

Henri Barbusse: “There will be Nothing Else on Earth but Preparation for War”

By [Stop NATO](#)

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by Henri Barbusse

*The following text was written by renowned French novelist Henri Barbusse in 1916 at the height of World War I. In 1914, at the age of 41, Barbusse enlisted in the French Army against Germany in World War I. He was wounded in the first year of the war. The text is an excerpt from his award winning *Le Feu* (translated by William Fitzwater Wray as *Under Fire*) in 1916. The novel depicts his life and the horrors of World War I.*

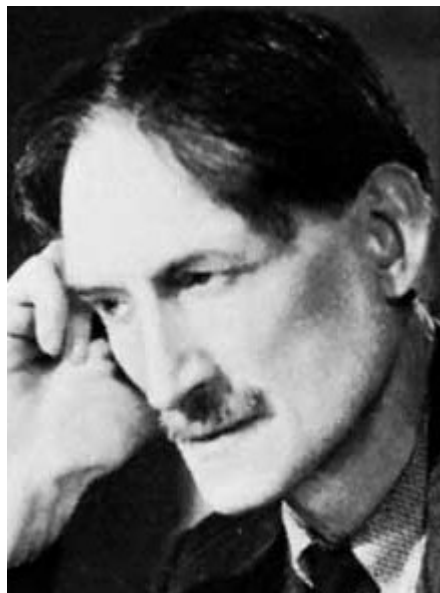
While Barbusse does not provide a particularly optimistic perspective, his grim portrayal and understanding of the history of war, constitutes an important message to the anti-war movement. In many regards, it describes today's world of profit driven militarization and global warfare.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, June 5, 2013. Thanks to Rick Rozoff, Stop Nato, for having brought this excerpt to our attention.

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War will come again after this one. It will come again as long as it can be determined by people other than those who fight. The same causes will produce the same effects, and the living will have to give up all hope.

We cannot say out of what historical conjunctions the final tempests will issue, nor by what fancy names the interchangeable ideals imposed on men will be known in that moment. But the cause — that will perhaps everywhere be fear of the nations' real freedom. What we do



know is that the tempests will come.

Armaments will increase every year amid dizzy enthusiasm. The relentless torture of precision seizes me. We do three years of military training; our children will do five, they will do ten. We pay two thousand million francs a year in preparation for war; we shall pay twenty, we shall pay fifty thousand millions. All that we have will be taken; it will be robbery, insolvency, bankruptcy. War kills wealth as it does men; it goes away in ruins and smoke, and one cannot fabricate gold any more than soldiers. We no longer know how to count; we no longer know anything. A billion — a million millions — the word appears to me printed on the emptiness of things. It sprang yesterday out of war, and I shrink in dismay from the new, incomprehensible word.

There will be nothing else on the earth but preparation for war. All living forces will be absorbed by it; it will monopolize all discovery, all science, all imagination. Supremacy in the air alone, the regular levies for the control of space, will suffice to squander a nation's fortune. For aerial navigation, at its birth in the middle of envious circles, has become a rich prize which everybody desires, a prey they have immeasurably torn in pieces.

Other expenditure will dry up before that on destruction does, and other longings as well, and all the reasons for living. Such will be the sense of humanity's last age.

The battlefields were prepared long ago. They cover entire provinces with one black city, with a great metallic reservoir of factories, where iron floors and furnaces tremble, bordered by a land of forests whose trees are steel, and of wells where sleeps the sharp blackness of snares; a country navigated by frantic groups of railway trains in parallel formation, and heavy as attacking columns. At whatever point you may be on the plain, even if you turn away, even if you take flight, the bright tentacles of the rails diverge and shine, and cloudy sheaves of wires rise into the air. Upon that territory of execution there rises and falls and writhes machinery so complex that it has not even names, so vast that it has not even shape; for aloft — above the booming whirlwinds which are linked from east to west in the glow of molten metal whose flashes are great as those of lighthouses, or in the pallor of scattered electric constellations — hardly can one make out the artificial outline of a mountain range, clapped upon space.

This immense city of immense low buildings, rectangular and dark, is not a city. They are assaulting tanks, which a feeble internal gesture sets in motion, ready for the rolling rush of

their gigantic knee-caps. These endless cannon, thrust into pits which search into the fiery entrails of the earth, and stand there upright, hardly leaning so much as Pisa's tower; and these slanting tubes, long as factory chimneys, so long that perspective distorts their lines and sometimes splay them like the trumpets of Apocalypse — these are not cannon; they are machine-guns, fed by continuous ribbons of trains which scoop out in entire regions —and upon a country, if need be — mountains of profundity.

In war, which was once like the open country and is now wholly like towns — and even like one immense building — one hardly sees the men. On the round-ways and the casemates, the footbridges and the movable platforms, among the labyrinth of concrete caves, above the regiment echeloned downwards in the gulf and enormously upright — one sees a haggard herd of wan and stooping men, men black and trickling, men issuing from the peaty turf of night, men who came there to save their country. They earthed themselves up in some zone of the vertical gorges, and one sees them, in this more accursed corner than those where the hurricane reels.

One senses this human material, in the cavities of those smooth grottoes, like Dante's guilty shades. Infernal glimmers disclose ranged lines of them, as long as roads, slender and trembling spaces of night, which daylight and even sunshine leave befouled with darkness and cyclopean dirt. Solid clouds overhang them and hatchet-charged hurricanes, and leaping flashes set fire every second to the sky's iron-mines up above the damned whose pale faces change not under the ashes of death. They wait, intent on the solemnity and the significance of that vast and heavy booming against which they are for the moment imprisoned. They will be down forever around the spot where they are. Like others before them, they will be shrouded in perfect oblivion. Their cries will rise above the earth no more than their lips...

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