



Gandhi's Wars: Becoming a Nobel Peace Prize Reject - Organizations for Minorities of India

During his life, Gandhi vocally supported every major war, including the Second Boer War, the Bambatha Uprising, World War I, World War II, and India's military annexation of Kashmir, Hyderabad, and Junagarh. He served as a volunteer in the colonial British Army in the first two conflicts.

Politicians everywhere are famous for promising one thing while delivering something completely different. Perhaps this explains why Gandhi claimed to love nonviolence, yet supported every major war of his lifetime. Certainly, his rejection for the Nobel Peace Prize on five separate occasions — in 1937, 1938, 1939, 1947 and 1948 — means others noticed this inconsistency. Some of the reasons for that rejection were explained in a December 1999 article by the Nobel Prize Committee:

Tønnesson, Øyvind. "Mahatma Gandhi, the Missing Laureate." NobelPrize.org, December 1, 1999.

Gandhi had many critics in the international peace movement. The Nobel Committee adviser referred to these critics in maintaining that he was not consistently pacifist, that he should have known that some of his non-violent campaigns towards the British would degenerate into violence and terror. This was something that had happened during the first Non-Cooperation Campaign in 1920-1921, e.g. when a crowd in Chauri Chaura, the United Provinces, attacked a police station, killed many of the policemen and then set fire to the police station.

A frequent criticism from non-Indians was also that Gandhi was too much of an Indian nationalist. In his report, Professor Worm-Müller expressed his own doubts as to whether Gandhi's ideals were meant to be universal or primarily Indian: "One might say that it is significant that his well-known struggle in South Africa was on behalf of the Indians only, and not of the blacks whose living conditions were even worse." ... At a prayer-meeting, Gandhi had made a statement which indicated that he had given up his consistent rejection of war. Based on a telegram from Reuters, The Times, on September 27, 1947, under the headline "Mr. Gandhi on 'war' with Pakistan" reported:

"Mr. Gandhi told his prayer meeting to-night that, though he had always opposed all warfare, if there was no other way of securing justice from Pakistan and if Pakistan persistently refused to see its proved error and continued to minimise it, the Indian Union Government would have to go to war against it. No one wanted war, but he could never advise anyone to put up with injustice. If all Hindus were annihilated for a just cause he would not mind. If there was war, the Hindus in Pakistan could not be fifth columnists. If their loyalty lay not with Pakistan they should leave it. Similarly Muslims whose loyalty was with Pakistan should not stay in the Indian Union."

Following is an overview of the major wars which Gandhi supported.

Second Boer War (1899 - 1902). On Apr. 18, 1900: "I need hardly say that, as soon as war was declared, irrespective of their opinions as to the justness or otherwise of the war, the Indians to a man made up their minds to give their humble support to the British Government during the crisis." [Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Vol. 2, p. 353]

Gandhi also volunteered to serve in the British Army to help the colonialist power suppress the prior claim to the land of the Boer settlers. He raised and led an Indian Ambulance Corps.

Bambatha Rebellion (1906). On Nov. 18, 1905: "If the Government only realised what reserve force is being wasted, they would make use of it and give Indians the opportunity of a thorough training for actual warfare... A very fine volunteer corps could be formed from Colonial-born Indians that would be second to none in Natal in smartness and efficiency."

Prior to Gandhi's arrival in South Africa, the black Zulu South Africans were in the middle of a nonviolent civil rights movement against their colonial British masters. They refused to pay taxes and often even to work. Surprisingly, to those unfamiliar with the real Gandhi, he refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of their movement, and actively campaigned against it.

He endorsed the 1906 British war on South African blacks known by the British as the Bambatha Rebellion. In particular, he sought comfort and assistance for British troops and pursued recruitment into the armed services. Eventually, he was appointed a Sergeant Major in the British Army. He then wrote propaganda about the war, and years later lied about the form and level of his involvement in his autobiography. Read the full story of his cheerleading for the British war effort [here](#).

World War I (1914 - 1918). On June 17, 1918: "[Gandhi said] full assistance should be given in order to overthrow the Germans. He believed they could not preserve the country so long as they had no military traditions... He was ready to go to the war if the people would come forward... To receive military training was the stepping-stone to acquire Home Rule, and so each and every member of the Home Rule League should join." [Vol. 17, p. 76] (Notes from Gandhi's speech at Nadiad record these statements.)

World War II (1939 - 1945). On May 15, 1940: "I do not consider Hitler to be as bad as he is depicted. He is showing an ability that is amazing and he seems to be gaining his victories without much bloodshed." [Vol. 78, p. 219] (This letter was written five days after the horrific and very bloody Nazi invasion of France began.) Later that year, on Dec. 24, he began a letter to Hitler with "Dear Friend" and continued: "That I address you as a friend is no formality." He then told the German leader: "We have no doubt about your bravery or devotion to your fatherland, nor do we believe that you are the monster described by your opponents." [Vol. 79, pp. 453-56]