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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL EDITION



BERTHA VON SUTTNER:

A PIONEER OF PEACE AND EQUALITY



BERTHA VON SUTTNER:

“AFTER THE VERB ‘TO LOVE,’ ‘TO HELP’ IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VERB IN THE WORLD”



Bertha von Suttner, the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905, remains one of the most influential figures in the history of the peace movement. Her tireless advocacy for disarmament, her critique of war, and her unwavering commitment to equality and justice have left an indelible mark on the world.

Born into an aristocratic family in 1843, Suttner defied societal expectations to become a leading voice for peace, inspiring not only her contemporaries but also future generations of activists. Her seminal work, “Die Waffen nieder!” (Lay Down Your Arms!), became a global sensation, translating her anti-war message into a powerful call for humanity to reject violence.

Now in 2025, Suttner’s legacy feels more relevant than ever. In a world still plagued by wars, rising militarism, and systemic inequalities, her message of peace and her belief in the power of dialogue to resolve conflicts resonate deeply. Moreover, her advocacy for women’s rights and her critique of patriarchal structures align with modern movements for gender equality and women’s leadership in peacebuilding.

The past few years particularly indicate the need for a louder expression of the will for peace. Therefore, this year on March 8th, the IADL wants to dedicate its issue to one of the important women who exemplified the responsibility of fighting for peace.



WOMEN ARE STILL CALLING: “LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS”

Bertha von Suttner was born in 1843 in Prague, then part of the Austrian Empire, into an aristocratic military family. Her upbringing was marked by the rigid expectations of her class and gender, but she was also exposed to the intellectual and cultural currents of her time. Despite her privileged background, Suttner faced significant personal and financial challenges, including the loss of her family's fortune, which forced her to seek employment.

One of the most pivotal moments in her life came when she accepted a position as a secretary for Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite and the founder of the Nobel Prizes. Although their professional relationship was brief, it had a profound impact on both of them. Suttner's passion for peace and her intellectual rigor deeply influenced Nobel, who later credited her with inspiring his decision to establish the Nobel Peace Prize. Their correspondence over the years

reveals a mutual respect and a shared belief in the importance of promoting peace through dialogue.

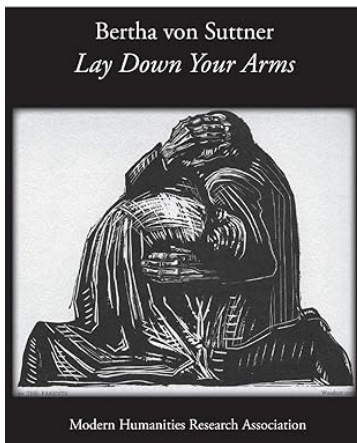
Suttner's early experiences, including her exposure to the devastating effects of war and her interactions with Nobel, shaped her worldview. She became increasingly critical of the glorification of war and the patriarchal structures that perpetuated violence and inequality. These themes would later become central to her work as a peace activist and writer.

Bertha von Suttner's most famous work, „Die Waffen nieder!“ (Lay Down Your Arms!), published in 1889, is a powerful anti-war novel that tells the story of Martha Althaus, a woman who loses her first husband to war and becomes a passionate advocate for peace. The novel's vivid portrayal of the horrors of war and its critique of militarism struck a chord with readers across Europe and beyond. Translated into more than 30 languages, it became a cornerstone of the peace movement and established Suttner as a leading voice for disarmament.

In 1915, in the midst of the First World War, Women's International League for Peace



MHRA European Translations
Volume 5
Barbara Burns



and Freedom (WILPF) was established. WILPF was created in The Hague to combat all forms of violence and to promote peace. In 1933, with the rise of fascism, the organisation was outlawed. In 2021, WILPF Austria was recreated to engage for a sustainable peace, and a gender sensitive multilateral peace and security policy as patriarchal structures produce inequality and war.

In addition to her literary contributions, Suttner was deeply involved in organized peace activism. She co-founded the Austrian Peace Society in 1891 and played a key role in the International Arbitration and Peace Association. Her efforts to promote international arbitration as an alternative to war were groundbreaking, and she was a prominent figure at the first Hague Peace Conference in 1899. Suttner's work helped lay the foundation for modern international law and the establishment of institutions like the International Court of Justice.

Suttner's advocacy extended beyond disarmament. She was a vocal supporter of women's rights and believed that women had a unique role to play in promoting peace. She argued that the exclusion of women from political and social decision-making perpetuated cycles of violence and inequality. Her vision of peace was not just the absence of war but the presence of justice, equality, and human dignity.

SUTTNER'S MESSAGE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, Bertha von Suttner's message remains strikingly relevant. The world continues to grapple with armed conflicts, rising militarism, and the devastating consequences of war. At the same time, movements for peace, equality, and justice are gaining momentum, drawing inspiration from Suttner's legacy.

One of the most pressing issues today is still peace! In addition, the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution can be informed by Suttner's critique of militarism and her call for disarmament. Suttner's emphasis on the tools for peace also remains vital. In an era of polarization and misinformation, her belief in the power of knowledge and understanding to bridge divides offers a roadmap for addressing conflicts at both the local and global levels.

Suttner's life and work remind us that the pursuit of peace is not a passive endeavor, but rather an active and ongoing struggle. Her courage in challenging the status quo, her unwavering commitment to justice, and her belief in the power of individuals to effect change continue to inspire activists and advocates around the world.

As we look to the future, the legacies of Suttner and many other women inspire us to confront the root causes of violence and inequality, to amplify the voices of those who have been marginalized, and to work tirelessly for a world where peace is not just an ideal but a reality as well. In the words of Suttner herself, "After the verb 'to love,' 'to help' is the most beautiful verb in the world." Let us honor her memory by continuing to help build a more just, equitable, and peaceful world.



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WHAT KIND OF TIMES ARE THESE

BY ADRIENNE RICH

THERE'S A PLACE BETWEEN TWO STANDS OF TREES WHERE THE GRASS GROWS UPHILL

AND THE OLD REVOLUTIONARY ROAD BREAKS OFF INTO SHADOWS

NEAR A MEETING-HOUSE ABANDONED BY THE PERSECUTED

WHO DISAPPEARED INTO THOSE SHADOWS.

I'VE WALKED THERE PICKING MUSHROOMS AT THE EDGE OF DREAD,

**BUT DON'T BE FOOLED, THIS ISN'T A RUSSIAN POEM, THIS IS NOT SOMEWHERE ELSE
BUT HERE.**

OUR COUNTRY MOVING CLOSER TO ITS OWN TRUTH AND DREAD,

ITS OWN WAYS OF MAKING PEOPLE DISAPPEAR.

I WON'T TELL YOU WHERE THE PLACE IS, THE DARK MESH OF THE WOODS

MEETING THE UNMARKED STRIP OF LIGHT—

GHOST-RIDDEN CROSSROADS, LEAFMOLD PARADISE:

I KNOW ALREADY WHO WANTS TO BUY IT, SELL IT, MAKE IT DISAPPEAR.

AND I WON'T TELL YOU WHERE IT IS, SO WHY DO I TELL YOU

ANYTHING?

BECAUSE YOU STILL LISTEN, BECAUSE IN TIMES LIKE THESE

TO HAVE YOU LISTEN AT ALL, IT'S NECESSARY TO TALK ABOUT TREES.

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IADL

The International Association of Democratic Lawyers is a global organization of lawyers' associations, individual lawyers and judges from over 90 countries committed to equality amongst peoples, the elimination of imperialism and colonialism and the protection of the rights of all. IADL is a Non-Governmental Organization accredited to ECOSOC and UNESCO.

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IADL, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, is a Non- Governmental Organization (NGO) with consultative status to ECOSOC and represented at UNESCO and UNICEF. The IADL was founded in 1946 by a gathering of lawyers who had survived the war against fascism and participated in the Nuremberg Trials. The International Review of Contemporary Law is a digital legal journal published by IADL. It does not follow the mainstream, but instead analyzes legal questions in their cultural, economical, political and social context.

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