

Some remarks on the history of peace movements in Europe

by Birgit Daiber

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Peace initiatives are the oldest of the social movements – even older than workers movements. Immanuel Kant presented 1795 his draft for an “eternal” peace order – which became one of the basics for the charter of the United Nations in 1945. In 19th century liberal-democratic groups promoted peace initiatives and the early workers movements implemented anti-militaristic strategies in their programmes. And – just to remember – the vote of German SPD 1914 for war loans was the occasion when Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht leaved the party and finally became co-founders the Communist Party. Since the Great War anti-militarism became part of the DNA of Communist and radical left parties all over Europe.

In 1918 peace-movements and initiatives became popular – but all ended with the Nazi war over Europe. After the end of 2nd World war with the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the East-West-confrontation the debates on war and peace became a new dimension. A new radical pacifism occurred with a global view. In 1954 Albert Schweitzer started to publish about the danger of atomic bombs. 1955 the Russel-Einstein-Manifesto was published warning against warning against hydrogen bombs. 1957 Schweitzer wrote a letter to the President of United States and published a Declaration of Conscience. In 1958 9235 scientists signed a resolution and presented it to the United Nations which led to a 34 months during Moratorium of USA, UdSSR and United Kingdom (while France just started atomic tests in Sahara). Since the beginning there was a strong resistance in West-Germany against rearmament from Communists, Social Democrats, Trade Unionists and Christians. 1954 started the debate for an atomic armament of NATO under the guide of USA. Against this strategy started the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the UK. Every year at Eastern they organised the March from Aldermaston (where the nuclear bombs of UK where located) to Trafalgar Square in London. They introduced the famous peace-sign that is in use until today:

In Germany 18 famous scientists (for example Max Born, Otto Hahn, Werner Heisenberg and others) published a declaration against nuclear rearmament and Trade Unions took it over. The German Government tried to find ways to participate in nuclear armament of NATO with the help of France and Italy and German Parliament agreed on such a perspective. So a new wave of protests started with the campaign “Fight against nuclear death” in 1981/82.

The British Easter-Marshes became the role model for the German initiative of Easter-Marshes and until 1967 they grew from 1000 participants in 1960 to about 150.000 participants in 1967.



The situation in France was not so different. While nuclear tests started in Sahara in 1960, the development of nuclear armament and the conflict between France, USA and UK on the structure of NATO culminated 1966 in the exit of NATO. The “movement de la paix” - strongly supported by Communists and left Socialists - nevertheless was strong.

1963 USA started the war in Vietnam. It became one of the central issues of Students’ protests and an international Anti-War-movement. In it’s radical parts it wasn’t pacifist but supported the Viet Cong.

Mid the seventies USSR developed new nuclear missiles – SS 20 – which easily could reach Western Europe. As reaction NATO took it’s so-called double decision in 1979. It contained negotiations but as well the deployment of new nuclear missiles in western Europe. This led to the next wave of peace movements. It became the biggest one since 2nd World War.



ss20-missile

From Comiso in Sicily to Rome, Vienna, Madrid, Oslo, Bonn, Berlin and massive in the Netherlands and UK developed protest-movements. In France after the “Appel des Cent” in 1982 on June 2nd 200 000 citizens participated in a demonstration. In Austria Peace-Marshes and Peace-Festivals were organised. Especially in Italy the movement grew enormously. 30 000 people participated in camps and demonstrations in the small town of Comiso in Sicily – where NATO wanted to station missiles – and demonstrations all over the country up to 500 000 people took place. The Netherlands too were an important centre for the international peace movements in this time. On the national level the Christian Peace-Council (Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad) had a central role. It was obvious that the majority of the population was against the NATO-double decision. In Germany (West) mass demonstrations from 1981 until 1983 mobilised hundreds of thousands of people while in Germany (East) protests started under the slogan “Swords to Ploughshares” (Schwerter zu Pflugscharen) – the nutshell for a growing civic opposition.

After the Break of the Berlin Wall a window opened for peaceful cooperation between East and West. The famous Charter of Paris, 1990 signed by 32 Member States of CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) gives an impression about it.

But already in Winter 1990/91 USA started the so-called 2nd Gulf-War against Iraq and Millions of people around the world protested against it.

And, not enough: The unthinkable happened. War came back to Europe. From 1991 to 1995 the ethno-nationalist war in Ex-Yugoslavia shattered all hopes. At the beginning peace-movements still tried to act – for example with the famous “peace-chain” 1991 in Sarajevo, but the more the war exploded in Bosnia and ethnic cleansing against Muslims was practised the more peace activities got helpless and activists split up in those, still defending pacifism and those, pleading for military action in the name of Human Rights. This was the first case, where anti-militarism and human rights-activism got into deep conflict and there is still a lesson to learn.

CSCE had no chance because of the inner-state character of the war (and changed it’s name in OSCE - Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). There was one specific moment that it came back to action: in 1998 OSCE tried to pacify the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo – but this time NATO wouldn’t stay apart and started it’s military intervention against Serbia. For the first time Germany participated in such an intervention – remarkably decided by a red-green government and without UN-resolution. Peace activists were outraged but again helpless. Again

there is a lesson to learn.

But before the world could recover a new monster arrived on the war scene: with the New Yorker terrorist attacks on nine-eleven suicide bombing became a new face of war in 2001.

US-Forces started immediately a military action in Afghanistan where they thought to find Al Qaeda – and in 2003 NATO entered the war – backed by a UN-Resolution. There were even feminist voices supporting the war because of the extreme suppression of women by Taliban. Here we find another up-coming new legitimation for wars: the Human Rights Argument. Keep it in mind!

But who wanted to protest against the new threat by Islamists bombing our cities? Madrid, London, Paris, Brussels, Nice, Berlin – and today it's still not over.

Peace-movements were awakening from their paralyse due to shock for a moment when USA together with UK and their “coalition of the willing” prepared the 3rd Gulf-War 2003 against Iraq (with ridiculous arguments) and demonstrations took place: in February millions of people all over the world demonstrated, in Spain, in Italy, in London, in Berlin and in the USA – and on X-day, when bombing started, again protests were visible in many cities.

This war with dreadful destruction, war crimes and civil wars until 2011 and beyond was giving birth to the next up-coming threat: ISIS. The expansion of ISIS 2014 partly is a consequence of the war in Iraq.

But before these new wars in 2010 arrived the “Arab Spring” with demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya – before it started in Syria with the results we know today. In Libya and Syria – war-mythology found new dimensions. Picking up the already in Afghanistan practised argument of Human Rights and the in Iraq practiced argument of liberation from dictatorship plus the argument to fight at the side of civic groups against the dictator these two countries became the latest battle-fields and the same time the monstrous Islamist Terror developed.

Last but not least we have “frozen conflicts” in Europe and the open war in Eastern Ukraine. Russia tries to defend it's borders by any means against the coming closer of NATO: This is the sub-text concerning the frozen conflict between Georgia and South-Ossetia, the conflict between Moldavia and Transnistria, and, obviously, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

And Oh wonder! There is one organisation left, many years only present with the organisation of election observation missions: OSCE. This is the practical platform where the East and West, including Europe, Russia, USA and Canada still try to cooperate.

Actually we are falling back into the 1980s. Russia and USA will end the INF-Treaty from 1987, the fundamental agreement on the demolition of land-based ballistic and cruise missiles. This may bring back nuclear threat to Europe.

What kind of conclusion could we draw at this point?

We still have to learn lessons:

- 1) It's very easy to start military intervention when the Human Rights argument is at stake – even without the minimum of a UN-Resolution.
- 2) Democratic change is nothing that can be implemented by military powers from outside.
- 3) In the contrary: Military intervention may lead to complete destruction and a regime of warlords.
- 4) Yes, there are cases where urgent military action is wanted (as it was in Srebrenica and in Rwanda) but there is only one organisation competent to act: the United Nations. Even if they fail they are better than every single State or military organisation – they are acting in the name of fundamental rights and in the name of the world community.

Peace-movements since 2nd World war were strong in their public presence when they were confronted with the activities of States – but not so far in the new war strategies and not in confrontation with Islamist Terrorism. There is a barrier to overcome.

What is extremely worrying is the growth of military spending worldwide. USA, Russia, China and Saudi-Arabia are investing more and more in arms. They don't want to put them into Museums.

But there are related fields not to under-estimate: It is not only a closure of borders what's happening on Mediterranean Sea it's a war against refugees. And the urgency for our planet caused by environmental destruction needs immediate action. Both, flows of refugees and the destruction of living conditions for many people will determinate peace and war in the future.