

# ***The Continuing Relevance of Andrew Carnegie's Legacy***

**Lecture by David Nasaw**

Peace Palace

The Hague, Netherlands

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Historians have been harshly—and often truthfully—faulted by postmodernist critics for their reluctance, perhaps their disciplinary incapacity, to break free of their forebears' commitment to mapping the road from past to present by excluding those paths not taken. Too often we follow in the grand tradition of Hegel and Ranke and use history to provide an apologia for what is, by arguing that it had to be.

I intend to take another route today and to narrate the story of a path not taken, of an historical misstep, a past cut off from any future. I do so in an attempt to highlight what I believe to be the legacy of Andrew Carnegie, a legacy found not in buildings, as grand as they are, or in his philanthropic agencies, as important as they have been, but in his one signal failure — in his unfulfilled dream, his utopian longing, his unrealizable passion to create institutions and strategies which might guarantee that the twentieth century would be a century of world peace.

The Andrew Carnegie I will speak of this afternoon is not the one we are familiar with, not the genius of iron and steel, not the founder of scientific philanthropy, not the builder of libraries and institutions, not the brilliant writer and social philosopher of capitalism, but rather a silly little man who was held in contempt by the realists he worked worth—the politicians, statesmen, and international lawyers. Andrew Carnegie was a man of the nineteenth century, of the enlightenment, of the century of light and progress, who was caught at the brink of the dark twentieth century. He was an enthusiast, a utopian, a fool, a crank—one we honor — for his vision, still unfulfilled, for his dreams even more than for his accomplishments.

Andrew Carnegie was a child of the Scottish enlightenment: the Enlightenment of Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson. He was, from childhood onward, an advocate of religious tolerance, a student of history, a believer in science and reason as guarantors of progress, a skeptic who accepted as given and true only what could be proven to him, a critic of dogma of any sort. While the foundation of

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his worldview was the thinking of the Scottish Enlightenment, he brought it down to earth by adding a large and compatible dose of Yankee can-do pragmatic optimism and then refitting and confirming his faith in progress it by grafting it, worshipfully, onto Herbert Spencer's version of Social Darwinism.

Herbert Spencer taught him that that laws of evolutionary progress guide change over time, that history has both purpose and direction, that the world was getting more prosperous, more civilized, more humane, that in each era of human history certain individuals would be called upon to lead humanity to new heights. In the age of monarchies, dynasties and barbarism, it was the captains of the military who provided the peasants who made up the great part of the population with the security required to raise their families and grow their crops. In the age of republics, industry, and civilization, captains of industry replaced captains of the army.

As a child of the Enlightenment and a self-proclaimed disciple of Herbert Spencer, there was no way he could not, as a Social Darwinist, also be a peace activist. Herbert Spencer taught him about the laws of evolutionary progress and about the stages of human progress from barbarism to civilization. The hallmarks of barbarism had been savagery, the inability of men to settle disputes other than through violence, the organized killing of innocent men by innocent men. One of the hallmarks of the coming civilization would be the replacement of violence by reason in the settling of domestic, personal, and international disputes.

"You will find the world much better than your forefathers did," he declared in his second Rectoral address to the students of St. Andrew's in 1905. "There is profound satisfaction in this, that all grows better; but there is still one evil in our day, so far exceeding any other in extent and effect, that I venture to bring it to your notice. . . . There still remains the foulest blot that has ever disgraced the earth, the killing of civilized men by men like wild beasts as a permissible mode of settling disputes." He urged the students to commit themselves to "this holy work and hasten the end of war" by forming their own Leagues of Peace and arbitration societies. "Lay aside your politics until this war issue is settled. This is the time to be effective . . . It is by concentrating upon one issue that great causes are won."

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Carnegie took upon himself the task of coaxing the leaders of the civilized world towards the inevitable realm of international peace that was to follow the age of dynastic rule and dynastic war. A permanent Court of Arbitration had been established at The Hague in 1899 to settle disputes between nations, but it had jurisdiction only over disputes voluntarily submitted by both parties. The task at hand was to get the nations of the world to agree now to obligatory arbitration of disputes between them.

Carnegie believed that the intervention of the United States and President Theodore Roosevelt would be key to strengthening the Hague structure. Only Roosevelt, Carnegie believed, could bring the British and the Germans into negotiations towards a bi-lateral arbitration treaty. Roosevelt had already shown his willingness to work to strengthen international peace agreements by acting as an intermediary and persuading Venezuela and its European creditors to submit their dispute for arbitration at the Hague. On New Year's Day, 1903, Carnegie, effusive as ever, resorted to his characteristic hyperbole in publicly praising Roosevelt for "breathing life into The Hague tribunal, the permanent high court of humanity, for the peaceful settlement of international disputes." Roosevelt, in doing so, had pushed the world closer to the "coming banishment of the earth's most revolting spectacle—human war—the killing of man by man. . . . The complete banishment of war draws near. Its death wound dates from the day that President Roosevelt led. . . opposing powers. . . to the Court of Peace, and thus proclaimed it the appointed substitute for that which had hitherto stained the earth—the killing of men by each other."

In April of 1903, Carnegie committed \$1.5 million (about \$40 million today) for the "erection of a Court House and Library (A temple of Peace)" at The Hague. In the fall of 1904, Secretary of State John Hay issued a call for a second Hague conference. Carnegie now joined with other American and international peace activists in doing everything possible to enlist Roosevelt and the American government in taking a leadership role at the second Hague conference.

While Roosevelt did his best to disguise his disdain for Carnegie—he needed him on his side as a buffer against criticism that he was a wild-eyed socialist/anarchist—he thought the man a phony and a fool. "I've tried hard to like Carnegie," Theodore Roosevelt wrote Whitelaw Reid, "but it is pretty difficult. There is no type of man for whom I feel a more

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contemptuous abhorrence than for the one who makes a God of mere money-making and at the same time is always yelling out that kind of utterly stupid condemnation of war which in almost every case springs from a combination of defective physical courage, of humanly shrinking from pain and effort, and of hopelessly twisted ideas. . . It is as noxious folly to denounce war per se as it is to denounce business per se.” The second Hague Conference would, he warned Carnegie, accomplish little if anything.

Carnegie would not be deterred. He was everywhere at once, in print and in person, in letters, speeches, manifestos and interviews, pushing, needling, cajoling, using wit and sarcasm to make clear to others what was so clear to him, that war had to be outlawed, that it was a vestigial cancer from the past that deserved no place in the present, that in the age of reason, in the new century, human beings had to and could find another way to settle their disputes.

The second Hague Conference was scheduled for June of 1907. In March Carnegie funded, convened, and addressed an international conference on arbitration at Carnegie Hall, then in early June, attended Kaiser Wilhelm II's annual regatta at Kiel in northern Germany. Carnegie was already in communication with the Roosevelt government in the United States and the newly elected Liberal government in Britain. He would take this opportunity, he thought, to establish a personal connection to the Kaiser and lobby him as well on his plans for peace. He did not get much of a chance to do so—as the Kaiser was more interested in his yachts than talking peace to the little Scotsman. From Kiel, Carnegie boarded a special railroad car provided him by the Kaiser's government, which with the Dutch government, arranged for his through passage to The Hague.

He arrived—as a private citizen—while the conference was in progress and spent the next few days as cheerleader and publicist. The second Hague conference would continue to meet through the fall, long after Carnegie had departed. The fact that little was accomplished on disarmament, compulsory arbitration, or the organization of an international police force did not deter or discourage him. More nations had participated in 1907 than in 1899 and the conference had adjourned with a resolution to meet again, though no date was set for a third conference. (A date was eventually set: 1915. It was too late.)

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Despite the failures of the second Hague conference, Carnegie remained confident that disarmament, compulsory arbitration, and a League of Peace would come to pass, but perhaps, not just yet. He was delighted when President Roosevelt invited him to the White House in the fall of 1907, again underestimating the distance between his utopian dreams and Roosevelt's realist approach. The invitation to meet with the president he regarded as proof that he was being listened to not only because of who he was, but because his message was one of sanity, of reason, of progress. "So you must not think me mad in seeing the Emperor on a Mission I was impelled to undertake," he wrote his dear friend, John Morley, a highly influential Liberal member of the British parliament. "I hit the bulls eye you see with the President and may yet with the other [i.e. the Emperor]. I know he—the president—and the Cabinet saw I had the true solution . . . Why shouldn't the angel of Light choose a dreamer now & then just for a change . . . for a working miracle."

Carnegie refused to stop dreaming, refused to give up his quest for "a working miracle," refused to understand how Roosevelt and the other realists in government dismissed his utopian proposals with disgust. He refused to give up on his partners for peace, Theodore Roosevelt principal among them.

While president, Roosevelt had been prohibited by custom from leaving the country. His term of office would, however, end in March of 1909 and he would be free from that moment on to travel the world as the messenger of peace. His first priority, however, was not making peace between nations, but shooting as many large animals as he could in Africa. (In the end, he would slaughter over 500 African animals, including 55 species of large mammals, 11 elephants). Carnegie made a deal with the ex-president. He would provide him with the funds he needed for his African expedition, but when he was finished with the killing, he would go to Europe to engage first the Kaiser, then his Uncle, King Edward VII of Great Britain, in the organization of world peace. "After Africa, then the real 'big game,'" he wrote Roosevelt. "Meet the men who rule European nations, then you have a source of power otherwise unobtainable—You promise to become the 'man of Destiny.'"

While he waited for Roosevelt to return from Africa and take up his mission for peace, Carnegie continued to write, to speak out, to argue on behalf of arbitration treaties,

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disarmament, and an international League of Peace. As much as he tried to remain optimistic, upbeat, he was becoming increasingly fearful that unless something were done soon, Great Britain and Germany would be pulled into a Great War that would lead to a European war. "Carnegie Fears War; Pleads for Peace," *The New York Times* reported after his address to the New York Peace Society in late April, 1909. "Only a spark [was] needed," he had declared, "to plunge England and Germany into Battle. To save the nations from themselves, there must sooner or later emerge from the present unparalleled increase of armaments a league of peace embracing the most advanced nations."

He spent the spring and summer of 1910 on his own peace tour: he met with Victor Emmanuel in the King's residence in Rome, with Premier Clemenceau in Paris, he awaited an invitation from the Kaiser, which never came. And he planned for Roosevelt's return. In April of 1910, Roosevelt returned from Africa and was greeted like a conquering hero in Paris, then in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway where he received the Nobel Prize for his role in arbitrating an end to the Russo-Japanese war.

Carnegie's plan was that Roosevelt meet first with the Kaiser in Berlin, enlist his agreement to begin talks with his uncle, King Edward VII of Britain, then to go to London to meet with the leaders of the British government and secure their approval for talks on an Anglo-German agreement to submit future disputes to compulsory arbitration. It was a grand scheme. But, on the eve of Roosevelt's arrival in Berlin, Edward VII of Britain died. Even if the Kaiser agreed to move forward, now there would be no partner for peace awaiting him in Britain. To further jeopardize Carnegie's grand scheme, when Roosevelt met the Kaiser, he refused to follow the script Carnegie had laid out for him. As Roosevelt wrote his friend George Trevelyan in Britain, "Carnegie . . . had been asking me to try to get the Emperor committed to universal arbitration and disarmament . . . Carnegie's purposes as regards international peace are good, although his methods are often a little absurd." Roosevelt refused to present the Kaiser with Carnegie's "absurd" peace proposals. He indirectly raised the question of Germany's slowing the naval arms race with Britain, but indicated he would not be disturbed if there were no movement towards disarmament. He, Roosevelt, was assured the Kaiser "was a practical man and in no sense a peace-at-any-price man." The Emperor claimed that he

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could do nothing, even if he wanted to, without the approval of the Reichstag and the military and public opinion, which were committed to building bigger and better ships.

Roosevelt, as promised, went next to London, but, with the King's death, the succession, and the state funeral and coronation to follow, his meetings with the Liberal government were postponed, then cancelled. Carnegie's plans had fallen flat, but he did not give up. He would never give up.

In December of 1910, he signed the final deed of gift, transferring to the trustees of what would become the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace the grand sum of \$10 million, (worth a few billion in today's currency). He named Elihu Root, former Secretary of War and of State, and now Senator from New York as its first president. His letter to his trustees made clear his intentions: "Although we no longer eat our fellow men, nor torture prisoners, nor sack cities killing their inhabitants, we still kill each other in war like barbarians. Only wild beasts are excusable for doing that in this, the twentieth century of the Christian era, for the crime of war is inherent, since it decides not in favor of the right but always of the strong. The nation is criminal which refuses arbitration."

He would spend the next years working for the arbitration treaties which he hoped would prevent future wars. Though he now had President Taft on his side, the treaties were stillborn when the Senate of the United States blocked any form of compulsory arbitration of issues it did not approve in advance. Carnegie tried to fight back with a publicity campaign led by his new Endowment, but Root refused to allow the Endowment to enter into the political dispute.

In February, 1914, he would endow a second agency, the Church Peace Union (known today as the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs) with \$2 million, with the understanding that it would take a more activist role than the Endowment could. With the leaders of the new organization, an ecumenical group of churchmen, all peace activists, he planned an international conference to be held in Germany in August.

And then, the unthinkable. He had done all he could, but it was not enough. He was in Scotland in the summer of 1914 when, as he had predicted, the spark took flame, and absent any compulsory arbitration mechanisms or institutions, the nations of Europe



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resorted to violence to settle a local dispute between Austria and Serbia. There is no doubt that Austria wanted to militarily punish Serbia and was not going to be deterred by some arbitration procedure. But the other parties to the war were hesitant. There were strong voices and powerful elements in each government that wanted to find a way out of war. Russia and Austria might have submitted to arbitration; the same with Germany and Russia—or so historians have now shown us—but there were no mechanisms, no institutions, no traditions to follow.

Carnegie was aghast at learning all that he had feared had come to pass and the supposedly civilized nations of Europe, instead of finding a settlement to what was after all a minor issue, had gone to war instead. Carnegie's first task was to rescue the Church Peace Union delegates from Britain and the United States who had been trapped in Germany when war was declared. He then returned to the United States and went immediately to Washington where he implored President Wilson and the American government to do what it could to broker some sort of peace agreement. He failed, the war ground on, the killing accelerated.

He celebrated his 79<sup>th</sup> birthday in November, 1914. In December, he predicted that if a League of Peace were not established at the end of the war now raging, the vanquished would rise up again to renew the cycle of bloodshed. In March of 1915, he was asked in an interview with *The New York Times* if he had “lost faith in the peace impulse which centers at The Hague.”

“Certainly not. I verily believe that in this war exists the most impressive, perhaps the only argument which could induce humanity to abate forever the curse of military preparation and the inevitably resultant woe of conflict . . . This war staggers the imagination . . . I do not underestimate its horror, but I hope, and I believe that this very horrible, newly barbaric excess will so revolt human nature against all things of the kind that the reaction will be great enough to carry us into the realms of reason. And the realms of reason are the realms of peace.”

This was to be his last interview.

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He retreated into silence, stopped writing, seeing visitors, speaking, corresponding; he refused to read the newspapers. His friends were distraught, as, of course, was Louise, his wife, who could not recognize the once voluble, active, little man who could not stop talking. They were convinced he had suffered some sort of a nervous breakdown, brought about by his failure to do anything to stop the Great War. The supreme optimist had in the end been defeated by the reality of man's inhumanity to man.

On November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the day before the armistice was signed, ending the Great War, he took up pen again to write a last letter to Woodrow Wilson. "Now that the world war seems practically at an end I cannot refrain from sending you my heartfelt congratulations upon the great share you have had in bringing about its successful conclusion. The Palace of Peace at The Hague would, I think, be the fitting place for dispassionate discussion regarding the destiny of the conquered nations, and I hope your influence may be exerted in that direction." Wilson's response was generous. "I know your heart must rejoice at the dawn of peace after these terrible years of struggle, for I know how long and earnestly you have worked for and desired such conditions as I pray God it may now be possible for us to establish." While he did not know where the peace talks would be held [they would end up at Versailles, not The Hague], he was sure Carnegie would "be present in spirit."

And Wilson may have been right. Andrew Carnegie remains here with us in spirit. We must not forget the silly-looking little fool for peace, the man who looked like a cross between Santa Claus and Karl Marx, standing barely five foot tall, gnome-like, broadly smiling, pushing, pushing, pushing forward his proposals for peace. He was a man of the nineteenth century who hoped for better in the twentieth. Might we not learn from him, from looking back across the desolate dark century that has passed, the world wars, the genocides, the killing fields, to his dreams, his hopes, his utopian belief in progress and his work for the day when reason and humankind would take the final step forward from barbarism to civilization.

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