Ernst Friedrich, Extract from 'War Against War'

To Human Beings in all lands!
I, who am falsely called "German" instead of just simply "man". I call out to the icy regions of the North, I call out to Africa and to America, to Asia and to Europe.

To all regions that have ears to hear I call out but two words and these are
Man and Love

And even as the Australian weeps when he encounters pain, and laughs and makes merry when joy and happiness are granted him, even so dost thou weep, my brother Eskimo, and so, O African and O Chinese, weepest thou too and so weep I.

And as we all, all human beings, equally feel joy and pain, let us fight unitedly against the common monstrous enemy, War.

We shall unite in protesting against, in weeping over the accursed mass murders for which we all bear equal guilt. But let us also raise our eyes cheerfully to the red dawn of freedom and peace.

To the Fatherland of all Fatherlands, to the Fatherland of human beings which stands above all!

In many books have many words been written for and against this most diabolical, this meanest and lowest of all crimes of the State.

The bourgeois poet in his strength glorified this War in verse and the proletarian writer wrote in glowing wrath against this mass murder.

But all the treasury of words of all men of all lands suffices not, in the present and in the future, to paint correctly this butchery of human beings.

Here, however, in the present book, - partly by accident, partly intentionally - a picture of War, objectively true and faithful to nature, has been photographically recorded for all time.

The pictures in this book from page 53 to the end, show records obtained by the inexorable, incorruptible photographic lens, of the trenches and the mass graves, of "military lies", of the "field of honour", and of other "idylls" of the "Great Epoch".

And not one single man of any country whatsoever can arise and bear witness against these photographs, that they are untrue and that they do not correspond to realities.

And no one comes and says: "Oh how frightful that such pictures should be shown!" But he says rather: "At last, at last the mask has been torn away from this "field of honour", from this lie of an "heroic death", and from all the other beautiful phrases, from all this international swindle the mask has at last, yea, at last, been torn away!!"

This book is dedicated to all war profiteers and parasites, to all war provokers, and is consecrated also to the "kings", generals, presidents and ministers of all lands.

To the priests, however, who blessed the weapons in the name of God, this book is dedicated as a War bible!

Show these pictures to all men who still can think!
He who then still believes in this mass butchery, let him be locked up in a madhouse, let us avoid him as we do the plague!

It may then be that the nationalists and war-provokers, the kings and the generals, may wish to carry on war among themselves, on their own account and at their own risk, and that they force no man to join them against his will!

Such a war would indeed be welcomed by every pacifist and every proletarian!

Then all the war enthusiasts would at last of their own free will exterminate one another, and then we should have peace, eternal peace on this earth!

But unfortunately these heroes are not to be had for such a "war of liberation" (liberation from the war promoters and profiteers).

They lack the courage, these war-thinkers and war leaders, to go themselves into the battle, and themselves to die a sweet "heroic death".
That is why they invented such beautiful phrases as "Fatherland" and "Field of Honour" and spoke of "defence" and uttered other lies.

And he who did not permit himself to be enthused to death by military music and by lying legends of the "enemy" of "the invaded".

Him they forced against his will into the murderer's uniform, him they ordered to murder and to rob for the interests of the money-bags.

I know of one practical way of preventing war for all time to come.

Many, many years ago the doctor, it is said, was fully responsible with his own life and property for the life of his patients.

If the patient died at the hands of his doctor, the latter died too. Such was the law.

And so let there be also a law for kings, presidents, generals and, last but not least, newspaper writers: "Whoever forces men into war or provokes them to mass murders, shall be responsible with all his property and possessions and with his own life for the safety and the sufferings of the soldiers.

The king who rallies people to his standard shall himself bear the standard.

And if a soldier should be reduced to begging, the king shall go out begging with him.

If huts are burnt down in wars, so also shall palaces and castles be set in flames.

And always, for each human life that is sacrificed at the front, shall one king or one minister rest in peace on the "field of honour" for the Fatherland.

And the newspaper writers that agitate for war, shall be detained as hostages for the life of each single warrior!"

Such a law, however, will never come into being, and no "disarmament" or "peace" conference will give heed to my proposal.

Therefore let us, who are fighters, join in the war against war, let us examine the causes and the nature of war, so that, armed with the weapon of knowledge and the sharp sword of the mind, we may emerge victorious from the fight.

The Cause of war

Long ago, Plato who was born 427 years before the Nazarene, Plato, that wise man, said: -

"All wars arise for the possession of wealth".

That is as true a word as ever was spoken. For to the present day in all wars the object is to protect or to seize money and property and power; and there will always be wars so long as Capital rules and oppresses the people.

When international capital finds itself threatened by mutual competition, and when the furnace-barons and factory owners begin to have differences among themselves, then they rattle their sabres and spurs and they call out:

"The Country is in danger!" (They mean by "country" always the money-bags!)

And wonderfully enough the working slaves of all lands abandon their plough and their anvil, they hasten to arms, and protect the life and property of their masters with their own blood and life. What did I say? "That this is strange?" No, it is quite natural - a natural monstrosity! For it is not the state power and force alone that compels all "subjects" to protect the throne and the money-bags, and to die for them.

Capital has not only economic power in its hands; it has, equal measure and with equal power, subjected the proletariat also intellectually.

This fact is easily overlooked and there still remains, therefore, so much bourgeois ideology in the proletariat!

I, therefore, always say to my brothers, the proletarians, I say to the class-war fighters: -

"Free yourselves from bourgeois prejudices! Fight against capitalism within yourselves! In your thoughts and in your actions there still lurks unspeakably much of the philistine and the soldier, and almost in every one there is hidden a drilled subaltern, who wishes only to dominate and command, even if it be over his own comrades and over his wife and children in his family!"

But I also say to those bourgeois pacifists, who seek to fight against war by mere hand caresses and tea-cakes and piously up-turned eyes: -

"Fight against Capitalism - and you fight against every war!"

The battle-field in the factories and the mines, the hero's death in the infirmaries, the mass graves in the barracks, in short, the war, the apparently eternal war, of the exploited against the exploiters!
Do not you realise all this?
The war against war signifies:
The war of the victimised against the profiteers!
The war of the deceived against the deceivers!
The war of the oppressed against the oppressors!
The war of the tortured against the torturers!
The war of the hungry against the well-fed!
The Prevention of War
It is true that capital is the cause of every war.
But the guilt of war rests on our shoulders.
It is we proletarians that make the conduct of war possible; it is for us likewise to prevent wars!

Refuse to serve!
Bring up your children so that they may later refuse to render military and war service!
How very many lightly overlook the "fact that in one's own home in the family, war is being spontaneously prepared!"
And here lies the beginning of all evils, here lies the beginning also of war!
The mother that sings soldier's songs to the baby on her lap, prepares for war, yes, she prepares for war!
The father that makes gifts of toy soldiers to his child mobilises the child for the war idea!
The toy soldier is the Judas that you yourself bring into the home, is the betrayal of human life! Remember always this one thing:
The little helmet made of paper will one day be a steel helmet on the head of a murderer!
And if the child has once practised with his air-gun, how natural it is that he should in later years shoot with a rifle!
The little sabre carved of wood will some day become the battle-sword that pierces the body of a human being!
Ye parents that do not wish that your sons should murder the dear sons of other parents, you should remember that the child whom you present with a helmet and sabre and gun, plays his tender soul to death out of his young body.
Those children, however, who are educated in love and solidarity, and are brought up to respect unconditionally the inviolable sanctity of human life, these children will most certainly be unfit for arms and war-service.

We, opponents of military service must finally destroy the halo and the humbug, and tear down the gaudy tinsel of the soldiery, and we must speak out what then still remains to be said:
a professional murderer paid by the state, who is trained in murder schools (called barracks) privileged by the state, in the carrying out of the most gruesome of crimes, the murder of human beings! That is what the children should be told!
Then indeed will the young girl, destined by nature to reproduce and protect life, be disgusted to flirt with the soldiers - her natural enemies - "the pimps of death".
And the boy will later refuse to wear the uniform because he knows: It is a murderer's cloak!
It is with such clearness and precision that you must think and also act, if you wish to nip the evil in the bud! And, should war nevertheless break out, then proceed consistently and unhesitatingly to

THE WAR AGAINST WAR!
Let the general strike be the first weapon! The men will refuse service! True heroism lies not in murder, but in the refusal to commit murder. Rather fill all prisons and workhouses and all the mad-houses of all lands, than murder and die in the service of Capital!
The last and most dreadful war has not yet broken out which cast gas and poison and flames on human beings and animals and houses.
It lies in our hands, in our power, to prevent, to hinder, this most dreadful tragedy.
Let the great, inspiring example of consistent conscientious objectors be our model.
They suffered death for their consistent "No!" rather than themselves become murderers!
I WILL NOT!
Stronger than all violence, than the sabre and the rifle, is our spirit, is our will! Repeat these three words: "I will not!" Give content to these words and all wars in future will be impossible.
What then will all Capital of the whole world, what will all the kings and presidents do, when the entire people in all lands arise with the cry: WE WILL NOT!

AND YOU WOMEN! If your husbands should be too weak, then carry out the work yourselves!! Prove that the bond of love with the husband is stronger than an army order! Do not let your men go to the front! Do not decorate their rifles with flowers! Cling to the necks of your husbands! Do not let them go even when the order to depart calls! Tear up all the rails, throw yourselves before the locomotives!

WOMEN! REALISE THIS IF YOUR HUSBANDS SHOULD BE TOO WEAK!
Mothers of all lands unite!
ERNST FRIEDRICH End of July, 1924

W. B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all convictions, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz."

He is bubbling over, he’s done time in Tegel, life is awful, what kind of life is this, the fellow who wrote that song is right, I mustn’t think about what happened to me, Ida.

And he goes on shouting with a feeling of horror, what’s going to happen there, he wards it off, he steps on it, he must bellow, bellow it down. The cafe roars, Henschke stands before him at the table, dares not come near him, standing there like that with that roaring coming out of his throat all topsy-turvey and foaming: “And none of you’s got anything to say to me, not one of you can tell me anything, not a single one of you, I know all that better than you do, I didn’t go to the front and lie in the trenches for this, so you could bait me, you agitators, we’ve gotta have order, order, I’m telling you, order – and put that in your pips and smoke it, order and nothing else” (yes, that’s it, here we are, that’s just it), “and if anybody comes and starts a revolution now and don’t give us order, they ought to be strung up all along the street…”

A frenzy, an numbness comes over Franz Biberkopf. Blindly he croaks in his throat, his eyes are glassy, his face blue, bloated, he spits, his hands burn, the man’s out of his mind. His fingers claw the chair, but he manages to hold on to it. Soon he will take the chair and haul out.

Danger ahead, clear the streets, load, fire, fire, fire.
At the same time this roaring man hears his own voice, from far away, is looking at himself. The houses, the houses threaten to cave in again, the roofs to smash over him, this won’t do, no, they
can’t get away with that those criminals won’t succeed, what we need is order ...
In his twilight state he is frightened: something is out of gear with the world, the others seem so
terrible to him, he experiences it with a sort of clairvoyance .......... 

He stood in front of the Tegel Prison gate and was free now. Yesterday in convict’s garb he
had been raking potatoes with he others in the fields back of the building, now he was walking in a
tan summer topcoat; they were still raking back there, he was free. He let one street-car after another
by, pressed his back against the red wall, and did not move. The gateman walked past him several
times, showed him his car-line; he did not mover. The terrible moment had come (terrible, Franze,
why terrible?), the four years were over. The black iron gates, which he had been watching with
growing disgust for a year (disgust, why disgust?), were shut behind him. The had let him out again.
Inside, the others sat at their carpentry, varnishing, sorting, gluing, had still two years, five years to do.
He was standing at the car-stop,
The punishment begins.
He shook himself and gulped. He stepped on his own foot. Then, with a run, took a seat in the car.
Right among the people. Go ahead. At first it was like being at the dentist’s, when he has grabbed a
root with a pair of forceps, and pulls; the pain grows, your head threatens to burst. He turned his
head back towards the red wall, but the car raced on with him along the tracks, and only his head was
left in the direction of the prison. The car took a bend; trees and house intervened. Busy streets
emerged, Seestrasse, people got on and off. Something inside him screamed in terror: Look out,
lookout, it’s going to start now.” ....

There are mountains that have been standing for centuries, that have always been standing,
and armies with guns have gone over them, there are islands, people on them, chock-full, all strong,
solid business houses, bank industry, dancing, dives, import, export, social questions and one day
there starts a rrrrrrr, rrrr, not from the warship, the rumpus starts all by itself - from down below.
The earth gives a jump, nightingale, nightingale, how beautifully you sang, the ships fly to the skies,
the birds fall to the earth... Oh, there are mountains that have been lying quiet for myriads of years,
and armies with guns and elephants have gone over them, what is one to do, when they suddenly start
to caper, because down below there’s a noise that goes: rrr, rumm. Don’t let’s say anything about
that, let’s leave it alone. ....

Now at last he is assistant door-man in a medium-sized factory. He is no longer alone on
Alexanderplatz. There are people to the right, and people to the left of him, some walk in front of
him, others behind him. Much unhappiness comes from walking alone. When there are several, it’s
somewhat different. I must get the habit of listening to others, for what the others say concerns me,
too. Then I learn who I am, and what I can undertake. Everywhere about me my battle is being
fought, and I must beware, before I know I’m in the thick of it. He is assistant door-man in a factory.
What is fate anyway? One is stronger than I. If there are two of us, it grows harder to be stronger
than I. If there are ten of us, it’s harder still. And if there are a thousand of us and a million, then it’s
very hard, indeed. But it is also nicer and better to be with others. Then feel and I know everything
twice as well. A ship cannot lie in safety without a big anchor, and a man cannot exist without many
other men. The true and the false I will know better now.

George Grosz
See images: http://www.graphicwitness.org/historic/gr0.htm

"Grosz considered himself a propagandist of the social revolution. He not only depicted
victims of the catastrophe of the First World War - the disabled, crippled, and mutilated - he also
portrayed the collapse of capitalist society and its values. His wartime line drawings show him to be a
master of caricature. In a 1925 portfolio of prints Grosz ridiculed Hitler by dressing him in a bearskin,
a swastika tattooed on his left arm. Until 1927 he also painted large allegorical paintings that focused
on the plight of Germany; Count Harry Kessler, a leading intellectual and collector, called these
'modern history pictures.'

"Grosz was called by some the 'bright-red art executioner,' and indeed his political radicalism was well
known. He had joined the German Communist party in 1922. Although a trip to Russia later that year disillusioned him, he continued to work with [radical publisher] Malik Verlag. Feeling out of step with Russia's politics, Grosz resigned from the party in 1923, but the next year he became a leader of Berlin's Rote Gruppe (Red group), an organization of revolutionary Communist artists that prefigured the Assoziation revolutionarer bildender Kunstler Deutschlands (ASSO, Association of revolutionary visual artists of Germany).

"By 1929 the political climate in Germany had shifted to the right, and, at best, Grosz's work was considered anachronistic. The periodical Kunst und Kunster (Art and artists) commented...: 'Dix's Barrikade (Barricade) and Grosz's Winterrnarchen (Winter tale) are now curiosities that only have a place in a wax museum, commemorating the revolutionary time. One doesn't make art with conviction alone.' In a somewhat more positive light, Grosz was described as a historical figure in the periodical Eulenspiegel in 1931: 'No other German artist so consciously used art as a weapon in the fight of the German workers during 1919 to 1923 as did George Grosz. He is one of the first artists in Germany who consciously placed art in the service of society. His drawings...are worthwhile not only in the present but also are documents of proletarian revolutionary art.' These comments were more indicative of the magazine's editorial stance than the tenor of the times, however. More in keeping with popular sentiment, Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration (German art and decoration) described Grosz as one-sided and pathological, 'too obstinate, too fanatical, too hostile to be a descendant of Daumier. 1) Although according to the magazine's art writer he was a master of form, his social point of view was wrongly chosen.

"Grosz's reputation as a political activist and deflator of German greatness was no secret. Menacing portents and premonitions of disaster began to haunt him. A studio assistant appeared in a brown shirt one day and warned him to be careful; a threatening note calling him a Jew was found beside his easel. A nightmare he recounted in his autobiography ended with a friend shouting at him 'Why don't you go to America?' When in the spring of 1932 a cable arrived from the Art Students League in New York, inviting him to teach there during the summer, he accepted immediately. After a short return to Germany, where he was advised that his apartment and studio had been searched by the Gestapo, who were looking for him, the artist emigrated in January 1933. He became an American citizen in 1938.

"In the meantime Grosz was among the defamed artists whose works had been included in two Schandausstellungen (abomination exhibitions) in Mannheim and Stuttgart in 1933 In a letter of July 21, 1933, Grosz wrote that he was secretly pleased and proud about this turn of events, because his inclusion in these exhibitions substantiated the fact that his art had a purpose, that it was true 9 The polemical articles about modern art, "art on the edge of insanity" as the official Nazi newspaper, the Volkscher Beobachter called it, also regularly included Grosz, with particular attention paid to his portraiture. A portrait of Max Hermann-Neisse, later to appear in the exhibition Entartete Kunst, was singled out for the "degenerate loathsomeness of the subject." A total of 285 of Grosz's works were collected from German institutions; five paintings, two watercolors, and thirteen graphic works were included in Entartete Kunst.

"Grosz participated in an anti-Axis demonstration in New York in 1940 and revealed his reaction to the Führer in an interview with Rundfunk Radio in 1958: "When Hitler came, the feeling came over me like that of a boxer; I felt as if I had lost. All our efforts were for nothing." "Grosz returned to Germany permanently in 1958, somewhat disillusioned with his American interlude. He had wanted a new beginning and had tried to deny his political and artistic past, but he was appreciated in America primarily as a satirist, and the work from the period after the First World War was perceived as his best. The biting commentary that marked this early work was that of a misanthropic pessimist, not what he had become: an optimist infatuated with the United States. Grosz was unable to understand the American psyche to the degree that he had the German, and he returned to his homeland in an attempt to regain the momentum he had lost. He died in Berlin in an accident six weeks after his return." - From Stephanie Barron, "Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany"

1) George Grosz, Autobiography of George Grosz (1955)

What can I say about the First World War, a war in which I served as an infantryman, a war I hated at the start and to which I never warmed as it proceeded? I had grown up in a humanist
atmosphere, and **war to me was never anything but horror, mutilation and senseless destruction**, and I knew that many great and wise people felt the same way about it.

I don't even like to talk about it. I hated being a number and not merely because I was a very small one. I let them bellow at me for just as long as it took me to find enough pluck to bellow back at them. I stood up as best I could to their disgusting stupidity and brutality, but I did not, of course, manage to beat them at their own game. It was a fight to the bitter end, one in which I was not defending ideals or beliefs but simply my own self.


In 1916 I was discharged from military service, or rather, given a sort of leave of absence on the understanding that I might be recalled within a few months. And so I was a free man, at least for a while. The collapse of Germany was only a matter of time. All the fine phrases were now no more than stale, rank printer's in on brown substitute paper. I watched it all from my studio in Sudende, living and drawing in a world of my own.

I drew soldiers without noses; war cripples with crab-like limbs of steel; two medical orderlies tying a violent infantryman up in a horse blanket; a one-armed soldier using his good hand to salute a heavily bemedalled lady who had just passed him a biscuit; a colonel, his fly wide open, embracing a nurse; a hospital orderly emptying a bucket full of pieces of human flesh down a pit.

(3) George Grosz, interviewed by Erwin Piscator (1928)

When John Heartfield and I invented *photomontage* in my South End studio at five o'clock on a May morning in 1916, neither of us had any inkling of its great possibilities, nor of the thorny yet successful road it was to take. As so often happens in life, we had stumbled across a vein of gold without knowing it.


I was recalled (to the German Army) in the middle of 1917. My new duties were to train recruits and to transport and guard prisoners of war. But I had enough and one night they found me semi-conscious, head-first in the latrine. I spent some time in hospitals after that.

Whenever I had a moment to spare I would vent my spleen in sketches of everything about me that I hated, either in my notebook or on sheets of writing paper; the brutal faces of my comrades, badly mutilated war cripples, arrogant officers, lascivious nurses.


One day, I gathered that I was to be shot for desertion. Luckily Count Kessler heard about it as well, and interceded on my behalf. In the end, they pardoned me and packed me off to a home for the shell-shocked. Shortly before the end of the war, I was discharged a second time, once again with the observation that I was subject to recall at any time.


I thought the war would never end. And perhaps it never did, either. Peace was declared, but not all of us were drunk with joy or stricken blind. Very little changed fundamentally, except that the proud German soldier had turned into a defeated bundle of misery and the great German army had disintegrated.

I was disappointed, not because we had lost the war but because our people had allowed it to go on for so many years, instead of heeding the few voices of protest against all that mass insanity and slaughter.


In those days (after the First World War) we were all Dadaists. If the word meant anything at all, it meant seething discontent, dissatisfaction and cynicism. Defeat and political ferment always gave rise to that sort of movement.

We held Dadaist meetings, charged a few marks admission and did nothing but tell people the truth, that is, abuse them. The news spread quickly and soon our meetings were sold out, crammed with people wanting to be scandalized or just after fun.

Between insults we performed "art", but the performances were as a rule interrupted. Thus hardly would Walter Mehring begin to rattle away at his typewriter while reciting some piece or other of his own composition, when Heartfield or Hausmann would come out from behind the stage and yell: "Stop! You're not trying to bamboozle that feeble-minded lot down there, are you?"