

In an e-mail discussion about pacifism I was asked:

**ARE YOU SAYING WE ALL SHOULD BE PACIFISTS?**

I e-mailed back saying: Pacifists do think everybody should be a pacifist ... pacifism will not work if only a few take part ... everyone has to participate if we want long lasting peace.

This was the response I got ... I will deal with each point in detail:

**THAT WILL NOT WORK. IT HAS NEVER WORKED. NICE TO BE THEORETICAL BUT WHEN YOU HAVE A CRISIS, YOU CANNOT BE THEORETICAL. THIS IS A BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND LEFT: THEORY VS THE REAL WORLD. I'D LIKE TO THINK WE COULD ALL BE PACIFISTS. REMEMBER THE PACIFISTS IN 1938 - IMAGINE IF PACIFISM HAD BEEN THE PREVAILING VIEW IN THE UK THEN. IT JUST DOES NOT WORK.**

**THAT WILL NOT WORK. IT HAS NEVER WORKED.**

Well, I could not disagree more, I know it will work. But tragically ... *it has never been tried* ... but once everyone has become a pacifist, it surely will result in no more wars.

It is disingenuous to say pacifism has never worked: Of course it has worked. We haven't had WWII, have we? Many conflicts didn't turn to war (Gandhi/India Britain), but obviously, the wars that were fought, pacifism didn't stop. History is defined by wars - prevented wars don't get much attention.

**NICE TO BE THEORETICAL BUT WHEN YOU HAVE A CRISIS, YOU CANNOT BE THEORETICAL.**

Pacifism is neither theoretical nor about the decisions you must make when you have a crisis, i.e. face an invading army. In that instance you will do what the situation requires (but that is by no means *necessarily* fighting the hostile army); importantly: What you have to do in that instance is not the defining issue of pacifism - in fact it is an unrelated issue. Pacifism is all about *the steps you take to avert the crisis* in the first place ... pacifism is whatever avoids war.

**THE BASIC DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RIGHT AND LEFT ...**

... is the Right-hawkish view is to the past, to conclude past wars are proof that pacifism doesn't work. The Left-dovish view is to the future ... with considering the past: We know that in the past ignoring pacifism has led to wars. We know if we keep ignoring pacifism, it will again lead to war. We know if pacifism is applied, it will prevent wars.

The most potent argument against pacifism is: Democracies tolerate pacifism, totalitarian systems don't - thus democracies are at a disadvantage. This is true. One of the counter-arguments is a centre-piece in my essay: Totalitarian systems mostly are run by dictators, their removal may be acceptable as an exception to pacifism. But crucially, the resistance/opposition in a totalitarian system must be assisted from the outside. Also, many totalitarian systems rely on outside help (Iraq, Iran, North Korea) - this help must be stymied. Lastly, most totalitarian systems do not survive in the long run, they in time succumb to democracy (though the process may take longer than a generation); in the meantime, temporarily succumbing to a hostile system may be preferable to war (Denmark/Norway/WWII).

**THE ARGUMENT THAT TOTALITARIAN SYSTEMS EVENTUALLY BURN THEMSELVES OUT AND ONE JUST MUST BE PATIENT FOR THIS TO HAPPEN IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE APPROACH. SOME THINGS, SUCH AS PERSONAL LIBERTY AND FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION AND THE SAFETY OF ONE'S FAMILY ARE WORTH FIGHTING FOR. DEMOCRACY IS NOT THE NORM - IT IS THE EXCEPTION AND WORTH FIGHTING FOR.**

Worth fighting for - sure, but at what price ... and why with violence? You have to ask yourself: Do you accept your son having to die fighting (or to kill others)? And: How can it ever be right that women and children are killed in a war? Are you prepared for your son to have the kind of experiences - where he is forced to kill and mutilate - that bring him home from his tour of duty in an emotional mess, unable to re-integrate into society, instead ending up as a wife/child bashing drunk, who eventually suicides?

**I AM IN FAVOUR OF MILITARY ACTION - IF MY SON WERE CALLED UP, I WOULD BE VERY FEARFUL AND I WOULD TRY AND AVOID HIM GOING TO WAR. BUT THIS IS ON A PERSONAL LEVEL. ONE CANNOT SAY, "LET'S NOT HAVE ARMIES BECAUSE SONS WILL GET KILLED". I DON'T LIKE PAYING HIGH TAXES, BUT I DO. IT IS PART OF HOW A SOCIETY OPERATES.**

But this is the problem with the hawkish world-view ... war is as inevitable as taxes! (And wars often are necessary and useful.) Hawks say: "We'll do what it takes to defeat terrorism, even if it means war." (... and even if 10x as many civilians are killed as terrorism victims.) We all want to get rid of terrorism, but is it justified to destroy a whole country doing it? Pacifists will work hard against terrorism ... but without considering the ghastly war scenarios as inevitable and justified.

As a non-pacifist and supporter of the Iraq war you may argue: Preventing a war is not the most important: It is more important to preserve our way of life (... or to export and spread our political system, which we deem superior; or to secure resources, such as oil supplies; or to test our weapons systems etc) (or indeed for personal reasons, where Bush jnr wants to finish off what Bush snr started). As a pacifist I will argue emphatically against that stance. As a non-pacifist you may argue: We are fighting for peace. Pacifists challenge this concept: It is deeply flawed (destroy a country to save it?)

**IF "EVERYONE HAS TO PARTICIPATE" PACIFISM WON'T WORK ... IF THE AFGHANS ADOPTED PACIFISM AND THE TALIBAN TOOK CONTROL, THERE WOULD BE TORTURE AND MURDER.**

It indeed is hard to argue for pacifism in the face of evil like the Taliban (or Hitler, Saddam, Pol Pot, Hamas etc.) But as ever: Evil always relies on support (the Taliban live off opium sales to the US) ... that support must be stymied. It may seem convincing to say since the Taliban won't participate in pacifism, it's unrealistic for us to strive for it; but the argument side-steps the core issues: 1) Pacifism often is not a short-term solution ... it does not provide answers for the proverbial gun-at-your-head problem; 2) Pacifism works covertly by helping with infrastructure and providing favorable living conditions, hospitals, education etc. That support will undermine the stranglehold of systems like the Taliban ... as seems to be the case currently in Iraq, where the influence of al-Qaida is waning due to diminishing support from the locals, rather than military defeat.

Hawks say it is pointless to argue for pacifism with a gun pointed at your head. That is true (... and now you need to deal with that situation as best as you can). But that's not our issue; our issue is: How do we work toward *avoiding* that conflict? The gun-at-your-head issue again and again being brought up in this context is a diversion from the question: How do we avoid wars? With pacifist thinking, or with hawkish *'we have to fight a war to achieve peace'* thinking? When a war breaks out, it is not pacifism that has failed ... in the contrary, it is hawkish concepts and the resultant policies that have failed. The principles of pacifism are not put in question by pointing to a shooting conflict. Once we are at that point, mistakes have been made ... pacifism strives to avoid those mistakes; and to pin-point them, we have to go back in history: In the case of WWII we have to go back to WWI and its aftermath; in the case of Iraq War II and terrorism we have to look at the Palestine/Israel conflict.

**REMEMBER THE PACIFISTS IN 1938.**

1938/WWII was a difficult situation - the greatest of pacifists have struggled with it (incl. the British writer/philosopher Bertrand Russell, who had gone to jail for his opposition to WWI) (... mind you, he was right in the middle of it; it was 1940 - well after the shooting had begun - when he accepted fighting the Nazis was an exception to the rule of pacifist thinking ... he called his position: Relative Pacifism).

So, obviously it was not possible to prevent WWII in 1940 (the Nazis had started it) ... probably not even in 1939 or indeed 1938; it was too late by then. Or was it? Because, remember: In 1940 Denmark, Norway, the Nether Lands and Austria were occupied or annexed. The writer H.G. Wells had stated after WWI the British would have been better off under German occupation ... that they had suffered more from the war. Denmark, Norway, the Nether Lands and Austria fared better without resisting militarily. You may say: Well, ultimately they profited from the effort the Allies put in.

This is often the argument from the Right: We are now reaping the rewards from fighting (a war) for our freedom. But the argument is questionable: We don't know, and cannot ever know (and thus the argument can't be tested and really is specious), where we would be, had a crisis been met with other means than rushing into war.

Back to 1938: WWII cost 50m war-dead ... would anywhere near that many people have died had the Nazis been opposed by non-military action? Admittedly that would have been a difficult task ... but: Please consider the following carefully:

Both British and French authorities were advised in 1938 by high ranking German officers to resist Hitler's demands and to strengthen the German resistance. *They were ignored.* One of the resistance members was the diplomat Ernst von Weizsäcker, a NSDAP member and SS officer, a Nazi Secretary of State (he was jailed at Nürnberg - Churchill called his sentence a 'Deadly Error') (his son later was German President for ten years). What I am saying here is this: There was very high-ranking German resistance way before outbreak of war - *which was not supported or assisted by British and French authorities.* That resistance planned many attacks on Hitler, but - as history records - Hitler was lucky and escaped about 1/2 doz attempts on his life (... and as early as 1936 the view within the resistance - held by, among others, generals who thought another war could not be won - was that a regime so totally dominated by one man could only be brought down by eliminating that man).

When discussing pacifism and its apparent failure to stop WWII, it is probably fair to say that with more outside help it would have been possible to get rid of Hitler. *Why? Because it was difficult to organise resistance from within Germany. Why? Because the Germans supported Nazism. Why? Because Germany had been bankrupted with reparations, and people were unemployed and starving. Who got them work and fed them? The Nazis. Who bankrupted Germany after WWI? The Allies. Among the Allies some thought it was a mistake to bankrupt Germany after WWI. Why? Because you just don't know what that might lead to!*

Now consider this: had Hitler been eliminated in 1936/38 and the Nazi system had collapsed, WWII would not have happened ... but we would never hear about the fact that a war had been prevented! How often have wars been avoided in the past? We just don't know.

In this context, look at another aspect of WWI: The US's engagement was in order to 'Fight for Peace'. It broke the yearlong deadlock on the Western Front. The US intervention ensured an overwhelming allied victory - instead of a possible negotiated settlement. Germany was bankrupted with war reparations. The resulting enormous economic hardship and political instability brought to power Hitler and the Nazis. Thus it can be argued Nazi rule and WWII were (indirectly and inadvertently) the result of America trying to secure peace in WWI.

What is the relevance of all this? Pacifism's goal is to work for peace, without fighting a war for it ... while ensuring imbalances are avoided. That applied then as it applies now (Palestine/Israel). So when we remember the pacifists in 1938, or pacifists at any other time, it is necessary to look at the big picture. I don't want to be revisionist (what happened, happened) but *I can't let the claim go un-answered that WWII is an example against pacifism.* Besides, I think there are parallels between WWII and Iraq War II: Hitler/Saddam needed to be eliminated - but the wars should have been avoided (before Iraq War II we said: NO WAR ... Get rid of Saddam - but not with war on Iraq).

**[I'D LIKE TO THINK WE COULD ALL BE PACIFISTS.](#)**

What's stopping you? There are no downsides to pacifism. Not a single death - no battle, no war - has been caused by pacifism. (But there *is* a problem, isn't there? What would we do with all those industries that depend on their profitability for wars being fought?)

Pacifism is a state of mind ... as is anti-pacifism: In the preamble of the UNESCO constitution it is stated: "Wars begin in the minds of men" ... wars don't fall out of the sky - they are a result of the thinking of men. Pacifism is about our thinking now and the decisions we make now ... for the future.

This cliché is true: If there is a will, there is a way; Wernher von Braun was asked what it took to go to the moon: "The will to do it." What does it take to have no more wars? The will to have no more wars. It's all in the mind. And for peace, minds must change.

WWI was The War To End All Wars; yet, only about 20 years later we had WWII ... which was a result of mistakes that were made during and after WWI. Less than 20 years later we were on the brink of WWII ... and in the Cuban Missile Crisis Kennedy's hawkish military advisers were in favor of nuclear war - only JFK's stalling prevented a US attack. True, Kennedy was no pacifist ... and Bush neither is a pacifist. But if Bush now convinces the Israelis to return to the borders of 1967 and that the settlements on occupied territories are wrong - and if the Palestinians in return forego violent attacks and thus precipitate a peace deal - pacifism was at work. Remember ... pacifism = whatever prevents war; it manifests in wondrous ways.

Thus - for long-lasting peace - hawks need to be changed to doves.

But should you consider to swap sides, be warned: Patently it is a lot easier to be a non-pacifist than a pacifist. As a non-pacifist all you have to do is point at past wars and say: "See! Pacifism doesn't work" ... and you're done. Furthermore, you can absolve yourself from the responsibility for future wars: The hawkish view is, our wars are inevitable, necessary, useful and just: "It is our right, our duty and our only option to fight when we're threatened!" (... or when 'our way of life' is in jeopardy; or our overseas interests; or the supply of resources we require for our economy etc). This way of thinking is the easy way out, even lazy. Non-pacifists say they don't like wars either ... well, don't fight wars then. But here's the rub: That requires a lot of work. Currently, for the Right, it requires understanding - and working with - Muslims. That is a huge task ... it goes back to addressing the causes of terrorism, rather than just fighting the symptoms. It is hard, Hard Work. (Hard Work is code for: change peoples' minds; people have to shift their positions.) It is not acceptable to say: "Muslims are impossible to deal with" ... then throw one's hands up in the air ... and bomb the lot.

The reaction to 9/11 was a watershed. The war is wrong and - crucially - it creates more terrorists (you can't effectively threaten suicide bombers with death). The 9/11 violence was answered with yet more violence. Had the West made an effort to understand the motivations for 9/11 and responded in a measured way, we would have a more peaceful world today (and again, history is the key for that understanding: We have to look at Palestine/Israel. Muslim extremists are motivated by the disenfranchising of Palestinians after WWII; a two-state solution, return of occupied territories, decommissioning of refugee camps will reduce terrorism more than any War on Terror).

Why do hawks and doves disagree so hugely in the analysis of the truly ultimate, hard question: "What are we going to do about wars?" The Right: "We will fight and do whatever it takes to win, because our fight is just and God is on our side!" The Left: "We will do whatever it takes to avoid fighting, because war is too awful." To me, the key to the dilemma lies in the nature of war: War is cruel, insane and stupid; war is immoral, counter-productive, gratuitous and wrong ... always. I find it incomprehensible that humans can do this to one another - for whatever reason. In the past, wars were affairs of men fighting on level ground - there was an aspect of personal contest. A war was a series of skirmishes where rulers often fought their own hands-on fights. WWI changed all that. Machine guns mowed down thousands in a single day. Faceless, pointless, un-fathomable slaughter. If humanity is to survive just the next few hundred years, we will have to change our ways; technology will dictate that. In the past people had different mind-sets ... one could argue people were less enlightened than we are now-a-days. This enlightenment has to be put to good use: NO WAR. Because we are smarter than our forefathers.

And please, do not insist we have to 'Fight for Peace'. That fight is bloody and doomed ... history is clear on this: It contains the seed for future wars. It has never worked ... we still have wars, don't we?

With the exception of small minorities, hawks and doves ultimately have the same goal: Peace. The small minorities have agendas that most of us don't comprehend. Instability and aggression feed their agendas; thus the rocket and suicide attacks. The attacks ostensibly don't help their people ... but they further the radicals' agenda. The problem is, the hawkish West buys into their agenda with answering violence with violence. Al-Qaida, Hamas, Hezbollah play the fiddle ... the West dances to their tune (the radicals carry out a massacre - the West respond with violence - the radicals rub their hands together with glee: "Our plan is working!"). Hawks deem it reasonable to kill women and children ('collateral damage') to achieve peace their way. Doves deem the cost too high ... the War on Terror has killed tens of thousand civilians, and the US spent \$1.000.000.000.000 doing it!

When defining pacifism, many say: **[PACIFISM IS THE TOTAL REJECTION OF VIOLENCE.](#)** While that is one possible definition ... it is the one for which pacifism is most often derided. With that definition pacifism is blamed for not having solutions when one is attacked - the refrain is: See, pacifism doesn't work. This is a miscomprehension ... it is important to understand that pacifism is not the magic wand one can use against a rocket or suicide attack; in that situation different tools may need to be used. Pacifism, on the other hand, is the state of mind that will bring long lasting peace for future generations.

*pacifism ... the conviction that war is an unacceptable way of resolving conflicts; the refusal to take up arms due to moral beliefs; the active striving for NO WAR (with doing the Hard Work for peace).*

## Appendix: Pacifism Examples & Pacifists' quotes

Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) taught about the social waste of militarism and the needlessness of war. He urged a total reform of the educational, social, and economic systems that would direct the nation's interests toward peace rather than toward armed conflict between nations.

In New Zealand during the latter half of the 19th century British colonists used many tactics to confiscate land from the indigenous Maori, including warfare. One Maori leader, Te Whiti-o-Rongomai, inspired warriors to stand up for their rights without using weapons, which had led to defeat in the past. He convinced 2000 Maoris to welcome battle-hardened British soldiers into their village and even offered food and drink. He allowed himself and his people to be arrested without resistance for opposing land confiscation. He is remembered as a great leader because the 'passive resistance' he practiced prevented British massacres, thereby protecting far more land than with violent resistance.

After the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was founded by the pacifist William Penn, Quaker-controlled colonial Pennsylvania employed an anti-militarist public policy. Unlike residents of many of other colonies, Quakers chose to trade peacefully with the Indians, including for land. The colonial province was essentially unarmed and experienced little or no warfare in that period.

Mohandas K. Gandhi was a political and spiritual leader of India, and of the Indian independence movement. Grateful Indians christened him with the title "Mahatma" or "Great Soul." He was the pioneer of a brand of non-violence, which he called satyagraha - translated literally as "truth force". This was the resistance of tyranny through civil disobedience that was not only non-violent, but sought to change the heart of the opponent. During his thirty year leadership of the Indian Independence Movement from 1917 to 1947 Gandhi led dozens of nonviolent campaigns, spent over seven years in British prisons, and fasted nearly to the death on several occasions to obtain British compliance with a demand or to stop inter-communal violence. His efforts helped lead India to independence in 1947, and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom worldwide.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* that reading Leo Tolstoy's book *The Kingdom of God is Within You* overwhelmed him and 'left an abiding impression.' Gandhi listed Tolstoy's book, as well as John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and the poet Shrimad Rajchandra (Raychandbhai), as the three most important modern influences in his life. Reading this book opened up the mind of the world-famous Tolstoy to Gandhi, who was still a young protester living in South Africa at the time.

In 1908 Tolstoy wrote, and Gandhi read, *A Letter to a Hindu*, which outlines the notion that only by using love as a weapon through passive resistance could the native Indian people overthrow the colonial British Empire. This idea ultimately came to fruition through Gandhi's organization of nationwide non-violent strikes and protests during the years circa 1918-1947. In 1909, Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy seeking advice and permission to republish *A Letter to a Hindu* in an Indian dialect. Tolstoy responded and the two continued a correspondence until Tolstoy's death in 1910. The letters concern practical and theological applications of non-violence, as well as Gandhi's wishes for Tolstoy's health; before he died, Tolstoy's last letter was to Mahatma Gandhi.

Many consider *The Kingdom of God is Within You* to be a key text for Tolstoyan, Christian anarchists and nonviolent resistance movements worldwide.

Buddhist Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a nonviolent pro-democracy activist and leader of the National League for Democracy in Myanmar (Burma). A devout Buddhist, Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her peaceful and non-violent struggle under a repressive military dictatorship. One of her best known speeches is the "Freedom From Fear" speech, which begins: "It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it."

Throughout history, many have understood Jesus of Nazareth to have been a pacifist, drawing on his Sermon on the Mount. In the sermon Jesus stated that one should "not resist an evildoer" and promoted his turn-the-other-cheek philosophy. "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well... Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." The New Testament story is of Jesus, surrendering himself freely to an enemy intent on having him killed and proscribing his followers from defending him.

Especially famous for leading a pacifist movement is Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth and current Dalai Lama of Tibet. Faced with the occupation by the forces of the People's Republic of China, Tenzin Gyatso opted for peaceful resistance and eventually fled to India, where he was active in establishing the Central Tibetan Administration (the Tibetan government in exile) and preserving Tibetan culture and education among the thousands of refugees who accompanied him. The Dalai Lama travels the West to spread Buddhism and to publicise the cause of Free Tibet. In 1989, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Some pacifists and multilateralists are in favor of the establishment of a world government as a means to prevent and control international aggression. Such a government would not have to worry about the UN veto being used by one of its members when it or one of its allies decides to aggress on another nation, as currently is the case. As an example for a world government, the European Union is referred to as having been brought together peacefully.

Japanese, Italian and Nazi aggression that precipitated World War II often is cited as an argument against pacifism. If these forces had not been challenged and defeated militarily, the argument goes, many more people would have died under their oppressive rule. A frequently used (though possibly incorrectly attributed) quote is from Edmund Burke: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Pacifists point out that the 'something' good men must do is not necessarily violent, arguing the superiority of nonviolent action by describing "some movements learned from their own pragmatic experience, they could wage struggle more successfully through nonviolent action than through violence."

Furthermore, pacifists can claim that the United State's entry into World War I broke the multi-year stalemate between Germany and the allies, ensuring an overwhelming victory rather than a negotiated settlement. This permitted the victors to bankrupt Germany with war reparations, leading to economic unrest that hastened the rise of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler. Thus - it can be argued - the outbreak of WWII, the rise of the Nazi regime, was - indirectly and inadvertently - a consequence of actions (of good men doing something) by the US.

There was strong anti-war sentiment in Western Europe during the 19th century. In the aftermath of World War I there was a great revulsion against war, leading to the formation of more peace groups like War Resisters' International and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

### Pacifists' quotes

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction of war is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?" - Mahatma Gandhi

"In all history there is no war which was not hatched by the governments, the governments alone, independent of the interests of the people, to whom war is always pernicious, even when successful." - Leo Tolstoy

"That this social order with its pauperism, famines, prisons, gallows, armies, and wars is necessary to society; that still greater disaster would ensue if this organization were destroyed; all this is said only by those who profit by this organization, while those who suffer from it - and they are ten times as numerous - think and say quite the contrary." - Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is within You*

"Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation." - Martin Luther King Jr.

"The Holy Prophet Mohammed came into this world and taught us: Man is a Muslim who never hurts anyone, but who works for the benefit and happiness of God's creatures. Belief in God is to love one's fellow men." - Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan