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Changes in Concepts of War and Peace

Nobel Essay, May 31, 1928*

We are now approaching the end of the six-month period which the Nobel Foundation has granted to laureates for expressing their acknowledgments.

It is a duty which I should not like to leave unfulfilled. To explain more precisely the reasons that I have for offering you my humble thanks, let me sum up briefly the events which have, from the standpoint of world peace, stood out during the past six months.

I shall speak only of this period. In other words, I do not propose to discuss the rapid changes which, over the past quarter of a century, have transformed prevailing opinion. You are already aware of them, and indeed Alfred Nobel, more than any of his contemporaries, had in his day prophesied them, so to speak.

Since the beginning of this century, Gentlemen, you too have always kept your hopes alive. While awaiting the time when humanity will justify you, as it surely will, you have steadfastly continued to mark milestones reached along the way to victory.

Two ideas have assured the advancement of your work. One stems from a new concept of war. The other concerns the recent development of the human conscience.

As far as a brief account such as this will allow, I should like to consider in turn each of these two deep-rooted causes of change in the state of affairs and in the state of our morale.

*Both of the laureates for 1927, Mr. Buisson and Mr. Quidde, attended the award ceremonies on December 10. Mr. Quidde delivered his Nobel lecture on December 12, but Mr. Buisson did not then or later deliver a lecture in person. He did, however, send an essay or <<memoir>> to the Nobel Committee, which is published in the section entitled <<Les Conférences Nobel>> [The Nobel Lectures] of *Les Prix Nobel en 1927*. This essay is in French and is the text used for the present translation.

I. Change in the Concept of War

For a long time it was believed that war was waged by armies which could not be identified with the nation itself. Professional soldiers took upon themselves the job of defending national interests, and it was understood that the war affected only them; the country itself went on living and working.

Those happy days are over.

Today, war has assumed quite different proportions. The war which ended ten years ago has shown, first, that whole nations become involved, and second, that the present means of destruction <<bear no comparison to future probabilities for destroying industrial centers and of massacring civilian populations>>.

Indeed, <<the means of destruction placed by modern science at the disposal of modern warfare>> possess a power surpassing anything that humanity has so far been able to conceive. It was not enough for war to take possession of the seas with torpedo boats and submarines, depriving whole countries of their commerce and even halting the supply of the most essential foods. There was more to come.

From the day war conquered the skies, nothing could check its progress. It is now possible to drop from unmeasurable heights which defy any defense tons of chemical products, some capable of destroying the largest cities in the world in a matter of hours, others of spreading terrible diseases over vast areas, making resistance totally impossible.

Thus, war has put an end to itself. It has put itself in the position of executioner of the whole earth. Ever since 1921, the League of Nations has devoted much attention to the question of chemical warfare. The report which was turned over to an international scientific commission (and later given full coverage in *Temps* on August 22, 1924) gives a survey of the resources put at the disposal of the aggressor by the three classes of toxins; that is to say, first, *irritants* (lachrymatory, stemutatory, and, above all, vesicatory, of which yperite is the most dangerous) ; second, *asphyxiants* of which the most deadly is phosgene; third, those affecting the *nervous* system.

We must not forget that chemical warfare will sooner or later bring in its wake bacteriological warfare, pest propagation, typhus and other serious diseases. The means of defense against such dangers are as yet totally inadequate.

The International Commission to which the League of Nations appealed

believes it necessary to acquaint the whole world with the altogether new conditions which could be created by a new war. They are so frightening that no comparison can give even an inkling of their possibilities. The direct consequences would be the destruction of the human race and the abandonment of all that has, up to now, constituted civilization.

II. Change in Moral Concepts

It is not, however, only the development of novel forms of warfare that has aroused indignation in the human mind.

Man has shown that a human society cannot be an animal society. A human society obeys the dictates of reason and is guided and governed by a respect for justice.

That is why no nation, however big or small, invests the individuals of which it is composed with the right to mete out their own forms of justice by force. In any nation, whatever dissension arises, whatever quarrel breaks out, society sends the parties in the dispute to a court of justice, categorically forbidding them to resort to arms in order to settle their claims. To disobey this law is to join the ranks of felons and criminals.

How is it then that nations, as soon as they quarrel with one another, believe themselves free to resort to the use of force? What is the source of this unexpected right to settle their differences, not in accordance with justice, but by violence?

Is this resort to violence a crime? It is a crime, the responsibility for which is shared by all nations; more correctly, it is the natural-reaction to a kind of surprise: the nation which is taken by surprise sees no way of defending itself other than that which is natural to animals. Animals instinctively use whatever force nature has given them against all their enemies. The nation, analogously, when caught unawares, has no option but to imitate the beast, infinitely surpassing it in the efficacy of the means of destruction.

In the last six months, humanity has made extraordinary efforts to combat such reaction.

In the first place, there was the step taken by the most highly civilized nations, two of whom have proposed to the world a totally new approach: to outlaw warfare. These two are France and the United States.

In June, 1927, through its spokesman Mr. Briand, France addressed a moving appeal to the United States. It was for a mutual promise that,

whatever might happen, there would never be war between the two countries.

A few months later, the United States replied with an even broader proposal. Secretary of State Kellogg offered in the name of the President to submit to five great powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan) the same proposition: to reject warfare as a tool of national policy'.

We shall not delve into a study of the important debates to which the American proposal gave rise. The solution of the problems which have to be faced is far from being a simple one. In her reply, France, while joining with the United States in her appeal to the great nations, formally adhered to reservations which seemed to her to be necessary and which the nations to whom the appeal was addressed will no doubt in their turn deem indispensable.

Whether we call upon the wisdom of a large committee of jurists to whom all aspects of this extremely complex problem would be submitted, or whether we bypass such an initial investigation and the grounds it might provide for fixing the terms of a treaty accessible to all nations, a long period of preparation is still required: It will be necessary to draw up such clauses as will inspire absolute confidence in every signatory. This cannot be done in a day.

But, whatever may be involved in this, and it is not for us to judge, there is another totally different matter which we may well take up with the Nobel Committee.

Our first and foremost moral obligation, I believe, is to bring influence to bear, not on governments, but on the people themselves.

I should, therefore, not wish to conclude this review, without first drawing the attention of the Institute to two significant events which have occurred in the course of the last six months.

The first is the publication of discussions held at the International Congress in Prague (April 16-20, 1927)², a publication made possible through the generosity of the Czechoslovak government. It is sufficient to glance through the recently published volume of reports read and discussed at the congress

1. Three months after the laureate wrote his essay, on August 27, 1928, fifteen powers signed the Pact of Paris, commonly called the Kellogg-Briand Pact, renouncing war.

2. *La Paix par l'école: Travaux de la Conférence internationale tenue à Prague, du 16 au 20 avril 1927*, ed. by Pierre Bovet (Prague: Société Pédagogique Comenius, 1927).

after they had undergone preliminary study at the educational conferences which took place in Geneva.

The reports are confined to one theme: peace through education. Because of this narrow restriction, the question attains a degree of clarity, definition, and forcefulness which should make it of particular interest to the Nobel Institute.

A great many educators, both men and women, who came from nearly every country of the world, defined in this way the spirit we must inspire: the instruction given to youth should serve the cause of peace. A few illustrations of this propaganda will not be out of place.

Dr. Kamaryt showed us that the servants of human culture have always staunchly refused to be a party to violence, and that the supposed <<benefits of war>> do not exist at all¹.

A high school teacher from Bohemia, Miss Stendahl², outlined a system of education which, assisted by a moral, social, and religious way of life, gradually destroys the aggressive instinct.

Professor Prescott of Harvard University gave us some interesting excerpts from a summary he had made of inquiries carried on by a Polish woman during the war; these were followed by a voluminous document giving the text of a questionnaire addressed to 143 children or adolescents³. Is it surprising to see that the girls had more confidence in peace than the boys (57 against 33)? Is it not also understandable that the older the boys were, the more favorable was their attitude toward war and military service ?

A Prague superintendent of instruction, Mr. Franta, has asked his pupils to adopt the habit of asking themselves the following question: Who benefited mankind more, the conqueror of Cannes -or the poor unknown man who first forged an iron plough?⁴

1. Stanislaus Kamaryt, professor at Bratislava. *La Paix par l'école* reports (pp. 17-18) the five <<theses>> which he presented in Esperanto to the Conference, but not his full paper, <<L'Éducation pacifique et les manuels de science naturelle>>.

2. The text states: <<Un professeur du gymnase de Bohème, Mlle Stendahl, trace le tableau d'une education...>> *La Paix par l'école*, p. 18, states: <<Mlle Stendahl, de Stockholm, parle au nom des instituteurs primaires suédois.>>

3. D.A. Prescott, professor of education at Harvard University, <<L'Étude scientifique des attitudes et des préjugés des enfants: Méthodes et résultats>>, *La Paix par l'école*, pp.38-45.

4. Zdeněk Franta, superintendent of secondary schools in Prague, <<Comment l'esprit de paix devrait-il se manifester dans les manuels d'histoire>>, *La Paix par l'école*, pp.50-53.

Finally, Mr. Prudhommeaux, secretary-general of the French League of Nations Society, has drafted a masterfully written demand that scholastic authorities of every nation remove from all schoolbooks any material which incites hatred of foreigners¹. <<One should learn>>, he says, quoting Anatole France, <<to hate hatred.>> The reign of peace should be one of justice.

The Commission on Mutual [Intellectual] Cooperation, in its session of July 29, 1925, had already adopted a proposal made by Mr. Casares². This is summarized in two provisions, which are presented in a manner clearly designed to avoid offending anyone:

- (a) When a National Committee thinks it desirable that a foreign text concerning its country and intended for-use in schools should be amended... it shall make a request to this effect to the National Committee of the country where the text is in use...
- (b) National Committees, on receiving a request of this kind, shall decide in the first instance whether the request should be accepted and shall then determine what representations of a friendly and private nature, if any, should be made to the authors or publishers with a view to the proposed emendation. If these representations are successful, the Committee shall notify the Committee making the application and the International Committee; if not, it shall not be obliged to give any explanation either of the reasons for its failure or of its own refusal to take action.³

The secretary of the Welsh Association gave an account of the progress he had witnessed. He quoted, for instance, a touching letter written by the children of Welsh schools to their friends in France.

The point is vividly served by quoting a definition given by the rector of a school in French Equatorial Africa: School is not just a preparation for life; it should, in the words of Dewey, be <<life itself>>.

Finally, we should recall, without going into detail, the numerous reports on interschool and international correspondence, notably that of Mr. Charles

1. Jules Prudhommeaux, <<Sur l'amélioration des manuels scolaires et l'enseignement de l'histoire>>, *La Paix par l'école*, pp. 53-58.

2. Julio Casares, of the Royal Academy of Spain, who himself was named to this League of Nations Commission in 1926.

3. League of Nations Publications C.445.M.165. 1925. XII.

Garnier, of Paris. Let us not forget the study on Comenius¹ and let us confess that we have neglected many other valuable documents.

Incomplete as these notes are, I am sure I may assume that the Nobel Institute is well enough acquainted with this kind of problem to appreciate the value of a volume which testifies to the energetic development of the peace movement in these past months.

I have but one more document to bring to your attention, and you will see that it is by no means the least important.

For a long time, there had been proposals to bring about a meeting between French and German teachers, but all manner of difficulties stood in the way. On June 25, 1926, the president and the secretary of the German Teachers Union, duly mandated, met the French delegates in the presence of the Dutch Bureau, and the first ties were established. On September 26 of the same year, in Paris, a new body, the National Union of Teachers, joined the association, and on April 22-23, 1927, a great conference took place in London, where the International Federation had been invited to meet.

At the congress held in Berlin at the headquarters of the German Teachers Union, April 14-16, 1928, the following figures on membership were established :

1. German Teachers Union	150,000
2. National Association of French Teachers.	78,000
3. Dutch Teachers Union, Holland	6,400
4. Another Dutch Association	5,000
5. National Union of Teachers	121,000
6. General Association of Bulgarian Teachers	12,000
7. Swedish Teachers Association	4,200
8. General Association of Czechoslovak Teachers	26,000
9. General Association of Teachers in the Baltic Countries . .	3,900
10. Pedagogical Society of French Switzerland.	3,200
11. Swiss Teachers Union.	10,000
12. Polish National Union of Teachers	36,000
13. Yugoslav Teachers Association	13,000
14. Lithuanian Teachers Association	1,000
15. Teachers Union of the Dutch East Indies	1,500
Total	471,200

1. John Amos Comenius, Czech: Jan Amos **Komenský** (1592-1670), Czech educator and churchman known for his innovative methods of teaching.

The main concern of these various societies could be discerned in Berlin and elsewhere: they wished, above all, to remain politically neutral.

A talk given by the Secretary-General of the German Teachers, emphasized the duty of educators to <<promote the desire for peace, which is the only state worthy of mankind>>. He added:

<<Education for peace is a pedagogical task; human education is but an empty phrase if it does not have peace as its supreme purpose. Let none treat us as dreamers or visionaries! We are aware of the boldness of our task, yet we are compelled to work towards its fulfillment, for it is that which crowns our role as educators. We would not be disciples of Pestalozzi¹, nor indeed of Christ, if we did not believe that our foremost duty is to educate youth in the concept of peace, which is at the same time the concept of law and order, and of liberty...

The League of Nations is in its present form an imperfect beginning, striving to unite mankind on the platform of peace. It will develop as people improve, as education helps them shed their innate and sustained mistrust, and when at last they cease to regard force as the ultimately decisive source of justice between peoples.>>

To these significant views expressed by the representative of German pedagogical thinking, we are happy to add at least a brief quotation from the words of one of the French teachers, Mr. Péron, of Lyons: <<I say without any reservations that our presence here is an act of faith and of will! It testifies to our belief in the brotherhood of man. It testifies to the fact that, in our opinion, the abettors of international discord can no longer count on either the French or the German teacher in furthering their designs.>>

Mr. Péron, while emphasizing the duty of French teachers <<to defend staunchly the position of religious neutrality accorded by the French Republic to national education, which is the surest guarantee of our liberty of conscience and of our own pedagogical freedom>>, does not forget <<what today concerns us above all else: the fostering of a desire for peace, both in our pupils and throughout our country>>. He concludes with this magnificent image :

(Individually, each of the 500,000 members of the federation, in his own parish or village, contributes but a glimmer of light. But 500,000 such rays of light stubbornly trying together to pierce the gloom of ignorance, bad faith, and hatred will succeed in creating in our own countries and around

1. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Swiss educational reformer whose theories and methods strongly influenced modern elementary education.

the whole world a more radiant atmosphere of justice, fraternity, and peace!>>

Such then, Gentlemen, are the first fruits of this international association of teachers. Without excessive self-confidence, with a deep awareness of the difficulties which confront them, as well as with the wisdom and moderation which they must always display, they courageously undertake the conversion of mankind to a doctrine which will mean definitive progress. How could the Nobel Institute fail to encourage so worthy an effort? It cannot be unaware of the help contributed all over the world by the humble army of peace, whose first-line soldiers are those who first influence the young.