La Vita Internationale and L’Humanité Nouvellé have sent me the following letter:

“Sir, With the object of furthering the development of humanitarian ideas and civilization, La Vita Internationale (of Milan), with the support of L’Humanité Nouvellé (of Paris and Brussels), has deemed it necessary to concern itself with the difficult problem that has of late arisen in all its gravity and importance, owing to the delicate question about which France and the whole world has become so ardently impassioned: the problem of war and militarism. With this aim in view, we beg all those in Europe who take part in politics, science, art, and the labor movement, and even those who occupy the foremost positions in the army, to contribute to this most civilizing task by replying to the following questions:

1. Is war among civilized nations still required by history, law, and progress?
2. What are the intellectual, moral, physical, economic, and political effects of militarism?
3. What, in the interests of the world’s future civilization, are the solutions that should be applied to the grave problems of war and militarism?
4. What means would most rapidly lead to these solutions?”

I cannot conceal the feeling of disgust, indignation, and even despair that this letter provoked in me. People of our Christian world – enlightened, clever, good men, who profess the laws of love and brotherhood, who regard murder as a terrible crime, who, with few exceptions, are unable to kill an animal – all these people suddenly, when these crimes are called war, not only recognize destruction, pillage, and the murder of men to be right and lawful, but themselves contribute to this pillage and these murders, prepare themselves for them, take part in them, and pride themselves on them. With this the same phenomenon is always repeated. The vast majority of men – all the working people, those who do the pillaging and the murdering and bear the whole weight of this business – do not plan, or prepare, or wish these murders. They take part in them against their will, only because they are placed in such a position and are so minded that it seems to them that they will fare worse if they refuse to take part in these robberies and murders. It is only a very insignificant minority, which lives in luxury and idleness upon the labors of the working people, that plans and prepares those robberies and murders and compels the working people to commit them. This deception has been taking place for a long time, but of late the impudence of the deceivers has reached the farthest limit: a large portion of the products of labor are taken away from the working people, that plans and prepares those robberies and murders and compels the working people to commit them. This deception has been taking place for a long time, but of late the impudence of the deceivers has reached the farthest limit: a large portion of the products of labor are taken away from the working people, and are used for the preparations for these robberies and murders. The laborers themselves, without exception, are called upon to take part in these robberies and murders in all the constitutional governments of Europe. International

Transcriber’s note: “Carthage must be destroyed.” The sentence was a clarion call in the Roman Republic in the latter years of the Punic Wars.
relations are intentionally made more and more complex so as to lead up to war, peaceful countries are robbed without any cause, people are robbed and killed somewhere every year, and all men live in constant fear of universal mutual pillage and murder. It would seem to be obvious that if such a phenomenon takes place, it is because the greater masses are deceived by the minority, to which this deception is profitable. Therefore, those who want to free people from the calamities of these mutual robberies and murders first ought to expose the deception and show the masses how the deception is accomplished, how it is maintained, and how to be freed from it.

But the enlightened men of Europe do nothing of the kind. Instead, under the pretext of cooperating with the establishment of peace, they gather in one city of Europe, and then in another. They seat themselves with most serious faces at tables and discuss the best way to persuade the robbers, who live by their trade, to stop committing robberies and to become peaceful citizens. Then they consider profound questions: the first, whether history, law, and progress demand war – as though the fictions which we invent can demand of us a departure from the fundamental moral law of our life; the second, what may be the consequences of war – as though there can be any doubt that the consequences of war will always be universal calamity and corruption; and finally, the third, how to solve the problem of war – as though there existed a difficult problem about how to free deceived men from the deception that we see clearly.

This is terrible. We see, for example, that healthy, peaceable, happy people from year to year patronize gambling dens such as Monte Carlo, and leave there, for the advantage of the keepers of these dens, their health, their peace, their honor, and frequently their lives. We are sorry for these men. We see clearly that the deception to which these people are subjected consists in the temptations that entice the players, in the inequality of the chances, and in the infatuation of the players, who know that in general they will be losers, but nonetheless hope that they will be more fortunate than others. All that is perfectly clear. And here, instead of freeing people from these calamities, instead of pointing out to them the temptations to which they are subjected, the certainty of their losses, or the immorality of a game that is based on the expectation of other people’s misfortunes, we meet with distinguished men and discuss how to arrange matters so that the keepers of the gambling establishments shall voluntarily close their institutions. We write books about this and ask ourselves questions as to whether history, law, and progress do not demand the existence of gambling establishments, and consider what may be the economic, intellectual, and moral consequences of games such as roulette.

If a man drinks, and I tell him that he himself can stop drinking and must do so, there is some hope that he will pay attention to me. But if I tell him that his drunkenness forms a complex and difficult problem, which we, the learned, will try to solve in our meetings, all the probabilities are that he, waiting for the solution of the problem, will continue to drink. The same is true of false, complicated, scientific, external means for the cessation of war such as international tribunals, courts of arbitration, and other similar foolish things. These things suppress the simplest and most essential means for the cessation of war, which is only too obvious to anybody. The common people who do not profit from war need no international tribunals and no solutions of questions. Those who are subject to this deception only need to awaken and free themselves from the spell that they are under. The means for abolishing war is simply this: the men who do not need war, and who consider participation in war to be a sin, should stop fighting. This means has been preached since the most ancient times by Christian writers such as Tertullian, Origen, the Paulicians, and their successors the Mennonites, Quakers, and Moravians. Dymond, Garrison, and Ballou wrote about this means. I have exposed the sin, harmfulness, and
senselessness of military service for almost twenty years. This means was applied long ago, and has often been applied both by separate individuals in Austria, Prussia, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, and Russia, and by whole societies such as the Quakers, Mennonites, Nazarenes, and recently the Dukhobors – a whole fifteen thousand of whom have now for three years been struggling against the mighty Russian government, in spite of all the sufferings to which they are subjected, without submitting to its demands that they take part in the crimes of military service.

But the enlightened friends of peace not only do not propose this means, they cannot even bear the mention of it. When they hear of it, they appear not to notice it. Or, if they do notice it, they shrug their shoulders and express compassion for those uneducated and senseless people, who use such an inefficacious and stupid means, when they have such a good means, which consists of persuading the governments, which survive only by violence and deception, to renounce this violence and deception. The means of these enlightened friends is as effective as throwing salt on the tail of the bird that you want to catch.

They say that the misunderstandings that may arise between the governments will be decided by tribunals or by a court of arbitration. But the governments do not at all wish for the settling of these misunderstandings. On the contrary, governments invent misunderstandings if they do not exist, because only misunderstandings with other governments give them the opportunity to maintain the army on which their power is based. Thus, the enlightened friends of peace try to distract the attention of the suffering working people from the only means that can free them from the slavery in which they are held from childhood. They are held in that slavery by patriotism, by the mercenary priests of a corrupt Christianity, by binding oaths, and by threats of punishment.

In our time, when close peaceful relations have been established between the men of various nationalities and states, the deception of patriotism, which always demands the preference of one state or nationality to others, and which, therefore, always draws people into useless and ruinous wars, is too obvious for sensible people not to be freed from it. The deception of the duty of the religious oath, which is clearly forbidden in the Gospel, is, thank God, believed in less and less. It is only the fear of the punishment that is imposed on such refusals by the government that, for the majority of men, serves as a barrier to refusing to take part in military service. But this fear, too, is only a consequence of the deception practiced by the governments, and has no foundation other than hypnosis.

Governments may be, must be, and are afraid of those who refuse. Every refusal undermines the credibility of the deception in which governments keep men, but those who refuse have no reason to fear the government. First of all, every man risks much less by refusing to do military service than by entering the army. The refusal to do military service and the punishment – imprisonment or exile – are frequently only a profitable self-insurance from the dangers of military service. By entering military service a man risks taking part in war, being subjected to the most oppressive and agonizing of conditions, being killed like one condemned to death, or being crippled. Indeed, I saw a regiment at Sevastopol that came to a bastion where two regiments had already been killed off, and it remained there until it, too, was annihilated. Or, if he is more fortunate, a man in military service will not be killed, but will only fall sick and die from the unhealthy conditions of military service. A third possibility is that, having been insulted, a man will buckle, will say something rude to his superior, will violate discipline, and will be subjected to a worse punishment than what he would suffer by refusing to do military service. The best possibility is that, instead of being imprisoned or deported for refusing military
Secondly, however improbable this may be, every man refusing military service may hope to suffer no punishment at all, because his refusal will be that last proof of the government’s deception. As a consequence, it would be impossible for anyone to punish him, because no one would be found who is foolish enough to punish a man who refused to take part in his own oppression. Thus, submission to the demands of military service is obviously only a submission to the hypnosis of the crowd – a useless jumping of Panurge’s sheep into the water to obvious destruction.

But, besides the considerations of advantage and hope, there is a third reason that ought to encourage every man who is free from hypnosis and who understands the significance of his acts to refuse to do military service. A man cannot help but wish that his life should not be a useless, aimless existence, but that it should be a service to God and men. Frequently a man lives his life without finding an opportunity for this service. The call to take part in military service is that opportunity which presents itself to every man of our time. Every man, by refusing to take part personally in military service, either as a recruit or as a payer of taxes to the government, which uses these taxes for military matters, does a great service to God and men. By this refusal, he contributes in the most effective manner to the forward movement of humanity toward that better social structure, toward which humanity is striving and at which it must arrive.

But it is not only advantageous to refuse to take part in military service, and not only ought this to be done – for the majority of the men of our time, if they are at all free from hypnosis, it is impossible not to renounce military service. For every man there are certain acts that are morally impossible, just as certain physical acts are impossible. The promise of slavish obedience to strangers and immoral men, whose professed aim is to kill men, is just such a morally impossible act for the vast majority of the men of our time, if they are at all free from hypnosis. And so, every man of our time not only will find it advantageous and necessary to refuse to take part in military service, but even impossible to refrain from doing so, if he is at all free from this foolish deception.

“But what will happen if all men refuse to do military service? There shall be nothing to stop the triumph of evil people. There shall be no defense against the savages, who will come and conquer us.”

I shall not speak of the fact that the evil men triumphed long ago, still continue to triumph, and have for a long time been ruling over the Christians. There is no reason to fear what has already happened long ago. Nor shall I say that the fear of wild men, whom we persistently irritate and teach war, is a barren excuse, and that for the imaginary defense against these men one-hundredth part of those armies which Europe now maintains would suffice. I shall not speak of all that, because the consideration of what may happen to the world at large due to an act of ours cannot serve as guidance for our acts and our activity. Man has given to him a different guide, one that is incontestable: the guide of his conscience, and by following it he knows beyond a doubt that he is doing what he ought to do. And so, all the considerations about the dangers that confront the separate individual who refuses to do military service, and the dangers that threaten the world as a consequence of such refusals, are all part of the vast and terrible

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2 Transcriber’s note: This is a reference to a story in the Pantagruel by François Rabelais in which a shepherd buys a sheep and then, as a revenge for being overcharged, throws the sheep into the sea, only to have the rest of the herd follow the first sheep over the side of the boat and drown.
deception in which Christian humanity is enmeshed, and which is carefully maintained by the governments that live by this deception.

Nothing but the best can result, both for him and for the world, from a man acting as his reason, his conscience, and his God commands him to act.

The men of our time complain of the evil tendency of life in our Christian world. This cannot be otherwise. In our consciousness we have recognized not only the fundamental divine commandment, “Do not kill,” which was proclaimed thousands of years ago, but also the law of the love and brotherhood of all men. In spite of this, every man of our European world in practice renounces this fundamental divine law and, at the command of a president, an emperor, a minister, a Nicholas\(^3\), or a William\(^4\), puts on a fool’s costume, takes up instruments of murder, and says, “I am ready. I will strike down, ruin, and kill whomsoever you command me to.” What, then, can a society be, when it is composed of such men? It must be terrible, and, indeed, it is terrible.

Examine yourselves, brothers! Do not listen to those rascals who from your childhood infect you with the devilish spirit of patriotism, which is contrary to goodness and truth, and which is needed only to deprive you of your property, your freedom, and your human dignity. Do not listen to those cheats who preach war in the name of God, a cruel and vengeful God invented by them, and in the name of a false Christianity, which they have corrupted. Listen even less to those new Sadducees who, in the name of science and enlightenment, wishing for nothing but the continuation of the present order, gather at meetings, write books, and make speeches, promising to establish a good and peaceful life for men without their own efforts. Do not believe them. Believe in nothing but your consciences, which tell you that you are not animals or slaves, but free men. You are responsible for your acts, and so are unable to be murderers, either by your own will or by the will of those who depend on these murders to survive. You need only to stop and think in order to see all the terror and madness of what you have been doing and, having come to see it, to stop doing that evil, which you yourselves hate and which destroys you. And if you stop doing evil, which you yourselves hate, all those ruling cheats, who corrupt and torment you, will disappear like owls before daylight without additional effort on your part. Then, those new, human, fraternal conditions of life, for which Christian humanity – worn out from suffering, exhausted from deception, and stuck fast in insolvable contradictions – has been yearning, will naturally be formed.

Let each man, without any finely spun and complicated considerations and assumptions, fulfill what his conscience undoubtedly tells him in our time, and he will know the justice of the Gospel words, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (John 7:17)

April 23, 1898


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And please bring any mistakes to our attention.

\(^3\) Transcriber’s note: Czar Nicholas II of Russia.

\(^4\) Transcriber’s note: Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany.