials and intellectuals without a fight. Outcries of indignation fade away under a media flood of conformism, careerism, stupidity, faith in authority and fatalism.

War is imminent

The war in Ukraine will rebound on the West if it is not stopped soon. This means in all of Europe. It is a mistake to believe that this war will limit itself to the territory of Ukraine, when at the same time more and more dangerous weapons are being supplied from the West. Thus, the widening of the war is inevitable. Europe will be

the extended battlefield. For hypersonic weapons and long-range missiles – also nuclear-armed – every place in Europe is a reachable target. There is no need to explain the meaning of a third world to anyone. Or is there?

The Western states are in an encompassing media disinformation bubble – which used to be called simply "propaganda". Apparently, this is only noticed by those who persist in their critical thinking, who have the necessary time to inform themselves comprehensively and who muster the inner strength and courage to think through to the end, even against the media uniformity. For this, by the way, no academic title is necessary.

Reason and war

The French Nobel Prize winner for literature, *Romain Rolland*, describes the power of propaganda to destroy common sense and human feelings in an exemplary way in his book "Clérambault" during the First World War. After the end of the war, Rolland's works – like the work of countless individuals and organisations committed to peace – met with broad approval worldwide. The impression left by the horrors of war, the battlefields of Verdun or the poison gas deaths of Ypres, had a stirring effect. But obviously not for everyone ...

Twenty-one years later, the Second World War hit the people. It too did not fall out of the sky. It too was planned. It too was well prepared. And this war was also preceded by intensive propaganda work. Once again, thought, reason and compassion were eliminated.

A cruel awakening after the Second World War

Millions and millions of dead soldiers and civilians, war orphans, raped, traumatised, crippled, displaced, and uprooted human beings, endless ruins, epidemics, famines and for the first time two atomic bombs were dropped, one on Hiroshima and one on Nagasaki leaving thousands dead and future generations genetically damaged.

The psychosocial effects of war, well into the third generation, has only recently been recognised by researchers.

Human Rights Charter as a consequence

The founding of the UN and the proclamation of the *Human Rights Charter* with its declared goal of peace was the inevitable consequence of this catastrophe. Throughout Europe, the general endeavour for peace was as a matter of course. The approval of the work of *Albert Schweitzer* or the broad support for the peace efforts of personalities like *Dag Hammarskjöld* were expressions of this post-war sentiment.

For Europe, the cruel memory of the two world wars brought about also almost 50 years of peace – until the Fall of the Yugoslav war. However, after the Second World War other wars continued to be waged worldwide; almost unnoticed in Europe. There has not been a single year without war – driven by the governments of Western countries. Wars were waged in India, Indochina, Korea, Latin America, the former colonies of Africa, the Middle East, Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen etc. – until today ...

Decision for war or peace

And yet, there are no automatisms – neither anthropological, socio-psychological, sociological, “systemic”, “historical-materialistic” nor economic – that inevitably lead to war. Wars are planned. They are prepared. They are wanted. It is people who have the power to set them in motion – and often gain a lot of money in the process. They actively choose war. They want war. Thus, it is but a few people worldwide who, from their position, have the power to make decisions that affect billions of livelihoods worldwide. It is their decision, notwithstanding their motives.

Peace is always possible

Peace is possible, always, anytime, anywhere, from one minute to the next. If people can decide on war, they can also decide on peace. As soon as a will is in place, it is possible. Ceasefires or peace negotiations are not coincidences, they spring from insight and/or cold calculation. There are no automatisms perpetuating wars. These ideas must be confined to the realm of propaganda. They merely paralyse the will for peace and the courage to question the chosen path.

Responsibility

Even if individual leaders – and at this point I am expressly not thinking of the many politicians, but of those who actually have the decision-

making power to initiate or prevent arms deliveries, to promote or prevent negotiation efforts – if these people think that they are beyond any responsibility and are entitled to make godlike decisions about the fate and lives of others, they are committing a crime against humanity. They will have to take responsibility for their actions whether they want to or not, and whether they are aware of it or not. – There is no right to murder or manslaughter, and there is even less a right to revenge.

Outlook

In Europe, peace has been struggled for time and again, over centuries. During this time, various ideas have been developed to achieve a just peace or a peaceful coexistence (General Peace, *Peace of Westphalia*, *Hague Agreement*, *Geneva Conventions*, separation of powers by the state, state mechanisms to limit the possibilities of entering into wars, etc.). These paths must be taken up and developed still further.

The great attempt to ensure lasting peace through the *United Nations Charter* after the Second World War is still groundbreaking today. Unfortunately, it is flawed by the construction of the Security Council – consisting of the former victorious powers with the right of veto – which to this day secures them superiority over all other 188 states in the UN. Thus, this approach is doomed to fail. However, the core idea remains, that nations with equal rights are jointly responsible for peace; nations in the sense of sovereign states.

Democratic decision-making power

Should humanity once again narrowly escape the looming global armed conflict, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 (“...at the end we lucked out ...” according to US Secretary of Defence, *Robert Mac Namara*), then the great efforts of *Henri Dunant*, *Bertha von Suttner*, *Aristide Briand*, *Frank Kelloggs*, *Albert Schweitzer* and many others will be taken up in order to prevent the insanity of a nuclear end. To reach this, institutions of “collective security” developed in Europe, such as the CSCE and later the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE), can also be systematically renewed.

Finally, one will also have to think about the psychopathology of “decision-makers” and look for ways and procedures to limit their murderous decision-making power worldwide through appropriate democratic rules and institutions.