

## **A manifesto of the octogenarians: the war children speak on the war in Ukraine.**

"O God's angel, intervene and speak into it!  
it is war and I desire  
Not to be guilty.  
What should I do if I'm asleep with grief  
And bloody, wan and pale,  
The spirits of the slain would come to me,  
And weep in front of me, what?"

Matthias Claudius

Our voices become quieter in the twilight of our lives. It is appropriate that it be lowered; that is one of the virtues of old age. What is not appropriate is that we remain silent, in resignation. For we owe it to you youngsters to speak out, not to tranquilize you, but to alarm you; and we speak to you, not because we are brimming with age-old wisdom, but because we have carried all our lives the experience of war that was engraved on us during the nights of the bombing. The word 'war' is on everyone's lips and it's frightening how smoothly it slips into the daily hodgepodge of news, as if 'war' were a subject like any other.

*Our* ideas about war do not arise from the powerful images that are served to us on our small and large screens. Whether we like it or not, they emerge from our -enfleshed memories which find no rest -: the wailing of the sirens that announced the bombs, the rubble a few houses down where we were not allowed not to play because of the duds and the risk of collapse; the bunkers to which we were taken almost every night and where we sat huddled together; the terror when a bomb fell nearby and the whole bunker shook; and the darkness when the light went out and only a square of phosphorous applied to the wall maintained the illusion of light; worrying whether the house we lived in would still be standing when we went 'home' from the bunker after the bombing; the child who in panic resisted with tooth and nail to try on the gas mask and the mother who could not do this violence to her child for the sake of his safety; the hunger that hurt; and the rivalry of the siblings over the meager bread; the chilblains that itched but couldn't be scratched because they wouldn't heal.

Our experience of war does not extend beyond childhood experiences, but that is enough to make us feel connected to the killed, the wounded, and frightened children of Ukraine and makes it impossible for us to overlook their suffering. The longer this war lasts, the more their life will be dominated by their war experiences, they will be war children, like us. They have no voice to demand the silence of the guns and the path of negotiations. We're doing this on their behalf, and we're also doing it for the sake of our own fear of a nuclear escalation that no one - really no one - can envision.

As we children later learned, we belonged to the side of the attackers in that criminal war - and yet, we were its victims. And we had to learn that the bombings that we feared so much put an end to the Hitlerite fascist regime of terror. Millions of soldiers, American, Soviet, British, and French lost their lives in the process. Those of us who professed pacifism had to live with the contradiction that those who bombed us were also our liberators. Two famous World War I pacifists, Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russel, spoke in favor of the Allied war against Hitler's Germany with good reason. In this dramatic historical situation, in which the survival of humanity was at stake ... both made the *one and only* exception to their pacifism with a heavy heart and full of conviction. After the end of the war, they continued to see themselves as pacifists and "again and again spoke out against the Korean War, armament and the danger of nuclear war." (Olaf Müller)

We fear the fearless who first want to win the war and only then make *peace*. But 'victory' (Sieg) rhymes with 'war' (Krieg), not with 'peace'. Peace is not ours, says Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: "It is only promised to those who long for it. No planner understands that. Nevertheless, it is true: Peace cannot come without prior longing." And he adds: "Where

people lose their language, war threatens. Cold war, if you like. But peace means talking to one another.”

But where is the longing for peace supposed to come from in our country, where public opinion is beguiled by all the rules of media know-how to believe that one can and must fight for a victory against a nuclear power to have a favorable starting position for the talks that are only then possible to have? The fact that the 'hope' for a peaceful —if not coexistence, then at least side-by-side — existence rests on increasingly monstrous machines which are designed only to kill and destroy leaves us stunned. To enforce this perverted hope, the hope for reconciliation is defamed as the ideology of the weak. Without hesitation, without sadness, without even a horrified pause, the great tradition of the peacemakers— Jesus' message of loving one's enemies, the non-violence that Gandhi gave a political face with the Salt March, the civil disobedience that Martin Luther King encouraged the oppressed to practice— is declared out of the question at this 'turning point'. The courageous pacifism of Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the many nameless others who joined them and stood up for it, often with their lives, is declared done with a flick of the wrist. Instead of having their stories told they are consigned to the trash heap of history, as is the Sermon on the Mount, which urgently admonishes us to drop everything and to give priority to reconciliation with our hostile neighbors over everything else.

We warn: The democratic future of a country in which the “word-makers of war” (Franz Werfel) call the shots is in bad shape. They contemptuously dismiss those who object to the use of more and more weapons as procrastinators, those who consider compromise are branded traitors, the cautious are called cowards, the worried feeble, and the pacifist dopey, mad, or dangerous. What is actually dangerous is the much-vaunted 'unity' that makes everyone an accomplice of one opinion. Without dissenting voices that can make themselves heard, there is no democracy. In a startling way, the most influential media are failing to inform and report, operating instead as opinion makers and popular education agencies to create consensus. They ceaselessly reinforce the view that all good is on our side, the side of the Western Alliance, and all evil is beyond the demarcation line. But reconciliation begins with honestly investigating and then also acknowledging one's own part in the fact that things could have come to this. At the beginning of the war, the Pope raised the question of whether the illegal attack on Ukraine had anything to do with “NATO barking at Russia's doors.” He reaped a storm of indignation. It is not this question that is dangerous for the existence of western democracies, but its suppression. *“The search for truth cannot thrive outside the nourishment of mutual trust.” (Ivan Illich)* The essence of trust is that it can only arise and prove itself if you dare. And the question of who must take the first step does not arise. All that matters is that it is done.

We invite everyone - old or young or somewhere in between - who insist on being dissidents and who constantly reassess their attitudes in conversation with dissidents. Let's open the cross-generational, unbridled conversation, wherever the opportunity arises or can be created. Let's not be intimidated by bans on thinking, let's give a voice to the longing for peace.

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and signatories: H.Frahm , Dr. B. Heindl, Mag. S. Heindl, I. Neuper, Edz . Mueller, Prof. Dr. H.-J. Benedict, Prof. Dr. L. Cake Book, Pastor S. Wandschneider, K. Kenke , Dr. B. Horny S. Hejazi and over 2500 more... You can sign here : <https://chng.it/JYR2yYYCpt>