BERTHA VON SUTTNER
living for peace

the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize award to Bertha von Suttner

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an essay by HELLA PICK
BERTHA VON SUTTNER at home in Zedlitzgasse. She sat many nights at her desk next to Arthur’s portrait decorated with peace palms and wrote for peace.
PREFACE

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE AWARDED TO BERTHA VON SUTTNER

The year 2005 marks the centenary of Bertha von Suttner’s Nobel Peace Prize Award, a welcome opportunity to commemorate this very remarkable Austrian novelist, early peace activist and first woman to receive this prestigious award.

With the support of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs a variety of events, ranging from symposia to concerts, lectures and an exhibition, will recall and extensively explore the life and work of Bertha von Suttner. Events will take place in Austria as well as in many countries abroad to commemorate Suttner’s outstanding commitment for peace, exemplified by her groundbreaking novel “Die Waffen nieder!” (“Lay Down Your Arms!”) which became a world success in 1889 and paved the way for her Nobel Prize Award in 1905. Peace and human rights questions are just as urgent today as they were one hundred years ago, when Bertha von Suttner addressed them in her books. These questions will play a prominent role in the commemoratory events of 2005. Books and the commemoration of positive historic role models cannot prevent armed conflicts but the courage and foresight of personalities such as Bertha von Suttner do deserve our attention – if we want to make a difference.

For the Austrian Foreign Ministry this anniversary presented a welcome opportunity to ask the distinguished journalist and author Hella Pick, who was born in Austria and fled to London after Hitler’s take-over, to write an essay on the remarkable life of Baroness von Suttner.

The Austrian Foreign Ministry hopes that readers will enjoy this brochure, illustrated with some very rare photographs from private archives of the prominent historian Brigitte Hamann. The opinions expressed therein are, naturally, those of Hella Pick.
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“Lay Down Your Arms!”. That was the superficially simple and yet inherently complex message that Bertha von Suttner battled for decades to translate into an effective movement to end military conflict and secure the peaceful resolution of international disputes. Instead of glorifying war, she demanded of decision-makers, adopt pacifism as a noble cause, settle disputes by negotiation and in international law courts, and in place of soldiers hold up the peacemakers as heroes. She never gave up the struggle. Indeed her confidence in the cause of peace was rarely dented even though wars punctuated much of her life and she knew in the weeks before her death in 1914 that the odds were stacked against her; that a World War had become virtually inevitable.

In 1905 she received the Nobel Peace Prize which had been launched in 1901. She was the first woman to be recognised in this way; indeed there have been only six other women in all the years that followed to be singled out for this treasured award. Bertha von Suttner had certainly earned the prize. Her contribution to the Peace Movement had been enormous.

Much to her disappointment, the Norwegian Committee passed her over until 1905 when some of her admirers shamed its members into recognising her immense contribution to the peace movement. She had turned the annual Congresses of the Peace-Movement into major events on the international calendar and had been the moving spirit behind the creation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. She had travelled far and wide to plead with world leaders for their support, had made countless speeches and written millions of words.

By the time the Nobel Prize came to her she was 62 years old, widowed and with little money. She could have treated this distinction as a crowning point of her endeavours. But in fact she used it as a mere
staging post in an ongoing, ever more passionate crusade to bring the world to its senses and avert a catastrophic war. She died in 1914 a few days before the outbreak of a world war that seemed to deny everything that she had held precious.

Yet had she still been alive this doughty fighter would not have given up. On the contrary true to character she would have reinforced her efforts to create a powerful peace movement and to develop international institutions capable of maintaining peace. Today she would applaud the existence of the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the International Court in the Hague and War Crimes Tribunals as firm evidence that her ideas are gaining ground.

Every generation produces a handful of visionaries who impose themselves on societies. Bertha von Suttner undoubtedly belonged to this select group of men and women. Like her near contemporary, Theodor Herzl, she had a dream and like him also had the common sense to realise that the movers and shakers of this world had to be enlisted if any of it was to be translated into reality. Also like Herzl, Suttner lacked financial resources and was always in search of money to finance her endeavours.

Often ridiculed in her own time, Suttner’s near-religious commitment to pacifism was rooted in a touching interpretation of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Still a relatively new concept, she had convinced herself that the laws of evolution would inexorably steer mankind into a better future. “One of the eternal truths” she declared in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, is “that the future will always be one degree better than the past.” The world is not static. “Happiness is created and developed in peace and one of the eternal rights is the individual’s right to live... It is sanctified by the ancient commandment ‘thou shalt not kill.’ Even if “up to the present time the military organisation of our society has been founded on a denial of the possibility of peace, a contempt for the value of human life and an acceptance of the urge to kill,” it would
be utterly wrong to deny the possibility of change. The old system, she asserted, was doomed to failure. Suttner, often caricatured as *die Friedensbertha*, was utterly convinced that “a judicial peace between nations” would eventually become securely embedded in the conduct of international relations. As she saw it technical inventions, improved communications, economic interdependence were part of a process of internationalisation and unification that would win out over war and “the destruction of humanity” and would be “transformed into visible, living and effective forms” of peaceful management of international relations. Having come to know the United States and some of its leaders, she became firmly convinced that American idealism was so potent that the country could be counted on to become the leading champion for world-wide change for the better.

It is easy to be cynical about Suttner’s belief that the forces of good were certain, eventually, to vanquish evil. Indeed in her own time, she was more often ridiculed than followed or admired. Yet few who came into contact with her could fail to recognise that here was an extraordinary human being. Even though she was the product of 19th century Habsburg aristocracy brought up in the conventions of that society, in middle age she had stepped far outside that mould to turn into an indefatigable peace campaigner. As a young woman she would have been the last to think that she would at the age of 46 emerge into public life and become widely known throughout Europe and the United States. Nor did she envisage that she would fight against anti-Semitism and for women’s emancipation and would write countless articles and a long series of novels, including her bestseller “Die Waffen nieder!” (Lay Down Your Arms!) using her writing gifts and vivid imagination to drive home her message against the use of force and the horrors of war.

The arguments that Suttner used to underpin her ideas were far ahead of her time. She wanted European nations to unite for peace; she argued for free trade associations, for limits to national sovereignty by allowing international law to determine violations of human rights. Above
all she understood that extremism in all its manifestations, even in religion, poisons society and must be opposed. Daringly in the context of her background and her times, Bertha also made herself an advocate of women’s rights, arguing that they deserved full equality in society and in their relationships with men. She thought that women would instinctively make themselves champions of peace.

Curiously for an individual with such progressive ideas, Suttner never displayed much understanding for democratic ideas, and did not see that the old order was collapsing. Her mind-set was such that she clung to monarchs and their power brokers and to the intellectual elites but felt little need to bring her message direct to the grassroots. She never developed into a populist.
Even though she was born Countess Kinsky, she was nevertheless treated as an outsider by the Kinsky family and failed in her many efforts to be accepted by them as an equal. Her father, a Field-Marshall, had died before her birth. Her mother was only a cavalry officer’s daughter and therefore carried no weight in the family. Moreover she lost in gaming most of the little money she had. Bertha was an attractive young woman, spirited and resourceful and even with limited resources always well dressed. Yet a number of attempts to marry her off to wealthy suitors came to nothing. Indeed there were early signs that Bertha would try to compensate for her lowly state within the Habsburg Empire’s aristocratic establishment by a show of independence. She determined to educate herself, learning languages, training her voice in the – mistaken

THE KINSKY FAMILY had a strong military tradition: Bertha’s father (second from left) and three of his brothers were generals in the imperial army.
– hope of becoming a singer, reading widely and travelling as much as her mother’s limited funds allowed.

Still single at the age of 30, Bertha decided that she had no alternative but to do what was expected of women in her predicament – which was to become a governess. Thus in 1883 she accepted a post to look after the four young daughters of the wealthy, well connected Baron Karl Gundaccar Freiherr von Suttner.
Her arrival in the sumptuous Suttner household in Vienna had unforeseen consequences. The Suttners also had three sons, among them Arthur, a young man of 23 years who seems to have charmed all who came into contact with him. Bertha and Arthur fell in love; but tried to keep it secret in part because of their difference in age but mainly because it was clear to both that Baron Suttner would not permit a match with the governess – even if that governess was a Countess Kinsky.

For three years, the pair maintained their secret idyll. But then Arthur’s mother divined the relationship between her son and the governess, and made it clear to Bertha that she must find another post, as far away as possible from Vienna. The solution came after Baroness Suttner saw an advertisement for a Secretary/Housekeeper in Paris to a “very wealthy, highly cultivated gentleman.”
That gentleman turned out to be Alfred Nobel. After an extensive correspondence, during which Bertha learned that he was the manufacturer of dynamite, he offered Bertha the job. A lonely man, he took an immediate liking to Bertha. They had wide-ranging conversations about life and art, about world problems and humanity. Nobel explained his justification for producing deadly dynamite, asserting that he had convinced himself that the acquisition of ever more deadly weapons would be such a deterrent as to make war impossible. He told Bertha, who at that time had little interest in pacifism, that his aim in manufacturing
dynamite was to strengthen the prospects for peace. That was a contention she later came to reject. Even though she never doubted Nobel’s commitment to the cause of peace, they had a fundamental disagreement over the use of military deterrence as a way of preventing war. She found the arms race as a negation of peace-making.

During their first encounters in Paris Nobel rapidly developed a more than intellectual interest in Bertha. Gingerly this shy man asked whether she had left behind any personal ties: it was evident that he was falling in love. She responded by telling Nobel about the love she had left behind in Vienna. She was pining for Arthur, and Arthur was pining for her. The budding friendship between Bertha and Alfred Nobel survived and they developed strong ties that lasted to the end of his life. However a mere month after arriving in Paris, she left to rejoin Arthur in Austria. There was no question that the Suttner family would sanction their marriage. But even though the couple knew they would be ostracised and were virtually penniless, they decided on a secret marriage, and in June 1876, left for the Caucasus, where Bertha had influential friends and where she hoped Arthur might obtain a post in the Tsar’s court.

Her optimism was misplaced. Though there were occasional times when they stayed in the palaces of the Countess of Mingrelien, for most of the seven years spent in the Caucasus the pair lived a hand-to-mouth existence teaching languages and music and eventually writing articles and books. No matter their material difficulties, they were unreservedly happy in each other’s company. Bertha had a nickname for Arthur: he was Loewos and during this period she wrote an elegiac description of their life together published in 1884 as El Loewos. Bertha, always the stronger and more competent and also the better writer, idealised her husband and had no desire for children.

While in the Caucasus Bertha and Arthur became familiar with the evolutionary writings of Charles Darwin and of Herbert Spencer and acquired their concept of a free, liberal society that would achieve
BERTHA VON SUTTNER in her Caucasian surroundings with typical weapons and rugs on the wall. Her later comment was, “I don’t like this. Also, my favorite emblems are not here; I love neither pistols nor rifles.”
TBILISI, CAUCASUS, where Bertha and Arthur von Suttner lived for nine years. They earn an often precarious living by giving lessons in languages and music and eventually, and more successfully, by writing.
progress through the achievement of durable peace. These ideas also reinforced their anti-clericalism and helped to shape their cosmopolitan outlook. Bertha summed up her new approach to life in the first of her thought-provoking books, *Inventarium einer Seele*. There she pronounced herself against fatalism and insisted that mankind was endowed with the ability to move forward and make a better world. The book with its emphasis on social progress was the genesis of her peace philosophy. For the first time, she argued against the barbarism of war and against the notion that war was inevitable. She could easily imagine, she wrote, that the example of peace-loving nations would gradually end wars and stamp out hatred between peoples. Soldiers should not be held up as national heroes. “I would rather be Edison than Hannibal; Peabody rather than Radetzki, Newton rather than Wellington.” She sent the book to Alfred Nobel, who enthused about it and expressed his great admiration for its author.

Though *Inventarium* received some good reviews, it did not sell well and did nothing to relieve the Suttner’s poverty. Reluctantly they decided in 1885 that there was no alternative but to return to Austria. By then the Suttner family had lost most of its money and was living in greatly reduced circumstances in their country house in Harmannsdorf, not far from Vienna. Arthur and Bertha, grudgingly forgiven for their marriage, were allowed to join the Suttner household. Arthur took charge of what remained of the family estate.

Initially they focused solely on their literary endeavours with Bertha concentrating on easy-to-read novels that would earn them money but nevertheless had social and educational significance. For example in *High Life* she described the sterility of the Austrian aristocracy’s way of life from which she had grown to distance herself in the Caucasus. Its conservatism, she wrote, blinded them from evidence of social progress and from new thinking. All they wanted was to maintain their privileges and their status quo. The American hero of her book describes the “Crown and tiara pomp” (*Kronen und Tiarapomp*) of the Austrian
Entrance to Harmannsdorf Castle, the Suttner family’s summer home in the Waldviertel.
aristocracy as an “oriental piece of decoration” (orientalisches Ausstattungsstück).

None of this was to imply that Bertha von Suttner had turned her face against elitism. On the contrary she continued throughout her life to seek out the leaders of society – kings and queens, princes and princesses, aristocrats, statesmen, influential writers of many countries – convinced that change would only come from the top downwards. If the elites could be convinced of pacifism, the masses would follow.

In 1889 Suttner published another of her landmark books: The Machine Age. (Das Maschinenzeitalter) Here she elaborated on her conviction that technological and economic progress would be decisive in eliminating the kind of narrow nationalism that led to wars. It would also, she argued, lead to women’s emancipation. She used the book to denounce war as a scourge, destroying not only human life but also undermining cultural achievement and preventing social progress.

With the anticipated royalties from the book, the Suttners decided they could allow themselves a trip to Paris where Alfred Nobel was their host and introduced them to influential people on the French cultural scene. In Alfred Daudet’s house the Suttners learned for the first time of the existence of organised peace movements. In France, the veteran pacifist Frédéric Passy had formed a peace group. In London, Hodgson Pratt had formed a similar organisation. There were more groups in Italy, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland; even in the United States. All these groups were small. They operated independently of each other and there was no umbrella organisation.

However Hodgson Pratt, understanding the ineffectiveness of these disjointed peace groups was calling for a European-wide peace movement and argued that its priority should be to establish an international court of arbitration (Schiedsgericht) to resolve disputes between states. Bertha’s enthusiasm was boundless. For the first time it had been brought
THE MACHINE AGE, one of Bertha von Suttner’s landmark books published in 1889.
home to her that there were practical ways of implementing her ideas. Writing alone was not persuasive enough. Institutional instruments had to be built capable of convincing the doubters that the pursuit of peace was a realistic goal. But in order to demonstrate the need to create a peace movement, she again took up her pen. She revised the manuscript of the “The Machine Age” explaining how she had learned about the peace groups and stressing their significance. She also curtly dismissed Nobel’s theory of deterrence as an “idiotic” way of justifying the continued existence of the machinery of war. Above all she warned against nationalism driven to extremes which she saw as one of the primary causes of war.

The book was widely read by intellectuals, but lacked appeal for the wider reading public. Bertha decided to revert to her tactic of using

“LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS!”, published in 1889, had quite unexpected success. It was a sensation, translated into English and several other languages, and selling better than any other book published in the 19th century.
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BERTHA VON SUPTNER at the time of her return from Caucasus.
fiction to illustrate her ideas. The result was a two-volume best seller: “Lay Down Your Arms!” (“Die Waffen nieder!”). The book tells the story of a woman aristocrat whose life is dominated by war. Her first husband was killed in Solferino in 1859 during the war in Upper Italy. Her second husband, the novel’s hero, survives Austria’s war against Denmark in 1864, and Austria’s war against Prussia in 1866. But he is taken for a German and shot dead by French nationalists in Paris in 1870. Suttner illustrated her well-researched story with countless realistic stories about the cruelty and suffering caused by war, describing for example how soldiers’ bodies were hurriedly buried – sometimes even while still breathing. Meanwhile the women at home were considered too delicate to know about the sufferings of their men. The book criticised the hypocrisy of a society that used men as war fodder and wrongly talked of honour and heroism. She included the Church in her strictures against those who glorified war, and argued that technological advances must not be used to create ever more sophisticated armaments. One verse summed up her condemnation of the arms race:

My armaments are defensive
Your armaments are offensive
I must arm because you arm
Because you arm, I arm
So we must arm
We arm more and more

(Meine Rüstung ist die Defensive
Deine Rüstung ist die Offensive
Ich muss rüsten weil du rüstest
Weil Du rüstest, rüste ich
Also rüsten wir
Rüsten wir immer nur zu)

At one stage the book’s hero, Baron Tilling – a portrait of Suttner’s husband Arthur - tells his wife that his experiences have led him to the
conclusion that he must dedicate himself to peace, and must campaign against war. One man alone will not make much of a difference. But that is no argument against action; the peace army would grow. After the hero’s death, his widow Martha takes up the cause, underlining Suttner’s belief that women’s common sense would lead them sooner than men to understand the futility of war.

“Lay Down Your Arms!” had quite unexpected success. It was a sensation, translated into English and several other languages, and selling better than any other book published in the 19th century. Contemporaries compared the book’s potential impact on the peace movement with Harriet Beecher-Stowe’s book, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, which had helped to trigger abolition of slavery in the US. But she was showered with criticism as well as with praise, and it became fashionable to ridicule her. Only a woman could have written such anti-war sentiments; only someone who had no understanding of patriotism and of men’s heroism. The Church portrayed her close to an anti-Christ and even Karl Kraus found her a useful target for his irony.

The book projected Bertha von Suttner centre-stage among the leaders of the various peace groups, few of whom she had met in person. It also won her the attention of Socialist and Social Democrat leaders in Austria and Germany. She had not anticipated sudden fame and at first she found it quite difficult to realise that a great many people had begun to look to her for leadership in the cause of peace.

The book was published in 1889. The royalties enabled the Suttners to spend a few months in Venice. There they made friends with several important figures in the nascent peace movement and she became a fervent advocate of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, founded in 1888 by a British Parliamentarian, Randal Cremer, and by the French Deputy Frédéric Passy as a pressure group to win support for an international court and for disarmament.
By 1891 Suttner, now back in Vienna, was in full campaign mode planning for an Austrian branch of the peace movement, helping to organise annual peace congresses, busying herself with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, arguing the case for an international court and seeking to enlist famous names to the cause. Leo Tolstoi was one of her targets. The famous Russian author warmly praised her book, expressing the hope that it would trigger a process that would end wars. But he could not agree that an international court could replace wars as an instrument for resolving conflict.

Bertha von Suttner soon stood out amongst the other prominent figures of the peace movement. It was an advantage – as well as a disadvantage – to be a woman. Besides, she was an aristocrat – even if her own family kept her at arm’s length – and had access to prominent people; she was fluent in several languages; she was elegant, fearless and energetic. And she was supremely confident that her cause was just and that her arguments were cogent and persuasive. She was almost 50 years old and told Alfred Nobel, who intermittently gave her crucial financial support, that she felt at the prime of her life, energetic, and only had rare moments of doubt that she could confront the heavy tasks she had taken on. She had found her vocation.

She was not blind to the obstacles facing the peace movement: she accepted that only a small percentage of people were aware of it, let alone supported the cause; and she recognised that it had many determined adversaries. This makes it even more touching that Suttner believed the 20th century would not end without the abolition of war as a legal instrument of conflict resolution. Austria soon taught her an object lesson of the difficulties ahead: even though the initial response to the initiative was enthusiastic and gained sponsorship from important members of the literary establishment, active, paid-up membership of the Austrian branch of the peace-movement never reached significant numbers. Moreover while she succeeded in establishing a branch of the IPU its appeal was even more limited.
LEO TOLSTOI, The famous Russian author warmly praised Bertha von Suttner’s book, expressing the hope that it would trigger a process that would end wars.
Nothing discouraged Bertha. Besides humdrum administrative tasks and her personal lobbying, she kept a voluminous diary, was a prolific letter writer, and penned article after article against perpetuating an “armaments-based system of fear” (bewaffnetes Angst-System) incapable of guaranteeing peace. Surely it would make more sense, she argued, to replace arms with respect for international law, and for “the civilised countries of Europe” to unite as a group (den Bund der zivilisierten Staaten Europas zu gründen).

At the Rome Congress of the disarmament movement in the late autumn of 1891, Bertha von Suttner was a key attraction. At last she met and made friends with the leading pacifists of her time. Passy describes her as ‘our Commander-in-Chief.’ She enjoyed her prominence and overcame her fear of public speaking. She had found her style and kept to it for the rest of her life. She never harangued her audiences; always speaking quietly and without much gesturing. She let her carefully chosen words do their work. Reporting to Alfred Nobel after the Congress, Bertha told him she was astonished by her own courage and newfound gifts of diplomacy.
FRÉDÉRIC PASSY, a veteran pacifist, had formed a peace group in France.
Suttner’s next move was to found a journal entitled, like her book, “Die Waffen nieder!” to give voice to her peace endeavours. Her partner in this enterprise was Alfred Hermann Fried, a young Austrian working as an impecunious bookseller in Berlin. He was to become her closest associate to whom she also left her papers after her death, and who was to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1911. Circulation of the journal always remained small. Apart from regularly writing articles herself, she also managed to enlist prominent writers such as Leo Tolstoi, Peter Rosegger and her good friend Bartholomäus von Carneri.

It became harder to sustain her enthusiasm. Membership of the European branches of the peace movement failed to grow. There were internal disputes; the unresolved status of Alsace-Lorraine was an object lesson in the difficulties of peaceful resolution to conflict. When the Spanish-American war broke out in 1898, Bertha took to her bed for two days, and put black mourning borders on the next number of her journal. Still, she insisted, the work must go on. The righteous cause, she remained confident, would win out.

ALFRED H. FRIED, Bertha’s closest associate and her successor.
Among Arthur’s close friends and collaborators there were several Jews. But this was not the only reason why they linked the eradication of anti-semitism with the pursuit of disarmament. Already when the couple were living in the Caucasus, they had been deeply shocked by the wave of pogroms in Russia. When they returned to Austria they saw that anti-Semitism was not only directed against the impoverished Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe but also against the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia. Given their liberal outlook and crusading spirit, they decided that the fight against anti-Semitism required an organisational approach just as much as the campaign to convince the world of the virtues of pacifism. Bertha however left it primarily to her husband to set up in Vienna the so-called ‘anti-association’ (Anti-Verein). Launched in 1891 it had as its sponsors a group of prominent Austrians, both Jews and non-Jews. The same kind of optimism that guided the
Suttners in their pacifism also led them to believe that anti-Semitism in Austria was in its death throes and that the ‘anti-association’ would merely speed up a process that had already begun. This assumption was all the more surprising since Vienna’s political scene at that time was dominated by men such as Georg Ritter von Schoenerer and Karl Lueger who coupled their far-right nationalism with calls for racial purity and outspoken anti-Semitism. Bertha thought that publication of a journal devoted to exposing the wrongs of anti-Semitism would prove a useful tool for the ‘anti-association’.

Far and wide, she appealed for money. Finally a sponsor – Baron Friedrich Leitenberger – was found and in 1892, the weekly “Freies Blatt” was launched. Theodor Herzl, invited to contribute, refused. He argued
that the ‘anti-association’ had arrived on the scene far too late. Though Herzl had not yet formed his ideas for the establishment of a Jewish state he had already concluded that anti-Semitism had to be fought with far more radical measures than the Suttners, with their belief in the persuasiveness of the written word, envisaged. After the publication of Herzl’s “Der Judenstaat” (the Jewish State) in 1896, Herzl was even more discouraging about the Suttners’ ‘anti-association.’ He qualified the group’s activities as comical, and though he expressed admiration for Bertha, he thought she was utterly mistaken in the way she and her husband were tackling the anti-Semitism issue. Even she recognised that their work might be futile after the Emperor Franz Joseph yielded to pressure and endorsed Karl Lueger’s controversial election as Mayor of Vienna.

The Freies Blatt ceased publication in 1896 and in 1900 the Anti-Verein, having run out of money, was dissolved. Arthur turned into a convinced Zionist. Bertha was far more lukewarm in her reaction to Herzl’s Zionism, though she tried to help him when he sought an audience with the Russian Tsar. She recognised that Herzl was trying to create a better world. But she regarded nationalism as the arch-enemy of peace. Rather than encouraging the creation of a Jewish state, Bertha leaned towards assimilation as a solution to the Jewish question. This was also a reflection of her confidence that a new breed of Europeans, committed to liberal ideas and peace, were certain to emerge and triumph. She touched on these ideas in a couple of her later novels.

The anti-Semitism campaign did not deflect Bertha von Suttner from her principal task: the mobilisation of the peace movement. Annual Congresses provided the wider platform. But at the same time she continued with her efforts to persuade decision-makers, including the mighty Russian Tsar, to underwrite her activities and make radical changes to their conduct of international affairs. She was befriended by the American industrialist, Andrew Carnegie and by President Theodore Roosevelt, and began to look to the United States for leadership in international
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ANDREW CARNEGIE, patron of Suttner in later years.
affairs. But she was also increasingly concerned not only with the potential for war in Europe but also with the extension of European rivalries to China. It was pure barbarism, she cried, for the Europeans to try and parcel up an ancient civilisation.

Even though the Boer war followed in quick succession, Suttner always believed that the 1899 Peace Congress held in the Hague would go down in history as one of its most significant. She felt that pacifism had at last become respectable. The Congress adopted resolutions calling for the establishment of an international court and for institutional machinery to ease the peaceful resolution of conflict. It endorsed extension of the functions of the International Red Cross, and it demanded a ban – which only held a few years – on the use of poison gas and bombing from balloons. Naively at that time, it was assumed that the development of military aircraft could be stifled.

As if the Boer war, coming so soon after American-Spanish war, was not enough of a setback, mounting tensions between Russia and Japan added to Bertha von Suttner’s frustrations. She was mocked in the Austrian press. The Tsar, in common with the British and German leaders ignored her appeals for reason. She was both disillusioned and outraged by the Tsar’s cruel handling of the 1905 revolution with its wholesale shooting of protesters.

By then she was a widow. Arthur had died in 1902. The last few years of her marriage had been fraught with financial and personal problems. Though she had continued with her outpourings of novels, they were no longer selling well. Arthur had even less success with his writings. Alfred Nobel had died in 1896 without leaving her or the peace movement the hoped-for legacy. And of course, Nobel’s occasional financial contributions to the peace cause ceased. Living on Arthur’s family estate in financially ruinous circumstances, she also became increasingly jealous of Arthur’s niece Marie Louise. Bertha had aged markedly and had become uncomfortably heavy. The age difference between her and
Arthur began to count in their relationship. Marie Louise was young, attractive and loved Arthur passionately. She was also the only family member with money of her own. He became very dependant on Marie Louise. Bertha was jealous and resentful. Yet shortly before his death Arthur wrote a final love letter to Bertha, his ‘Lowos’: she had made him happy; had made his life worthwhile. There had not been a moment of dissatisfaction between them. He thanked her for her “big heart and for her love.” It was this posthumous message from her beloved Arthur that she carried with her through the remaining 12 years of her life, and which she believed gave her the strength to battle on almost to her last breath.

The Nobel Prize, when it finally came, provided Bertha with a modicum of financial ease and enabled her to buy the small apartment in Vienna which became her last home. The Peace Prize idea seems to have surfaced first in 1892 when Nobel had invited both the Suttners to join him on his motorboat on Lake Zurich. He told Bertha that he was thinking of leaving enough money in his will to fund the award of a peace prize every five years. Bertha was less than enthusiastic. As ever, Bertha pleaded for Nobel to settle a fixed sum on the peace movement. However, when his will was read out, and it turned out that there would be annual prizes with considerable sums attached she was jubilant. She assumed, mistakenly as it turned out, that she would be the first recipient and that this was in fact Nobel’s way of bequeathing her enough money to ease her life. She never imagined that she would have to wait until 1905 to receive what she thought had been her due ever since Nobel’s last will was published.

When the award was announced in December 1905, she was once again hailed in Vienna as a heroine. Gone were the caricatures and the ridicule. Bertha did not travel to Oslo for the award ceremony, claiming that she was too tired after her many other engagements. A year earlier she had been much feted on her first trip to the United States. But it had been exhausting, and there had been little respite in her activities after
Abroad, Suttner appeared before her large audiences dressed in widow’s veil, mourning jewelry, leather gloves and very elaborate dresses.
In 1911, Suttner toured across the United States and was buoyed by large audiences and the warm reception she was given. They called her an “angel of peace.”

her return to Europe. It was only on April 18, 1906 that she appeared at an official dinner in Oslo to make her acceptance speech.

The award seemed to reinvigorate Bertha. She put all her energies into the search for high level support for the peace movement and above all for more money to fund its activities. She complained that the Rothschilds were funding all manner of benevolent activities, but showed no generosity to the pacifists. And she looked to Andrew Carnegie as a
replacement for Alfred Nobel to provide financial backing for the peace movement. She toured Europe, giving lectures, attending congresses, writing, talking to the press.

In 1911, deeply depressed by the threatening situation in the Balkans, she decided on another lecture tour in the United States. The faltering peace movement needed moral and financial help from America. Though restricted, because of her stoutness, in her physical movements
she toured across the United States, and was buoyed by large audiences and the warm reception she was given. They called her an ‘angel of peace.’

On her return to Europe Bertha could not ignore the signs of impending conflict in the Balkans. Yet she never despaired of her cause. On her 70th birthday her close friends organised a celebration. But there were no official awards in recognition of her work and the Kinsky family maintained its distance. Suttner herself marked the birthday with an optimistic article in the Neue Freie Presse in which she argued that the Balkan war might well be the last war of all. She failed to realise that the Habsburg monarchy was in its death throes. She emphasised what happiness it was to be alive and wrote that she regretted the inevitable approach of death.

Bertha von Suttner ignored sign of ill-health and continued to write and even to travel and attend meetings until shortly before her death on June 21, 1914. In a final letter to Alfred Fried she praised him for the preparations he had made for the next peace congress. “I congratulate us and pacifism – it will be a brilliant congress!” Delirious in her last hours, she cried: “Lay down your Arms! Tell it to all!” (Die Waffen nieder! Sagt es Allen!)
BERTHA VON SUTTNER: Untiring at the age of seventy, Suttner still went on lecture tours to warn people of the approach of the great war.
MAJOR EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF BERTHA VON SUTTNER

9 June 1843  Bertha Felicie Sophie von Suttner, born Countess Kinsky in Prague, as the posthumous daughter of a field marshal and the granddaughter, on her mother’s side, of a cavalry captain.

1873-1875  She takes a position in Vienna as teacher-companion to the four daughters of the Suttner household in Vienna, where she meets her future husband, the youngest son of the family.

1875  After a short stay in Paris as secretary of Alfred Nobel, she comes back to Vienna to marry Baron Arthur von Suttner.

1876  The young couple leaves for the Caucasus where for nine years they earn an often precarious living by giving lessons in languages and music and eventually, and more successfully, by writing.

1885  Bertha von Suttner and her husband return to Austria.

1889  Baroness von Suttner publishes Das Maschinenzeitalter (The Machine Age) and Die Waffen nieder! (Lay Down Your Arms!).

1891  Suttner initiates the Austrian Peace Society of which she will be for a long time the president, attends her first international peace congress, and starts the fund needed to establish the Bern Peace Bureau.

1892  Together with A. H. Fried Bertha von Suttner initiates the peace journal “Die Waffen nieder!”, remaining its editor until the end of 1899.

1902  Death of her husband.

1904  Bertha von Suttner attends the International Peace Congress in Boston; lecture tour in the United States.

1905  Bertha von Suttner is the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

1906  A complete edition of her works is published.

1912  Second lecture tour in the United States.

1913  Already affected by beginning illness, the Baroness speaks at the International Peace Congress at The Hague.

21 June 1914  Death of Bertha von Suttner in Vienna.
BERTHA VON SUTTNER, one of the last photographs before she died on 21st June 1914.
BERTHA VON SUTTNER
living for peace
the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize award to Bertha von Suttner