

## Ernst Friedrich's Pacifistic Anarchism

By Douglas Kellner

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html>

Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War* is an important document in the struggle against the barbarism of modern warfare. Outraged by the unprecedented brutality and massive destruction of the First World War, Friedrich sought out and then published this collection of pictures and other visual artifacts which illustrate not only the human suffering and death produced in the war but also the lies and hypocrisy of the political and economic forces which promoted it. Aiming at an international audience, Friedrich had the book's introduction written in four languages--German, Dutch, English and French--and accompanied his collection of images with captions in these languages. {1} It was the first extensive published collection of photographic images of the atrocities of World War I, and thus brought the public face to face with a powerful panorama of the horrors of war through the media of photography and other mass images. Friedrich hoped that when they actually saw the reality of modern warfare, people everywhere would become more critical of war, the military, and militarism.

In order to provide a background for the republication of this important book by The Real Comet Press, I would like to provide an introduction to the life and work of Ernst Friedrich, who is little known outside of Germany. In the following pages, I shall thus describe the context in which @U(War Against War) was produced, and shall indicate the relevance of the book for us today. Friedrich was involved in various radical groups and movements, which were important precursors of the anti-war movements of the 1960s and today's peace movement. His response to the barbarism of modern mass warfare thus provides one of the first concerted expressions of protest against its complete insanity and criminal inhumanity. His perspective takes on even more importance and relevance in our own nightmarish Nuclear Age. Who, however, was Ernst Friedrich, and what can we learn from this fascinating individual?

Friedrich was born on February 25, 1894 in Breslau, Germany, "the thirteenth child of a washing woman." His father was an educated saddle-and-harness maker who later became, as Friedrich described it, "the loyal servant of a bank." {2} Since Friedrich could not afford to study drawing or sculpture, as he wished, he became an apprentice in the publishing trade--an occupation he would later take up himself. Dissatisfied with his apprenticeship in publishing, he became a factory worker, and was also involved in union politics; at night, he studied acting.

From his teen-age years through the 1920s, Friedrich was active in founding and participating in various German youth movements. In 1911, at the age of seventeen, Friedrich joined the German Social Democratic Party (SPD); he also wandered through Scandanavia, France and Switzerland. He returned to Breslau to pursue an acting career, and was performing in the @U(Koniglichen Hoftheater) in Potsdam in the summer 1914, when the First World War broke out. The eruption of the war revolutionized Friedrich and produced in him an intense aversion to militarism in any form. He refused military service and was placed under observation in a mental institution. In 1916, he participated in illegal assemblies of anti-militarist and revolutionary youth and in 1917 was imprisoned for an act of sabotage which he presented as "a great patriotic act."

Friedrich was released from prison about the time of the German November Revolution in 1918, and enthusiastically took part in the revolutionary movement that followed the abdication of the Kaiser and the German surrender which ended the war. He also participated in the Free Socialist Youth Movement (@U(Freien Sozialistischen Jugend)) in Berlin, which had been founded by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on Easter 1916. The movement stood outside of all party organizations and called for revolution as well as the elimination of war.

During the turbulent period following the Russian Revolution and the end of the First World War, numerous revolutionary political groups appeared and disappeared, and Friedrich participated in many of them, switching in 1919 from the Free Socialist Youth Movement to the Socialist-Proletarian Youth which was affiliated with the German Independent Socialist Party (USPD). Most of the independent socialists joined the newly formed Communist Party (KPD) in 1920, or formed communist splinter groups; Friedrich joined a communist worker-youth organization in April, 1920 which was affiliated with the Communist Worker's Party of Germany (KAPD).

Youth movements were especially popular in Germany at the time, and were strongly politicized by the experiences of war, revolution, and the economic instability with massive inflation and unemployment which occurred in the early 1920s. Whereas earlier organizations like the @U(Wandervogel) group in the German Youth Movement were cultural and artistic in orientation, devoted to the enjoyment and cultivation of youth, after World War I youth organizations took on a markedly political cast.<sup>{3}</sup> Friedrich was particularly active in both organizing and publishing. He frequently spoke at youth organization rallies and founded an anti-authoritarian journal, @U(Free Youth) (@U(Freie Jugend)), that lasted some years and brought his views to a much wider audience. After having participated in a variety of radical youth groups, Friedrich eventually became increasingly committed to a domination free socialism that eventually led him to anarchism. While in the Free Youth movement, he constantly publicized the principles of "the autonomy of youth" and "decentralization," and strongly advocated "not joining any particular workers' party." Still, Friedrich's basic alliance at the time was with the working class and in opposition to the bourgeoisie, which he believed was instrumental in promoting militarism, oppression and war.

In the early 1920s, Friedrich organized Free Youth groups throughout Germany, and continued to publish the movement's journal. He also issued a *Proletarian Kindergarten* book intended to educate children to oppose war and militarism (the book's cover and some contents are found in this book).<sup>{4}</sup> But his most significant achievement was the production of @U(War Against War), which he published in 1924. Not only did he assemble pictures of the horrors of war, but he juxtaposed them with evocative and ironic captions. In the documents assembled in the opening pages, Friedrich suggests that children's toys, schooling, the church, and other agents of socialization prepare children psychologically for warfare. Throughout the book, he attempts to document how these institutions, groups and practices are allied with big business, the state, and the military in the manufacture of both the machinery and the mentality of modern warfare.

Friedrich's rhetorical strategy in *War Against War* is to reproduce shocking pictures of the atrocities of war, and then to juxtapose the official patriotic and militarist propaganda images and

rhetoric of the period with illustrations of what this discourse produced. Documents assembled on pages (52-53), for example, contrast enthusiastic youth marching off to war in 1914 with a picture of corpses on the "field of honor" shortly thereafter. Ironic juxtaposition of "patriotic" phrases and concepts with the reality of piles of lifeless human bodies demystifies militaristic rhetoric and shows the appalling human consequences of military propaganda and policies.

As Friedrich assembles his montage, the impact of horror accumulates. The pictures giving evidence of mutilated and decaying corpses, the rubble of buildings, and the devastation of nature itself are followed by those showing the mutilated faces and bodies of the survivors of the war, and by pictures of cemeteries and graves. In his captions, Friedrich does not let the reader forget precisely who is responsible, and spares us nothing in his attempt to evoke a powerful aversion to war and its apologists.

Friedrich enunciates his message more discursively in both the introduction and conclusion to *War Against War*. Like expressionist writers such as Ernst Toller, whom he admired and befriended, Friedrich delivers his message in images, phrases and diction that are expressive, staccato and epigrammatic. The frequent use of exclamation points expresses his outrage and sense of urgency, and boldface titles signal his summons to "*Human Beings of All Lands!*" to learn "*The Cause of War*," "*The Prevention of War*," and how to prosecute "*The War Against War*."

His appeals to humanism, love, peace, and the need for organization and struggle against war signal Friedrich's allegiance to a activist pacifism. This mode of thought had its origins in the philosophy of the French anarchist Proudhon, who called for establishing voluntary organizations within society rather than resorting to the direct overthrow of the state. Several religious figures also preached versions of pacifistic anarchism. Anticipating Tolstoy and Ghandi, The New England Christian anarchist Adin Ballou believed that the individual "ought to obey God rather than men" and he preached nonresistance. For Ballou, love is "morally irresistible" and will transform humankind and society more surely than violence, which can only produce more violence; he also taught that power corrupts individuals and advocated a domination-free society based on love. The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy also believed that the new society begins in individuals' hearts and must be founded on love. Adhering to a "pure Christianity" based on the ethical teachings of Christ, with an emphasis on brotherhood and community, Tolstoy maintained that violence begets violence and that peaceful resistance is the best way to counter violence and militarism. {5}

Friedrich came to share this pacifistic and anarchistic position, but put more emphasis on political organization and struggle--perhaps in part due to his own experiences in the youth movements and the revolutionary struggles that followed the First World War. The book's title, *War Against War*, itself exhibits his demand for militant struggle against war and militarism. Near the end of his introduction, he calls for a general strike, draft resistance, and direct action against war and militarism, taking a more activist posture than his religious predecessors.

Yet Friedrich always believed in and strongly advocated *non-violent* means of social change. He once told his grandson that: "If you want to do something for peace, you must always use your

brains and not your muscles!" And Friedrich developed an insignia --two arms breaking a rifle-- to emphasize that he was against violence. At present this insignia is still being used by pacifistic groups and conscientious objectors all over the world, including the War Resisters League in the United States and War Resisters International in London.

In general, the anarchism Friedrich professed was therefore more pacifistic than the forms of anarchism associated with violence. Further, his anarchism was directed more specifically against state violence and oppression than simply against state power as such, as in the versions of anarchism produced by Bakunin and his followers. For, as Walther Oschilewski claims, Friedrich's anarchism was closer to the communal socialism of the Russian Peter Kropotkin than to Bakunin's more individualistic anarchism. {6} And in contrast to Tolstoy's more passive religious anarchism, Friedrich always opposed quietistic and nonrevolutionary forms of pacifism, publishing in his various journals statements like: "Without social revolution there can be no lasting peace.... We must prepare systematically an uprising against war." {7}

*War Against War* made a strong impression on Friedrich's contemporaries and was widely read and discussed. Never before had a German audience been subjected to such horrendous images of the savagery and destruction of World War I. During the war, most European governments forbade the publication of war photographs, and few photographic images of the war had appeared before the publication of Friedrich's book. Previously, the public's only contact with the horrors of the First World War had been through individual experience, or through the mediation of artists and poets. Early on in the conflict, many Expressionist and other poets began publishing antiwar poetry evoking the massive brutality which many of them experienced first hand. And artists like Otto Dix, George Grosz and John Heartfield produced paintings, drawings and montages documenting the horrors of war. {8}

Friedrich's realization that photographs could be employed as documentary evidence and, at the same time, as a provocation to pacifism was something new. The critic Kurt Tucholsky, for example, wrote in the prestigious Weimar Germany publication *Die Weltbühne* that the book "should not just be shown to our friends who are already pacifists and who do not want to repeat the old mistakes that are so often made: to send missionaries to Rome. Instead we should show it to our opponents, and should distribute it to schools, organizations, meetings, and cafes and to those who want to know nothing of these horrors. And one should also be sure to show it to women--indeed, should show it especially to women." Tucholsky also wrote that "The photographs of battlefields, these slaughterhouses of war, and the photographs of those mutilated by war belong to the most horrendous documents that I have ever seen. There exists no publication that offers anything similar in monstrosity, in basic truths, and in education." {9}

In fact, during the 1920s World War I had become a cultural battleground for figures of varying political persuasions. The National Socialists sought scapegoats for German defeat and inveighed against the "stab in the back" at the Versailles Peace conference. Conservative militarists like Ernst Junger published books and essays extolling war and celebrating Germany's experiences in the First World War, while Erich Maria Remarque presented the war as a brutal disaster in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. {10} This was the context in which Friedrich sought to speak out against militarist rhetoric in order to expose the human costs and suffering brought about by an event glorified and idealized by the apologists for militarism. Indeed, the book is

intended for use as a tool to build an antiwar movement, not merely to illustrate the follies of a corrupt ruling class; it should be read and used in this way today as well.

The original version of *War Against War* was published in two volumes but was later condensed into a one-volume version by Johannes Sassenbach, the Secretary of the International Union (@U(Internationalen Gewerkschaftsbundes)).@+{11} The text published here corresponds to the first volume of the original German edition. The book went through at least ten German editions by 1930 and was translated into many languages--a tribute to the forcefulness of a work by a proponent of a political persuasion--pacifistic anarchism--usually neglected or dismissed by the general public.

After the publication of *War Against War*, Friedrich made the formation and administration of an Anti-War Museum in Berlin his main project, and joined his publication and political work with it in order to establish a center for antiwar activity in Berlin. At the end of the book, Friedrich called for contributions for an "International Anti-War Museum," and he managed eventually to raise the money needed to build and administer it. Thereafter, Friedrich devoted much of his energies to collecting material for the museum and to seeking funds to sustain it, though he also continued to publish journals, books and antiwar material ranging from peace postcards to pacifistic texts.

In 1926, Friedrich helped form a "Revolutionary Pacifist Group" whose membership included such figures as Kurt Tucholsky, Walter Mehring, and the Expressionist writer Ernst Toller. During the last years of Weimar, Friedrich found himself in constant litigation against people who alleged that he had defamed them, and against state officials who accused him of "treason." In 1930, Friedrich was imprisoned for "high treason" for about a year because of the publication of antimilitarist writings intended for secret distribution among the army and police.

Friedrich's museum and his constant agitation against war and militarism earned him the enmity of the increasingly powerful and aggressive right wing in Germany. Indeed, after the Nazis came to political power in 1933 Friedrich was in an extremely precarious situation and the night that the Reichstag was burned, Nazi thugs broke into his anti-war museum and destroyed some of the collection and building. Soon after, the Nazis arrested and imprisoned Friedrich and took over the museum, destroying its exhibitions of anti-war material and turning it into a hangout for the local Nazi storm-troopers.

Friedrich was released from imprisonment in September, 1933, due to ill health and pressures from American Quakers. He fled the country, and remained in exile in Belgium and France until the end of World War II. He tells of his arrests, his struggles with the Nazis, his exile, and his later experiences in a book published in Geneva in 1935, *Vom Friedens-Museum zur Hitler Kaserne*.{12} Clearly, despite imprisonment and destruction of his life-work in Germany, Friedrich refused to surrender his project and during World War II, he reopened his peace museum in Belgium, published a collection of anti-Nazi jokes, and continued to agitate for peace and against Fascism.

When the Germans occupied Belgium in 1940, they again destroyed the Anti-War Museum he had recreated there; but after the war, he returned to Germany and attempted to get the German

government to finance its rebuilding. The mayor of Berlin, Ernst Reuter, merely replied that such an anti-war museum would have to be financed with private funds and could not be undertaken with state money.

Disappointed with the lack of support for his project in Germany, Friedrich spent most of his remaining years in France. He joined the French Socialist Party and did organizational and publicity work for them. But he continued to attempt to organize a peace museum, and in 1951 bought a "peace ship" and later a "peace island" with money received from the German government in reparation for his treatment under the Third Reich. He also established some youth communes and worked for friendship between German and French youth. Illness and depression, however, kept him from realizing his dream of reestablishing the peace museum.

After Friedrich's death in 1967, several monographs were published on his life and activities, and two of his main books were republished. Friedrich's Anti-War Museum was revived in Berlin in 1981 and is now managed by his grandson Tommy Spree. No doubt if Friedrich were alive today he would be encouraged by the growth of the antinuclear and antiwar movements among youth of all continents. It is in view of these contemporary struggles against weapons, militarism and war that Friedrich's life and work take on importance for us today. In the midst of an era when great powers are expanding already gigantic arsenals, urging military solutions to political problems, and refusing to negotiate reduction of nuclear weapons, Friedrich's militant pacifism has if anything become even more relevant.

Indeed, not only do we face destruction from weapons that dwarf the instruments of death opposed by Friedrich, but the people of the world are being subjected to "low-intensity warfare" and military actions on all continents, activities which only serve the interests of the most reactionary forces within the world's superpowers. In this context, Friedrich's strategy of documentation becomes especially significant. To some extent, it was visual documentation of the horrors of the Vietnam war--both visual images reproduced in newspapers and magazines, as well as television images of "the living room war"-- that helped produce public outrage and opposition to the war and that hastened its conclusion. But what mass images of the Central America conflicts do we see today? Who could support military aid for the Contras in Nicaragua when confronted with pictures of the destruction and murder carried out by the Contras against the Nicaruguan people? And who could celebrate American "victories" in Grenada and bombing of Libya when confronted with pictures of the innocent people maimed and killed in these actions?

Today, our media in supposedly "free" and "democratic" societies have been hiding from us the truth about war and the effects of military action by our government in ways similar to the German government in the Weimar Republic and under fascism by suppressing images of the human effects of war. In addition, they have also been promoting a culture of militarism ranging from children's toys and cartoons to films like @U(Rambo) and @U(Red Dawn), or television series like @U(Amerika), which dehumanize "communists" and which celebrate the values of militarism. Such images are reinforced by news and commentary which legitimates US military action, and even supports US aid to the Contras and calls for the invasion of Nicaragua, as with the columnist and television commentator George Will. Once again, our government and its allies in the media and the military-industrial complex have been suppressing information and

images which would reveal the ugly effects of military action. How long will we stand for this and what can we do about it?

Here Ernst Friedrich provides a model for us. Throughout his life he struggled against war and militarism and sought to document the terrifying folly of war and to attack those who promote and profit from it. Through every means available to him-- his museum, publications, and continual agitation for peace-- he devoted a lifetime to struggling against war and for peace. For this, he deserves our respect and emulation today as we undertake present and future struggles against war and militarism.

In 1933, the Nazis declared, after destroying the Antiwar Museum, that: "Soon no one will remember the work of Ernst Friedrich." Today, as we face the possibility of nuclear obliteration, we would do well to remember both the crimes of the militarists of the past and the life and work of fighters for peace like Ernst Friedrich. Until we live in a nuclear-free world without fear of war and destruction not even photographs and museums are safe.\*

### Notes

{1} Ernst Friedrich, @U(Krieg dem Kriege!) (Berlin 1924). Friedrich's grandson, Tommy Spree has informed us by letter that: "The introduction of @U(War Against War) has been written in more than four languages. E.F. always kept the introduction in English, French, and German. Yet the fourth language differed: I possess copies in Dutch, Norwegian, and Russian. It is said that the book has been translated in more than 40 languages, even in Chinese!" (Letter to Catherine Hillenbrand, Oct. 6, 1986).

{2} On Friedrich, see the articles collected and edited by Andreas Mytzke, @U(Ernst Friedrich zum 10.Todestag) in @U(Europäische Ideen), Heft 29, 1977, and the material collected in the republication of Friedrich's book @U(Vom Friedensmuseum zur Hitlerkaserne) (Berlin: Libertad Verlag, 1978), especially the informative study, "Friedenskämpfer, Wahrheitssucher" by Walther G. Oschilewski, pp. 213-237.

{3} On the Youth Movement in Germany, see Robert Wohl, @U(The Generation of 1914) (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979). Wohl does not, however, discuss the leftist youth organizations participated in by Friedrich which emerged after the German Revolution of 1918.

{4} Ernst Friedrich, @U(Proletarischer Kindergarten. Ein Märchen- und Lesebuch für Kinder und Erwachsene) (Berlin 1921).

{5} On the tradition of pacifist anarchism, see Gerald Runkle, @U(Anarchism: Old and New) (New York: Dell Publishing, 1972), especially pp. 98ff.

{6} Oschilewski, in Friedrich, @U(Vom Friedensmuseum), @U(op. cit.), pp. 219ff..

{7} Cited in Oschilewski, p. 229

{8} Friedrich was no doubt influenced by Expressionist artists and the drawings of Otto Dix and George Grosz who painted and sketched the horrors of World War I. For Friedrich frequented Expressionist circles and organized art exhibitions himself. On Expressionism and the First World War, see my discussion in "Expressionism and Rebellion" in @U(Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage), edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin Press, 1983). On George Grosz, Otto Dix, and other antiwar artists, see Matthias Eberle, @U(World War I and the Weimar Artists) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Beth Irwin Lewis, @U(George Grosz: Art and Politics in the Weimar Republic) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971); Hans Hess, @U(George Grosz) (New York: Macmillan, 1974), and Douglas Kahn, @U(John Heartfield: Art and Mass Media) (New York: Tanam Press, 1985).

{9} Kurt Tucholsky in @U(Die Weltbühne), Febr. 23, 1926, reprinted in @U(Gesammelte Werke), Bd. II, 1925-1928, pp. 359-360.

{10} For discussion of the celebration of war by militarist dupes and ideologues in Weimar, see Wohl, @U(op. cit.), pp. 48ff..

{11} Oschilewski, @U(op. cit.), p. 226.

{12} Ernst Friedrich, @U(Vom Friedensmuseum, op. cit.).

\*For helpful remarks on earlier drafts of this essay and for proposals leading to new research material, I am grateful to Gary Kline, Catherine Hillenbrand, Doug Kahn, Ingeborg O'Sickey, Ann McCauley, Judith Burton, and Ingrid.