

Peace History Society

Charles F. Howlett, Ph.D.
Molloy College

INTRODUCTION

The Peace History Society (PHS) was established in 1964 to coordinate national and international scholarly work related to matters involving the conditions and causes of war and peace. PHS has emerged as one of the foremost professional groups devoted to examining and understanding peace movements and peace cultures. Membership is drawn from around the world. Composed of practicing historians and independent scholars, PHS is an organization designed to make peace research relevant to the scholarly disciplines, nongovernmental organizations, government policymakers, and the global society at large.

BACKGROUND

In December 1963, at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association (AHA) in Philadelphia, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and author of the first scholarly history of the American peace movement, *Peace or War: The American Struggle, 1636-1936*, Merle Curti of the University of Wisconsin joined forces with Edwin Bronner of Haverford College to post a call for an ad hoc meeting "of those historians interested in peace research" (Conroy, 385). According to Curti, many members at the AHA meetings were moved by the noted University of Michigan economist and peace researcher Kenneth Boulding's "challenging statement that historians had been more interested in glorifying war than in exploring the problems of how to prevent it. Some forty people turned up at the gathering at the [Cherry] Street Meeting House in Philadelphia." Curti continued, "It seemed to me that scholarly study might help in understanding the problems of war and peace" (Curti, 15).

Reeling from the aftermath of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the near nuclear collision with the Soviet Union over missile placements in Cuba, and the impending military conflict in Vietnam, the historians who gathered for this meeting quickly realized that little disciplinary efforts had been made to examine the role of peace movements in the past. A committee was established consisting of the following historians: Charles Barker of Johns Hopkins University, Edwin Bronner, Hilary Conroy of the University of Pennsylvania, Merle Curti (who later would become president of the group), Roderick Davison of George Washington University, Staughton Lynd of Spellman (who by this time had achieved a degree of notoriety for his civil rights activism), Arthur A. Ekirch of American University (a Conscientious Objector during World War II and author of the popular work, *Decline of American Liberalism*), William Neumann of Goucher College (also a World War II Conscientious Objector), Bradford Perkins of the University of Michigan, Theodore Rozak of California State University at Hayward, Quaker historian Frederick Tolles of Swarthmore College, and the chairman, former Curti doctoral student Arthur I. Waskow of the Institute for Policy Studies.

The group members adopted the name of the Committee on Peace Research in History. The Committee's objective was to call upon members to educate the public about the importance of peace scholarship. In June 1964, the Committee issued a call to other historians to join its efforts "to encourage the kind of research on the history of war, peace, violence and conflict that can clarify the causes of international peace and difficulties in creating it" (Conroy, 1969, 387-88).

In 1966, the Committee officially became affiliated with the AHA and adopted the name of Conference on Peace Research in History (CPRH). CPRH's establishment encouraged historians to undertake "a collaborative study of America's . . . historic alternations between violence and

reconciliation" (Conroy, 1969, p. 388). Although its initial focus was on American issues, the organization's bylaws were much broader in scope and encouraged historians in all fields to participate: "The Conference seeks to communicate its findings to the public at large in the hope of broadening the understanding and possibilities of world peace" (CPRH, 1971, 1972). In 1986, as the organization grew in numbers and importance, its name was changed to the Council on Peace Research in History. In 1994, members voted to adopt its present name to reflect its current composition: the Peace History Society.

ORGANIZATION

Organizationally, PHS has executive officers consisting of the President, currently Mitchell K. Hall of Central Michigan University, Vice President, and Executive Secretary-Treasurer. There are two separate boards: the North American Board comprised of some thirteen members from the United States, Canada, and Mexico; and the International Board, with eleven members who hail mostly from Europe (this board also has two American representatives). At present, there are approximately four hundred members. Most members are from the United States and almost all are scholars and teachers of history; a considerable number teach American history, but there are many who also teach outside of the U.S. field. The organization is an affiliated society of the AHA and has joined the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, the International Peace Research Association, and the International Congress of Historical Sciences. PHS is also recognized as a significant nongovernmental organization by the United Nations. Some members of the organization, in particular Larry Wittner, have testified before U.S. Congressional Committees on matters of disarmament, peace, and social justice.

MISSION

Specifically, historians in PHS consider themselves engaged scholars, involved in the study of peace and war and in efforts to eliminate or at least restrict armaments, conscription, nuclear weapons proliferation, colonialism, racism, sexism, and war. They consider their work as part of a larger social reform movement, one presenting viable alternatives to the policies they opposed. Their efforts have shaped and defined the subject of peace history which can be properly classified into three categories. The first is *conflict management*, which involves achieving peace through negotiation, mediation, arbitration, international law, and arms control and disarmament. The second is *social reform*, which involves changing political and economic structures and traditional ways of thinking. The third is a *world order transformation*, which incorporates world federation, better economic and environmental relationships, and a common feeling of security. A considerable portion of the scholarly work has been devoted to a historical analysis of peace and antiwar movements and individuals, international relations, including diplomatic studies, and causes of war and solutions for peace.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE EDUCATION

Since its inception PHS has engaged itself with organizing peace research panels for scholarly bodies such as the AHA, Organization of American Historians, Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, the International Peace Research Association, and the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians. In addition, as part of its educational mission, PHS has distributed papers on special topics to libraries and governmental agencies, compiled lists of relevant research in progress, and published important works documenting international activism for world peace. Some of its most impressive publication endeavors are the "Garland Library of War and Peace," edited by Charles Chatfield, Blanche W. Cook, and Sandi Cooper; the *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders* (1985), under the general editorship of Harold Josephson; *Peace Heroes in Twentieth Century America* (1986), edited by the late Charles DeBenedetti; and *Give Peace a*

Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement (1992), which grew out of a memorial conference in honor of DeBenedetti and was edited by Melvin Small and William D. Hoover. One of the Society's most important contributions to peace education and peace research in history has been the sponsorship of major conferences of its own and in collaboration with other organizations. In the United States, PHS has been responsible for conferences such as "Peace and War Issues: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity" (1994), "Peace and War Issues: Gender, Race, Identity, and Citizenship" (1997), "Politics of Peace Movements: From Nonviolence to Social Justice" (2000), "Peace Work: The Labor of Peace Activism Past, Present, and Future" (2003), "Peace Activism and Scholarship: Historical Perspectives on Social, Economic and Political Change" (2005), and "Historical Perspectives on Engendering War, Peace, and Justice" (2007). The Society has also been instrumental in organizing panels for international conferences like the Hague Appeal for Peace in 1999 and the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Oslo in 2000. PHS scholars, moreover, have presented their research at the International Peace Research Association meetings in Malta (1994), Brisbane, Australia (1996), Durban, South Africa (1998), and Tampere, Finland (2000).

PHS continues to educate the public regarding the latest trends in peace history scholarship through its own journal, which first appeared in 1972. *Peace and Change: A Journal of Peace Research*, published quarterly, is a refereed periodical offering scholarly and interpretative articles on topics related to peace movements, conflict resolution, peace education, nonviolence and pacifism, internationalism, and race and gender issues. The periodical's title reflects the organization's belief that peace is more than the absence of war. Carrying on the tradition established by the emergence of the "modern" peace movement after World War I, peace historians are convinced that the process of peace must be built upon a just and equal society. Efforts at building a safer world through the eradication of racism, gender inequality, economic oppression, and environmental hazards have become part of the journal's blueprint.

Throughout its existence the journal has been served by some of the leading historians in the field of peace research. The journal's first coeditor was Bernice Carroll. She was followed by others who included prize-winning historians like Charles Chatfield, the late Charles DeBenedetti, and Lawrence Wittner as well as Robert Schulzinger, a recognized diplomatic historian, the late Scott Bills, Don Birn, Linda Forcey, Mitchell K. Hall, and Kathleen Kennedy. The current co-editors are Robbie Lieberman of Southern Illinois University and Barry Gan of St. Bonaventure University.

The journal continues to publish articles affecting peacemaking, cross-cultural studies, economic development, the deleterious impact of imperialism on developing states, post-Cold War upheaval, and the crisis in the Middle East. In recent years special issues, based on conference proceedings, have featured forums on the field of peace history, the trajectory of the Vietnam War, peace discourse, dilemmas of industrial development, internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the debate over world federalism.

CONCLUSION

As engaged scholars and educators, members of PHS continue to explore the degree of influence peace history has had on foreign policy and attitudes toward international relations. One of the more interesting areas of examination of late is that of investigating how peace movements have been instrumental in bringing wars to closure, despite not preventing their outbreak. As a body of scholars who research and teach history, PHS continues to grapple with the issue of whether peace history should seek greater acceptance and influence within the discipline's main body or emphasize a separate, activist ethos. The tremendous body of published works since the Vietnam War is indicative of the influence the field of peace history and its representative organization, PHS, has had within the profession.

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