

From the movement against war to the movement for peace. Key developments in the last century

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Until 1914, the anti-war movement was deeply divided into a proletarian wing and a much weaker wing drawn from the middle classes and the aristocracy. While the latter sought peace under the existing social conditions, the labour movement was convinced that lasting peace was possible only in a socialist society. Nevertheless, they believed that every effort must be made even beforehand to avert the great war that was brewing. The congress in Basel in 1912 and the anti-war demonstrations in the period leading up to August 1914 were the last mass – albeit powerless – expressions of a united socialist quest for peace. After 1917, the communist movement subordinated itself to Soviet policy on both foreign affairs and war, while the social democratic peace movement merged with the bourgeois peace movement and adopted its goals: the creation of a League of Nations; the prohibition in international law of wars of aggression; arbitration; and disarmament negotiations within the existing social order. The opening lecture attempts to shed light on how the goals and forms of activism of the movement against individual wars and for a lasting peace have changed in the course of the hundred years since Basel. It also considers whether the movement has had some degree of success.