

CRUSADER AND CASSANDRA

CRUSADER AND CASSANDRA:
THE POLITICS OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

By

RON GOLDSTEIN, B. A.

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AUTHOR: Ron Goldstein, B. A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Derry Novak

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PREFACE

The principal theme of this study of Bertrand Russell is that from his unique position as the last of a notable line of English Whig reformers and as the "godson" of John Stuart Mill, "the saint of rationalism", he attempted to make a unique contribution to political philosophy—and failed. Half of the seventy books Russell wrote were concerned with political and social questions, and of these all but those written during his last years combine the best values of English Whiggery with nineteenth century liberal humanism and reflect Russell's endeavour to adjust to the complexities of the twentieth century. Liberal humanism permeates Russell's views concerning human nature and education, and I hope to show that these views provide unsatisfactory and ineffectual solutions to the problems Russell tackles. It is, however, when Russell considers the reconstruction of society that he is confronted with his greatest dilemma. Too wise and too honest to equate Fabian reforms and welfare programmes with socialism, his individualism and Whig background obscured the one fact which he could never bring himself truly to face: the fact of the class struggle, the irreconcilable interests of the employers and the employed. Russell's dilemma was that he had a traditional dislike of popular movements and yet knew that the effective socialist reconstruction of society would take place only through the successful outcome of the class

struggle. For a brief period, he embraced the cause of revolutionary socialism, but this was primarily an emotional response, one of many political attitudes which were to conflict throughout his life with his fundamental liberalism. The result was pessimism and despair, conditions which plagued Russell and which, I believe, could have been avoided, in his politics at least, were it not for his misunderstanding of Marxism. Russell, although motivated by considerations of the highest ideals for the betterment of humanity, was essentially an individualist who increasingly despaired of mankind. Confidence in ordinary men and women, and in the justification and efficacy of mass action, may have liberated him from this dilemma. In what follows I draw attention to the enthusiasm, vigour, and the obvious zest which Russell displayed in his periods of political activism during the First World War and during his campaigns for nuclear disarmament and civil disobedience. It was, I suggest, no coincidence that, arising from these periods of intense political activity in a popular movement of protest, Russell was to embrace, albeit briefly, the Marxist theory of class struggle and revolutionary action. Indeed, it will be maintained in this study that the lasting monument to Russell will be neither his political philosophy, nor even his work in logic and mathematics, but his passionate sense of commitment, and especially the activity of his last years, when he placed his entire energies and reputation in the service of the quest for a peaceful world. While most

philosophers have been content to tell us what we ought to do to achieve the good, Russell, by the example of his sense of commitment, demonstrated how necessary it is to combine theory with practice. There are weaknesses in Russell's approaches, for he was a most human being, and I hope to establish that when applied to social problems his celebrated logic was often faulty, his politics naive, his individualism and emotionalism damaging to the causes he had taken up. Nevertheless, he was, indeed, "the last of the Europeans whom Socrates and Spinoza would have acknowledged as their countryman",¹ for his compassion lights up the frequent gloom of his analysis of the human condition.

It was Russell's misfortune to witness the defeat of liberal-humanist ideas and the perversion and sacrifice of socialist ideals, to live through a period of social disintegration rather than social reconstruction based on humanist principles. All the major issues of his youth that touched his compassion—oppression, intolerance, inequality of opportunity, imperialism, and war—had in many respects intensified during his lifetime. His political mentors—Locke, Mill, and William Morris—could expect the future to justify their hopeful view of man, but it was Russell's fate to see state education at work as state indoctrination, to note with despair that enfranchised women

¹Victor Purcell, Studies in the Social History of China and South East Asia, p. 16.

were as unenlightened and powerless as men, and that the exploited, if given the chance, would become exploiters. "People seem good while they are oppressed but they only wish to become oppressors in their turn . . . life is nothing but a competition to be the criminal rather than the victim."²

These were powerful factors in the life of Bertrand Russell, which when combined with his class outlook, always at variance with his socialist humanitarianism, help us understand his essentially pessimistic view of man and his failure to adjust the liberal humanism of Mill to the realities of the twentieth century.

²Bertrand Russell, Quoted in Ronald Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 390.

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF THE MIND

(1) Human Nature

At the root of Russell's liberal humanism is his refusal to accept that this is "the best of all possible worlds", and his fervent, sometimes optimistic and sometimes despairing, belief that it rests on enlightened individuals to make mankind aware of its own potential for positive change.¹

Russell has many misgivings, but no doubts about the nature of man, for he sees man from the viewpoint of one of the "enlightened ones". No philosopher of importance has been more engaged in the issues of his time, and no other lived so long. He asks us to accept him as a man among men, not as a "philosopher", yet he wants us to accept his opinions concerning the "impulses" and "desires" of man as fact, not from reason but from intuition. No evidence is provided for these opinions and when we read about them, we often feel that we are viewing man as Russell does, in a detached, yet subjective, manner:

¹"My aim is to suggest a philosophy of politics based upon the belief that impulse has more effect than conscious purpose in moulding men's lives . . . liberation of creativeness ought to be the principle of reform both in politics and economics". Bertrand Russell, Principles of Social Reconstruction, p. 6.

The greater part of human impulses may be divided into two classes, those which are possessive, and those which are constructive or creative . . . possessiveness is either defensive or aggressive; it seeks either to retain against a robber, or to acquire from a present holder. In either case an attitude of hostility toward others is of its essence.²

As Henry Parris has pointed out: " . . . his method is to state his intuition of the truth as self-evident, asking the readers to assume the validity for the sake of argument and then deduce logical consequences from it".³ There is, of course, some reason for believing that Russell is correct when he asks us to recognise the possessive and constructive impulses of man; some people may also feel intuitively, with Russell, that the ruling passions are indeed those of acquisitiveness, vanity, rivalry and desire for power, which, along with the basic instincts of hunger, sex and shelter, are the prime movers in politics, but these opinions remain only assumptions, and there are no means of testing this hypothesis by an appeal to evidence. We are similarly expected to accept as an empirical truth the various "desires" of man.

To make the world better, in the sense of involving more satisfaction of desire, it will be well to promote desires which embody or encourage affection, benevolence, creativeness and cooperation rather

²B. Russell, Political Ideals, p. 71.

³Henry Parris, "The Political Thought of Bertrand Russell", pp. 9-10. (Unpublished manuscript in Russell Archives, McMaster University, Hamilton, subsequently referred to as "R. A.").

than such as embody or encourage hatred, envy, destructiveness and competition.⁴

A "desire" is, therefore, anything which embodies the "impulses" and "passions" directed towards a particular end.⁵

Despite the scrupulously rational analysis of his metaphysics and his often stated belief in the empiricist philosophy of Locke and Hume, Russell was convinced that reason could play no part in his moral philosophy.

Since no way can be even imagined for deciding a difference as to values, the conclusion is forced upon us that the difference is one of tastes, not one as to any objective truth. When we assert that this or that has value, we are giving expression to our own emotions, not to a fact that would still be true if our personal feelings were different.⁶

The belief in the subjectivity of moral judgements was held by G. E. Moore, whose influence Russell has frequently acknowledged, and it is not my purpose to argue with it here. What is inconsistent, however, is that Russell, while maintaining that there can be no objective ground for

⁴B. Russell, Outline of a Political Philosophy, p. 4. Unpublished manuscript (1943), R. A.

⁵The "good" as defined by Russell is whatever causes the greatest possible amount of satisfaction of desire. When a number of desires can be satisfied by the same state of affairs they are "compossible"—a term borrowed from Leibnitz to replace, for no apparent reason, the word "compatible". This whole question, as discussed in Human Society in Ethics and Politics, appears to be an attempt to inject mathematical logic into moral philosophy. The general effect seems to be to separate moral issues from reality.

⁶B. Russell, The Listener (September 23, 1948), quoted in John Lewis, Bertrand Russell, Philosopher & Humanist, p. 68.

moral judgements, nevertheless postulates his own values as to man's impulses and desires, as if they were categorical imperatives, objectively right for all mankind.

The individual is, according to Russell, controlled by positive and negative impulses and passions, which determine whether the desires are to be positive or negative. We are not told what it is that enables the positive or the negative to dominate at a given time, although we are given a hint about what Russell thinks to be necessary in the following:

Obstacles to a good world lie partly in institutions, partly in the passions that support those institutions and are supported by them. Changes in both must go hand in hand. Changes in dominant passions will have to be affected largely by education. What are the passions that prevent improvement? Chief are greed, love of power, racial intolerance, envy and fear.⁷

Twenty-seven years earlier Russell had written that

Men's impulses and desires may be divided into those that are creative and those that are possessive . . . the supreme principle, both in politics and in private life, should be to promote all that is creative, and so to diminish the impulses and desires that centre round possession.⁸

In his book Power: A New Social Analysis, Russell refers to the emotional differences between men, pointing out that some human desires are not capable of complete satisfaction,

⁷B. Russell, Outline of a Political Philosophy, p. 16. Unpublished manuscript, R. A.

⁸B. Russell, Principles of Social Reconstruction, pp. 161-162.

especially the desires for power and glory. This thesis is his point of departure for an extensive examination of the various forms that power takes.

No evidence is offered by Russell to support these basic assumptions of his views of man. We may, with equal justification, challenge them as a priori and offer as an alternative the view that the passions, impulses, and desires of man are not the prime movers in politics, but are a product of more basic factors, such as the material existence of man and, in particular, of man's relationship to the forces of production.

Russell touches upon the effects of capitalism on the minds of men in Principles of Social Reconstruction, where he discusses a philosophy of life which maintains that what matters most to a person is his income, a philosophy of which he disapproves, while at the same time giving no evidence for what he considers is its wide acceptance.

It is clearly not enough to be told that men have conflicting passions and desires; it is necessary to recognise the causes of them. That such causes exist within society is evidenced by the predominance of some passions at the expense of others, at different stages of human society within individuals and within society as a whole. Most people, were they to reflect upon it, would recognise that changes have taken place in man's attitudes and desires because of the decline, first of feudal and subsequently of

capitalist society, and that there has been a growth of organization which has occurred at the expense of traditional attitudes and cherished beliefs. While Russell has frequently discussed the role that the State performs in promoting and suppressing impulses and desires,⁹ he pays insufficient attention to the changing nature of the methods of production in this respect. To pose cooperation against competitiveness, and to cherish a creative attitude to life rather than passive involvement, is in Russell's terms a call to return to the best values of an agrarian mode of production rather than face the possibility that the capitalist system by its very nature inhibits cooperativeness and true creativity. In fact, Russell has never seriously considered whether the class structure of society, with all its privileges and property rights, is at the basis of man's relation to society, from which may spring his attitudes towards his own and other men's property, his acquisitiveness, greed, and fear. What breeds fear? Superstition and ignorance, says Russell. But in the final analysis many of our superstitious beliefs are tied to the basic needs of man. The relationship of man to religion, to prayer, and the worship of ancient gods are directly connected to man's overwhelming impulse for life over death, and, hence, his

⁹See, for example, Principles of Social Reconstruction, Prospects for Industrial Civilization (with Dora Russell), Political Ideals, Freedom versus Organization, 1814-1914.

need for food and shelter. But there are other causes of fear; Russell admits to lack of security as a cause of fear,¹⁰ but, surely, the lack of security to provide the necessities of life, which not only breeds fear, but also envy, ambition and intolerance, is the most basic cause: "Economic contractions", says Harold Laski, "always mean fear and fear always breeds suspicion."¹¹

Russell was acutely aware of the passions and impulses that somehow must stop being the causes of man's problems and become instead the solution to them, yet he could find no rational answer to how this may come about.

It could be that Russell's totally appealing literary style is a reason for the usually uncritical acceptance of his theories of human nature. There may be some fantasy, but there is always a great deal of common sense. When we read The Conquest of Happiness or Unpopular Essays, we are made aware of what man is capable and of what life ought to be. Our emotions are assailed by continual passages of wit and charm, despite the writer's skepticism.¹² We are reminded

¹⁰"In all classes, from the lowest to almost the highest, economic fear governs men's thought by day and their dreams at night, making their work nerve-racking and their leisure unrefreshing". B. Russell, In Praise of Idleness, p. 84.

¹¹Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, p. 4.

¹²"Man is a rational animal—so at least I have been told. Throughout a long life I have looked diligently for evidence in favour of this statement, but so far I have not had the good fortune to come across it, though I have searched in many countries spread over three continents." B. Russell, Unpopular Essays, p. 71.

that Russell's Nobel Prize is not for mathematics or even for his work for peace, but for literature, and, indeed, he is a master of prose style. "All poetry should be the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", said Wordsworth, not a favourite poet of Russell's, but this remark applies well to Russell's prose. But there is something lacking in Russell's writings, just as the appeal of Mozart or Haydn can elevate us and provide us with a sense of belonging to a civilized world despite its ugliness and vulgarity, and yet not have the capacity to show us how to make life better, so, too, with Russell we are shown what the path may look like but are given no guide to reach it. Russell's view of man consequently is both elevating and depressing, optimistic and pessimistic; while it moves us, it also encourages our apathy because of its unattainable ideals. We are left, after all has been read, with a curious sense of man's fate, of glorious opportunity missed: "I felt

"Since Adam and Eve ate the apple man has never refrained from any folly of which he was capable." The Good Citizens' Alphabet (June 17, 1953), in Barry Feinberg (ed.), The Collected Stories of Bertrand Russell.

These are two of many examples of Russell's witty skepticism. Sadly, in later years similar opinions were voiced in a mood of outright pessimism, unrelieved by the wit of earlier times. For example, ". . . human beings can be convinced of many things, to believe in this or in that, to consume certain kinds of foods and not others, to dress in a certain way, to pay tribute to this or that God. But it is absolutely impossible to convince anybody to give up one ounce of his power. There lies the key to this history of tears which is the human destiny." B. Russell, "Interview with Enrique Raab", Sunday Citizen (October 31, 1965), pp.11-13.

justified at last in my inarticulate dissatisfaction with his plausible arguments which had never quite convinced me; they had not convinced him either."¹³ Russell's daughter, Katharine, in this sentence refers to her search for discovering the purpose of life and points out how her father's books had not helped her until she read the following passage in his Autobiography:

We feel that the man who brings widespread unhappiness at the expense of misery to himself is a better man than the man who brings unhappiness to others and happiness to himself. I do not know of any rational ground for this view, or, perhaps, for the somewhat more rational view that whatever the majority desires is preferable to what the minority desires. These are truly ethical problems, but I do not know of any way in which they can be solved except by politics or war. All I can say on this subject is that an ethical opinion can only be defended by an ethical axiom, but, if the axiom is not accepted there is no way of reaching a rational conclusion.¹⁴

Katharine later went on to quote Russell as speaking of the "impossibility of reconciling ethical feelings with ethical doctrines", and acknowledging that in the depths of his mind "this dark frustration brooded constantly."¹⁵ "He had had to struggle to keep despair at bay, and the optimistic visions of his popular books had not come easily to him; they were products of the will, maintained by determined effort against a sense of desolation that was always lying

¹³Katharine Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, p. 182.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 182.

in wait for him."¹⁶

This ever-present sense of desolation, the loneliness and feeling of isolation of his childhood, never left him:

. . . throughout my life I longed to feel that oneness with large bodies of human beings . . . I have imagined myself in turn a liberal, a socialist, a pacifist, but I have never been any of these things in any profound sense. Always the sceptical intellect, when I had most wished to be silent, has whispered doubts to me, has cut me off from the facile enthusiasms of others and has transported me into a desolate solitude . . . I am conscious that human affection is to me at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God.¹⁷

There is a sense of tragedy here, in many ways epitomizing, as in so much else in Russell's life, many of the conflicts of modern times.

During a long life Russell had witnessed a succession of cherished liberal and socialist beliefs come to failure. Universal education was the panacea of John Stuart Mill and William Morris, but in the hands of the State it has too often served to reinforce the least civilizing impulses of man. "Remember your humanity and forget the rest" is a cry from the heart of a humane but disillusioned man, but it remains a slogan, nevertheless. It does not assist the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 183.

See also Russell's letter to Gilbert Murray (May 9, 1951). "I will admit that my optimism is an act of will, and I could just as rationally proclaim pessimism—not more rationally and, I think, less usefully".

¹⁷B. Russell, The Autobiography, Vol. II, p. 38.

oppressed of the earth and is unlikely to influence the heart or the mind of the oppressor. And therein lies the dilemma of the liberal humanist, for he is doomed to despair and disillusionment when his appeal to liberty and justice goes unheeded by desperate people involved in the reality of political action: "An interest in liberty begins when men have ceased to be overwhelmed by the problem of sheer existence."¹⁸

A good example of this occurred during Russell's visit to China in 1920. Writing at this time, Mao Tse-tung said:

In his lecture at Changsha, Russell . . . took a position in favour of communism but against the dictatorship of the workers and peasants. He said that one should employ the method of education to change the consciousness of the propertied classes, and that in this way it would not be necessary to limit freedom or to have recourse to war and bloody revolution . . . My objections to Russell's viewpoint can be stated in a few words: 'This is all very well as a theory, but it is unfeasible in practice'. Education requires (1) money, (2) people, and (3) instruments. In today's world, money is entirely in the hands of the capitalists. Those who have charge of education are all either capitalists or slaves of capitalists. In today's world, the schools and the press, the two most important instruments of education, are entirely under capitalist control.¹⁹

Mao goes on to explain how the capitalist state protects itself and its educational system, and that the only means

¹⁸ Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, p. 7.

¹⁹ Mao Tse-tung, "Letter to Ts'ai Ho-sen" (November 1920), in S. Schramm (ed), Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung, p. 296.

left to the proletariat is to seize political power, for the capitalist class will never of its own accord relinquish it without struggle. In this revolutionary response to the liberal idealist, the young Mao Tse-tung reminds us what Russell, in China as Professor of Philosophy at Peking University, and recently back from Soviet Russia, had apparently forgotten—that a class struggle was raging in the China of 1920, a society torn apart by debt, slavery under feudal landlords, famine on a mass scale, widespread illiteracy, and colonial exploitation through the "treaty ports" of the major imperialist powers. Russell's The Problem of China treats these basic problems of Chinese life rather superficially, and his own feelings about life in Peking were in sharp contrast to his hostile reactions to revolutionary Russia. "Our first months in Peking were a time of absolute and complete happiness . . . Our Chinese friends were delightful. The work was interesting and Peking itself inconceivably beautiful".²⁰ Russell felt very comfortable in China, a country where the scholar aristocrat was regarded throughout its long civilisation as the person deserving of the highest respect and attention, and where a merchant would rather accumulate profit to provide a life of leisure and learning than use it to develop his business towards monopoly growth. Taoist philosophy appealed to Russell,

²⁰The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vol. II, p. 127.

with its belief that a man could spend his life in peaceful communion with nature. This does not refer to the peasant toiling on his rented plot, but to a man of leisure, "thinking in long stretches of time". There is an interesting contrast to be seen in Russell's books on Soviet Russia and China, The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism and The Problem of China. They provide us with a fascinating insight into Russell's ability to embrace a cause and then drop it for reasons which probably have more to do with his personality than logic has so far satisfactorily explained.

The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism marks a turning point in Russell's attitude toward social reconstruction and particularly toward Marxism. Twenty-four years had passed since the publication, in 1896, of Russell's first book, German Social Democracy, in which he discussed the theoretical basis of socialism and the historical investigations of Marx and Engels: ". . . in which they sought to exhibit the economic causes underlying all the great changes in human institutions and beliefs".²¹ While Russell had some reservations about this, they were not strongly held,²² his main criticism being that Marx had taken English capitalism as the source of most of his authority: "This overwhelming influence of English conditions has, I think, been a source

²¹B. Russell, German Social Democracy, p. 8.

²²B. Russell, "Why I Am Not A Communist", in Portraits from Memory, p. 212.

of much confusion and false judgement, though it is of superiority to the antediluvian and paternal views of many German economists and German rulers".²³

Following the publication of The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism in 1920, the problems of the relationship between man's beliefs and society were henceforth to be more clearly defined by Russell in his growing opposition to Marx, and seen by him to be entirely dependent upon men somehow changing their nature. The era of the psychological approach to politics had arrived, and Freud was replacing Marx. Psychoanalysis, as an antidote to individual problems of alienation, was (and still is among large sections of the middle class) a substitute for radicalism in politics. Following Russell's passionate pacifist activities of the First World War and his brief embrace with revolutionary socialism in 1919,²⁴ for the next thirty years Russell's political activism was replaced with programmes of proposals for reform in education, marriage, work, and even how we may "conquer" happiness. A philosophy of life which was linked to man's "inherent" desires stressed the problem of individual defects and individual needs and relegated social criticism and the need for social change to a secondary role.

²³B. Russell, German Social Democracy, p. 9.

²⁴See Chapters II and III following.

(2) Education and Individuality

Russell's views on education are dominated by his belief in human nature as a cause rather than an effect of social conditions. It is an inhibiting belief and one that prevents Russell's educational theory from achieving its full development, as I shall shortly discuss.

Between the years 1927 and 1934, Russell and his wife, Dora, ran an unorthodox school, Beacon Hill, in the south of England. In his excellent book, The Life of Bertrand Russell, Ronald Clark points out that the reason the Russells decided to open a school of their own was primarily due to their reluctance to have their children, John and Kate, educated by the state or at a public school, which they could not afford in any case. They also believed that there was a very real need for an education which would encourage children to question rather than conform:

We began to consider whether human development might not be served by an attempt at providing a really modern education which instead of training young children to maintain every prejudice of traditional society, or teaching them new dogmas, should try to help them to think and work for themselves, and so fit them for meeting the problems of the changing world they will have to face when they grow up. This was what we set out to do in our school.²⁵

Despite their criticism of A. S. Neil's school, Summerhill, it was the Russells' school that proved to be a mistake, at

²⁵New Republic (September 9, 1931).

least in its initial phase. Within two months of its opening, as early as November 1927, Russell was describing the school as a nuisance which curtailed his freedom and entailed a lot of hard work. Two years later he complained that it made John and Kate ill and no longer served its primary purpose.²⁶

In his Autobiography, Russell wrote:

For us personally and for our two children, there were special worries. The other boys naturally thought our boy was unduly favoured, whereas we, in order not to favour him or his sister, had to keep an unnatural distance between them and us except during the holidays. They, in turn, suffered from a divided loyalty; they had either to be sneaks or to practice deceit towards their parents. The complete happiness that had existed in our relations to John and Kate was thus destroyed, and was replaced by awkwardness and embarrassment.²⁷

Much of Kate's book, My Father, Bertrand Russell, refers to this period, which she clearly considers to be a traumatic experience in her own and her brother's life, for suddenly they had to share their parents' affection and attention with other children, many of whom were " . . . problems, sent to us as a last resort, and they vented on others the griefs and frustrations of their private lives".²⁸ There were other reasons, too, which caused Russell's loss of enthusiasm for Beacon Hill. He later admitted: " . . . I found myself deficient in skill as an administrator. The

²⁶R. W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 429.

²⁷B. Russell, The Autobiography, Vol. II, p. 155.

²⁸K. Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, p. 77.

school, therefore, was a failure . . . I wrote two books on education and spent a lot of time thinking about it but, as anyone might have expected, I was better at talking than at doing".²⁹ A considerable amount of newspaper publicity, which was almost entirely either critical or derisive, surrounded the entire enterprise, which culminated in the separation of the Russells in 1934, but which began to break down as a joint venture from 1930 onwards, when Russell's feelings towards Dora underwent a decisive change.³⁰

Russell had written of the importance of education as a political institution in Principles of Social Reconstruction (1916) and Roads to Freedom (1918), and his views, at times echoing John Stuart Mill and Alfred North Whitehead, were developed with the publication of On Education, Especially In Early Childhood in 1926. This book, which Russell later regarded as being unduly optimistic, and proposing unnecessarily harsh methods for the training of young children,³¹ was followed in 1932 by the second of his two major books on the subject, Education and The Social Order. The message of

²⁹B. Russell, Portraits from Memory, p. 14.

³⁰In 1930 Dora had given birth to a daughter. Russell, who was not the father said, "I tried to endure the new child and behave toward her as if she were my own . . . but the resultant strain of daily and hourly insincerity was intolerable and made family life a torture". R. W. Clark, Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 443.

³¹See, B. Russell, Autobiography, Vol. II, p. 151.

this book is clear: education has to be subversive if it is to have real worth in the sense that all the things we normally take for granted, all accepted assumptions, should be challenged and examined. Merely teaching pupils to memorize data is worthless, and the attempt of conventional education to enforce conventional mediocrity is criminal. Russell asks whether it should be the duty of education to train good individuals or good citizens. He points out that the problem with state education is that it is interested solely in the purpose of training citizens.³² Russell concludes that while education in citizenship has grave dangers, especially when orthodoxy is taught at the expense of truth, there is some need to train citizens in aspects of social behaviour and social cooperation in the interests of social cohesiveness.

Russell's hopes were high at the beginning of the Beacon Hill experiment, and despite the complexities of his personal affairs, there is a mood of great optimism in his two books on educational theory. While she had doubts about the value of her father's theories of education, Katharine Tait provides us with a portrait of a warm, affectionate

³²Twenty-two years later in a B.B.C. broadcast on J. S. Mill, Russell said, "Mill spoke of the need for education but not how it should be done, in fact, Fichte's idea of teaching his views of superiority to German children shows that the world would be a better place if State Education had never been inaugurated." "Russell on J. S. Mill" (December 22, 1954), R. A.

human being who is happiest when in the company of children. And certainly Russell looks happiest in his photographs when there are children present. He has described his own childhood in the Autobiography as an unhappy time, a period so fundamental to the motivations of his entire life that he placed great importance on early childhood memories as the basis of a child's later development. His essentially Freudian approach to human nature led to some large assumptions and some inconsistencies in his education theory. Russell starts with the belief that ". . . wars were due in the main to the insane and destructive impulses which lurk in the unconscious of those who have been unwisely handled in infancy, childhood and adolescence."³³ Russell's own infancy, childhood and adolescence were such as to lead us to the opinion, if we were to accept this strange conclusion, that he would possess insane and destructive impulses and hence support the First World War. In fact, he was the most fervent and energetic opponent of it. He again ignores his own experience when discussing the education of young children, for, despite his own attitude to work, which he always considered to be the result of self-control and willpower, and his view that ". . . there is a kind of discipline which is necessary to almost all achievement",³⁴ his approach to the training

³³Alan Wood, The Passionate Sceptic, p. 139.

³⁴B. Russell, Principles of Social Reconstruction, p. 110.

of young children was based on making good behaviour a matter of habit rather than self-control. This attitude results from Russell's attraction, at this time (between 1925 and 1935), to the theories of the American child psychologist J. B. Watson, whose behaviourist theories Russell largely accepted. In "The Aims of Education",³⁵ an article written, but not published, in December 1928, Russell discussed the theories of Watson, and also those of Sigmund Freud, and concluded that there is a sphere in the education of young children for each; behaviourism applies where a certain kind of action is useful, but where there is no strong emotional drive, brushing one's teeth, for example, and psychoanalysis can be of benefit where those activities, leading to success and achievement, are concerned. The result was not always in the best interests of the child or the child's education. Russell, according to Alan Wood,³⁶ was fond of describing how he had himself cured a boy of irrational fear of the sea and taught him to enjoy swimming by holding him in the water despite his struggles.

Katharine Tait refers to this incident, for it was her brother John, at the time three years old, who was afraid of

³⁵B. Russell, "The Aims of Modern Education". Unpublished article, R. A. See also B. Russell, An Outline of Philosophy, written in 1927, which has a number of chapters dealing with J. B. Watson's behaviourist theories.

³⁶A. Wood, The Passionate Sceptic, p. 143.

the cold waves of the Atlantic. She quotes Russell:

. . . every day for about a fortnight, we plunged him up to the neck in the sea, in spite of his struggles and cries. Every day they grew less; before they ceased, he began to ask to be put in . . . Fear had not ceased altogether, but had been partly repressed by pride.³⁷

John, who grew increasingly reticent and withdrawn as he became older, refused to discuss this incident later.

Kate's reminiscence of her childhood and the school leads us to the conclusion that Freud and J. B. Watson, in the well-meaning but illogical mind of a philosopher of logic, opened a gulf between theory and childhood happiness which was as wide as that which Russell himself experienced amidst the moral austerity of Pembroke Lodge:

It was not easy to please them. My father used to tell with amusement of my childish effort to write John's name upon the sand when I was perhaps two years old. Having succeeded in this stupendous achievement I fetched him to admire the result. 'Yes, that's very nice, Kate . . . very nice indeed. But, you know, we usually write the 'J' the other way round.' He was such a kind man, yet his method of education seems full of brutal assaults on the childish mind.³⁸

Later in his life, Russell was prepared to modify some of his educational theories. In the Autobiography,³⁹ he refers to several things that he thought, in retrospect, were mistaken in the principles by which Beacon Hill was

³⁷K. Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, p. 67.

³⁸Ibid., p. 67.

³⁹B. Russell, The Autobiography, Vol. II, p. 155.

operated, for example, that young children in a group cannot be happy without some order and routine, and become bored, bullying and destructive if left to themselves, needing adults to take the initiative in organizing games and amusements.

He wrote:

. . . an educator should think of a child as a gardener thinks of a plant, as something to be made to grow by having the right soil and the right amount of water. If your roses fail to bloom, it does not occur to you to whip them, but you try to find out what has been amiss in your treatment of them.⁴⁰

This statement is a reflection of Russell's essentially humanitarian, common sense approach to education, owing nothing to J. B. Watson or Freud. But it came too late, for in 1951, when he wrote this, he considered himself to have failed as a parent.⁴¹

Despite the moving conclusion to her book, when she thanks God that Russell had been her father, Katharine Tait clearly thought that Beacon Hill was a bad experience for both her brother and herself, and she refers to her time there as "an emotional disaster". She criticizes the idealistic attitude of both her parents who operated the school on beliefs

as false and fantastic as any religious superstition. Those of us who were pupils there did not learn to rule our lives by reason (though we did try) and we

⁴⁰B. Russell, New Hopes for a Changing World, p. 201.

⁴¹B. Russell, Autobiography, Vol. II, p. 190.

did not find, when we grew up, that the outside world responded with enthusiasm to our rational arguments for reform.⁴²

There is a distinction to be made between the operation of Beacon Hill and Russell's ideas on education. It is partly due to Russell's inability to practice fully what he preached in the conditions of the school, and partly because he and Dora did not always agree on some matters, such as the importance of cleanliness, self-discipline, and so on. While his views and those of Dora were combined in the running of the school, it was Dora who was its mainstay, for Russell was often in America on fund-raising lecture tours. Dora's views on education were very much her own and were as influential as Russell's, and the ideas of the school had probably little to do with its failure.⁴³ What really made the school impossible, as Alan Wood has pointed out, was that "it became a natural receptacle for specially difficult children and with them the attempt to allow free development could only lead to pandemonium."⁴⁴ Russell's wider educational theories have been influential in Britain, at least, in helping to bring about an end to compulsory religious

⁴²K. Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, p. 97.

⁴³See Dora Russell, The Right to be Happy, Children, Why Do We Have Them? and In Defence of Children. In fact, Dora continued the school until 1942, when it closed owing to the danger of air raids and the evacuation of its students.

⁴⁴A. Wood, The Passionate Sceptic, p. 141.

teaching in the schools (unfortunately, the comparative teaching of all major religions, which would be a more progressive step still, does not take place in schools anywhere, to my knowledge). Nursery schools and kindergartens, where children are taught to read and write as well as play, are now in existence, and there has been a revolution in the opportunity for children of all classes to receive a post-secondary education. The compulsory teaching of Latin and Greek, on which Russell considered he had wasted his time, ended with the opening up of university entrance to a much wider cross-section of British youth. However, despite these advances, the content and purposes of education, which for Russell were the most significant questions, have been largely ignored.

While some behavioural and Freudian methods have been widely adopted, such as pleasant learning surroundings, encouragement of self-expression, more contact between parent and teacher, co-education and the discussion of sex, the political implications of education, as an instrument of the state, remain almost untouched by modern educational advance.

Competition at the expense of cooperation, overwork at the expense of imaginative thought, patriotism and nationalism rather than internationalism, and lack of toleration of the opinions of others are all bad features of education today, just as they were when Russell placed so much emphasis on their negative influence fifty years ago. State education,

Russell pointed out, turns the teacher into a civil servant whose job it is to carry out the wishes of men who have no experience of dealing with young people and who see education as a form of propaganda.

In Unpopular Essays, written in 1950, a world-weary Russell writes:

There is no need for men to be cruel, on the contrary, I am persuaded that most cruelty results from thwarting in early years; above all what a teacher should endeavour to produce in his pupils, if democracy is to survive, is the kind of tolerance that springs from an endeavour to understand those who are different from ourselves.⁴⁵

Russell writes of two types of teachers, the type who loves to teach and the type who loves to govern,⁴⁶ and this is still one of the fundamental problems of education, in so far as it is quite impossible for the "man who loves to govern" to allow individuality of thought and expression in his pupils.

Russell understands that the highly intelligent child needs special attention, and may have great difficulty getting it in the normal education system; he puts two reasons forward, one deriving from his own elitist education:

A great deal of needless pain and friction would be saved to clever children if they were not compelled to associate intimately with stupid contemporaries. There is an idea that rubbing up against all and sundry in youth is a good preparation for

⁴⁵B. Russell, Unpopular Essays, p. 121.

⁴⁶B. Russell, Education and the Social Order, p. 141.

life. This appears to me to be rubbish. No one, in later life, associates with all and sundry.⁴⁷

The other reason is rather more the product of his common sense: "The advantages of special schools for the cleverer children are very great. Not only will they avoid social persecution, thereby escaping much pain . . . from a purely intellectual point of view they can be taught much faster . . . "⁴⁸ With the widening of educational opportunity, the sacrifice of the highly intelligent child's needs for special attention to the interests of mediocrity is certainly a problem at the present time. The mere accumulation of facts, and the senseless emphasis on the quantity of work in schools and universities, which allow no time for the leisure and pleasure of the contemplative pursuit of knowledge, are as evident today as when Russell wrote about them.⁴⁹ Russell also railed against examinations as a means of determining a student's ability, in this matter he was raising an objection which has been voiced for at least one hundred and seventy years.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁹"The Provincial Universities suffer from one defect which is always found when uneducated people, whether business men or state officials, create a place of learning. I mean excess of lectures and lack of leisure for the students." B. Russell, "What a Labour Government Could Do With the Universities" (September 14, 1923), R. A.

⁵⁰"Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared: For the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer", Charles Colten (1780-1832), quoted in Frank Muir (ed), The Frank Muir Book, p. 67.

Modern educators have ignored not only Russell and the wise Confucius ("learning without thinking and thinking without learning are both a waste of time"), but also their own experience as students, for they were once on the receiving end of so much that is wrong with the educational system. Teachers ought to treat with extreme caution behavioural theories that provide solutions for overworked administrators of overcrowded schools rather than answers to the problems of the individual child. In this regard, it is most important that teachers should give more weight to their own childhood memories when approaching their task.

Teachers today are, in one respect at least, different from when Russell identified them as employees of the State; they are more militantly organized and as such should be more aware of the immediate implications of the decline of capitalist society. For teachers to be in tune with all other sections of the work force, and to recognize themselves as an integral part of the movement for social progress, are recent developments, which is, in my opinion, beneficial to the student. This trend is still in its infancy and less apparent in the universities where intelligent academics are frequently unwilling to talk seriously about politics, war, peace, or slumps.

Russell was entirely opposed to the divorce of educational practice from life, and one of the positive aspects of Beacon Hill, mentioned by Katharine Tait, was the involve-

ment of the teachers with the everyday activities of the school. Part of the problem which separates the student from the teacher at university is due to excess of lectures, and Russell drew attention to this problem as early as 1923: "Education by lecturers makes students the intellectual slaves of their teachers, it gives them no chance to develop their own bent and it crushes originality."⁵¹

Russell, who regarded his undergraduate years at Cambridge as the best years of his life,⁵² was opposed to tinkering with the established universities; he considered Oxford and Cambridge more rebellious and independent-minded than the less well established universities, but he was totally against wealth, family position or ability at games as criteria of admission. A university education should be a privilege of special ability, and students who pass a stiff entrance examination should receive free tuition and sufficient expenses to maintain themselves at public cost.

There has been an improvement, owing to scholarships and grants, in the opportunity for a serious student to enter university, regardless of his family's income, but Russell's criteria for a university education to be a privilege

⁵¹"What a Labour Government Could Do with the Universities" (September 14, 1923), R. A.

⁵²"For my part, what stands out as of most value from my undergraduate years is conversation in groups of half-a-dozen to a dozen, stimulated and gently guided by some young teacher, old enough to be respected but young enough not to rouse antagonism." B. Russell, Bertrand Russell's America, p.308.

of special ability, are not the criteria for admission. The state, by increasing the number of universities, has opened its doors to students of all social classes, and the industrial and commercial world exerts a subtle pressure on parents to send their sons and daughters to university, for a degree is now a requirement for many jobs requiring little skill. While this situation frequently imposes financial burdens on parents and students, the university degree has become devalued because of its availability, and because special ability is not a university requirement. The modern university is designed as an accessory of government and industry, both of which require, in large numbers, a standardized, dependable, stable corps of bureaucrats and managers.

The function of education, which has always been to serve the interests of the state,⁵³ has changed in the past fifty years. Educational theory is less interested with making citizens knowledgeable, and more aware of the economic needs of a technological society; as a consequence, educational institutions are mostly concerned with training people for skilled work at public expense. By 1935, this trend was

⁵³ This process began with the development of the Industrial Revolution, for the needs of industry coincide with the beginning of educational reform in Britain, which can be dated from 1833, when an almost empty House of Commons passed a resolution granting the educational charities a sum of twenty-thousand pounds to help them build new primary schools. For the first time in history the state had involved itself in education. It is possible to draw similar parallels between the changing requirements of industrial society and developments in education to the present day.

already apparent to Russell: "Knowledge . . . is coming to be regarded not as a good in itself, or as a means of creating a broad and humane outlook on life in general, but as merely an ingredient in technical skill".⁵⁴ The responsibility of educational institutions to raise the intellectual level of the nation is not even discussed today, for education has abdicated in the face of the onslaught of T.V., movies, and paperback books, which provide by their success evidence of a retardation of the general mental level.⁵⁵ The concentration on particular occupational skills at the expense of human values has also buried what was at one time the proud aim of a liberal education, the triumph of the Socratic belief, the self-cultivating man and woman.

Russell, always a clever publicist, used the media with great skill throughout his life. During his "establishment" phase, which will be discussed later, he was a frequent speaker on the British and American radio, and gave

⁵⁴B. Russell, In Praise of Idleness, p. 25.

⁵⁵In "University Education in America" (R.A.), an unpublished speech made in 1941, Russell said that Shakespeare's vocabulary was 10,000 words and he was understood by his public, whereas the typical university graduate had a vocabulary of 3,000 words in the modern world, and most newspapers use no more than 1,500 words.

The traditional university education has not always provided academic excellence: "He was the product of an English public school and university . . . He had little education and highly developed muscles—that is to say, he was no scholar, but essentially a gentleman". Henry Seton Merriman (1862-1903), The Sowers, p. 94.

the first of the famous B. B. C. Reith Lectures in 1948.⁵⁶ His television interviews, "Bertrand Russell Speaks his Mind",⁵⁷ with Woodrow Wyatt, and "Face to Face" with John Freeman, were both enormously successful. Russell has spoken of the importance of television in education; however, the mass media instead of enlarging knowledge and provoking public debate, have too often reduced the scope of human enquiry, bringing to the public the tensions of the world without providing rational insights into their cause. The rise of capitalism transformed mass illiteracy into mass education but the power of the media of T. V. and paperback books has transformed that mass education into an educated mass illiteracy. In Praise of Idleness, which owes a large debt to William Morris in its optimism as well as in its content,⁵⁸ refers to the wise use of leisure, "which is the product of civilization and education". Russell's concern, in 1935, was that "urban populations have become mainly passive seeing cinemas, watching football matches, listening to the radio, and so on".⁵⁹ Russell did not, in this hopeful book, envisage the vicarious violence of the spectator in

⁵⁶Published as Authority and the Individual.

⁵⁷Published as Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind.

⁵⁸William Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil", A lecture given in 1884 and published in Political Writings of William Morris.

⁵⁹B. Russell, In Praise of Idleness, p. 19.

much of present-day cinema and sport, nor was he to appreciate fully the malign influences of passivity in the age of television.

Russell differed from William Morris on the advantages of technological advance. While Russell believed that better economic organization allows men to benefit through more leisure from increased productivity, Morris argues that increased productivity under capitalism robs the worker of the only means of his livelihood, his right to work. For Morris, the essential question is who owns the means of production:

The first step to be taken is to abolish a class of men privileged to shirk their duties as men, thus forcing others to do the work which they refuse to do. All must work according to their ability, and so produce what they consume, each man should work as well as he can for his own livelihood, and his livelihood should be assured to him.⁶⁰

Morris considered that nature would not be conquered, nor education properly fulfil its purpose until all work became a part of the pleasure of our lives. He went beyond Russell, who had advocated a four-hour day "for the ordinary wage earner". Morris was more concerned with the nature of work: ". . . as long as the work is repulsive, it will still be a burden which must be taken up daily, and even so would mar our life, even though the hours of labour were short".⁶¹

⁶⁰William Morris, "Useful Work versus Useless Toil", in Political Writings of William Morris, p. 95.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 95.

Both realise that leisure time in itself is not necessarily a "good", for men and women need activity that is interesting. People receiving social security payments in lieu of work experience "leisure time", but they also experience a feeling of loss, loss of activity and the companionship of the work place. Given free time, they are often at a loss about the best use of their new freedom, they are like the character in a Henry James novel who said "It was the liberty I liked, but not the opportunities",⁶² for leisure provides opportunities as well as boredom, opportunities for the widening of human experience, which is perhaps the most important positive element in reducing working hours. Broadening one's horizons, however, will not automatically be seen as an opportunity by all people. Therefore, a function of early education should be to encourage a desire for the positive use of leisure, rather than promote solely the desire for a positive attitude to work.

Unlike Morris, Russell had faith in science until the final period of his life:

. . . the possibilities of science in the way of increasing human happiness are not confined to diminishing those aspects of human nature which make for mutual defeat . . . there is probably no limit to what science can do in the way of increasing positive excellence and future discoveries are likely to accelerate this process enormously.⁶³

⁶²Henry James, The Europeans (1878), p. 160.

⁶³B. Russell, "What I Believe", in Why I Am Not A Christian, p. 66.

This is heady stuff, but Russell here proved less worldly than William Morris, for, surely, the basic questions that have to be asked of technological or educational advance are, who controls it and whom does it serve?

Russell's emphasis on the value of individual initiative, as opposed to, rather than integral with, social cohesiveness, is never more clearly exposed as a fault than when we consider the dangers to the individual and the community of modern science in the hands of specialists who are educated in our modern "value free" university system. Surely, what is urgently needed is not a modern form of laissez-faire relations, but the widest expansion of social relations, for if man is to endure and enjoy the advantages of technology it can happen only through cooperation—at every level from interdisciplinary to international. Russell, having advanced the concept of the supreme value of the individual and individual initiative, particularly in his book Authority and the Individual, published in 1949, came to a realization toward the end of his life that in the modern world freedom and happiness could be assured only if mankind cooperated to prevent disaster.

In trying to assess the value of Russell's educational theory, it is necessary to realize that, enlightened and progressive as it is, it is greatly influenced by the ideas of middle class and upper class English society in the years preceding the Second World War. Experimental schools, such

as Summerhill, Beacon Hill and Dartington Hall, were allowed considerable freedom because private education, albeit of a more conventional type, was the traditional means by which a small minority provided its offspring with the qualities considered essential to the leaders of society, so much so, that many believed, with the Duke of Wellington, that "Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton". The aristocracy sent its sons to Eton or Harrow (the upper middle class sent theirs to "a good school"), then "up" to Oxford or Cambridge for a year or so of congenial company and some tuition in the classics—not because there was any particular advantage but because it was "the thing to do". The result was the appearance of a few remarkable men, but, on the whole, unproductive knowledge and accent were worn as a mark of status throughout their lives, rather as the Chinese mandarins cultivated long fingernails. The learning of Latin and Greek, like the Confucian analects, helped keep the classes distinct; they had no other value, and the upper class knew it, as is apparent from the Duke of Wellington's advice to a new member of parliament: ". . . don't quote Latin, say what you have to say and then sit down". Russell's view of education, despite his sensitive awareness of the ills of society, suffers from a lack of understanding of the problems of teaching in an overcrowded school populated by working-class children from unhappy homes, in an atmosphere totally alien to middle-class life and alienated from it. Beacon Hill had more than

its share of disturbed children from broken marriages, but Russell never had to face the problems of teachers in the East End of London or from the East Side of New York.⁶⁴

Russell's views on cooperation rather than competitiveness, encouraging a spirit of inquiry rather than conformity, and so on, I recognize as both progressive and necessary, but the needs of the modern world require that if education is to be a civilizing influence it should not promote the belief that happiness and freedom can be found only through individual action, nor that the individual must conform to the needs of the collective, but that the individual and the community are interdependent:

It is, I think, true to say that an individual abstracted from society and regarded as entitled to freedom outside its environment is devoid of meaning . . . the necessity to give way to others, to accept restraint upon our right to unfettered activity, is inherent in the nature of things. But the surrender we make is a surrender not for the sake of the society regarded as something other than its members, but exactly and precisely for men and women whose totality is conveniently summarized in a collective and abstract norm.⁶⁵

Russell, who seemed to see duality in all things, sees that in man there exists both a love of liberty and a love of government, and he provides an analogy of a baby who struggles to free its arms and legs (love of liberty) when constrained

⁶⁴There are, however, important insights into the working class attitudes towards education in B. Russell, Sceptical Essays, especially p. 130.

⁶⁵H. J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, pp. 38-39.

by its older brother who enjoys watching the "resultant furies" (love of government).⁶⁶

History, for Russell, was the oscillation between the emphasis on individual liberty and the emphasis on order. While he conceded the necessity for both sets of ideals in society, he condemned the undue emphasis of one at the expense of the other, although, in the future he visualized, one would always prevail over the other, unless international government could be established. He maintained that only with the formation of international government would fear of war diminish, because to argue that under socialism there would be no wars went against the instincts of human nature.

Russell never tired, in his "popular" philosophy, of stating that without a change in education and environment, man would remain aggressive, competitive, and acquisitive. The minds of men must change, wrote Russell, and economic advancements alone are not sufficient for mankind to realise its needs: "It is true that poverty is a great evil, but it is not true that material prosperity is in itself a great good. If it is to have any real value to society it must be made a means to advancement of those higher goods that belong to the life of the mind".⁶⁷ This is a favourite

⁶⁶B. Russell, "Have Liberal Ideals a Future?", Unpublished article (1953), R. A.

⁶⁷B. Russell, Roads to Freedom, p. 170. Harold Laski puts this question rather differently and, I think, more

concept of Russell's, and it is one of his most compelling arguments against the bureaucratic state. The "life of the mind" is not just thought and knowledge at work but it must be these things, linked to the "general life of the community", for art, literature and science should have a social consciousness. Here Russell shows great foresight, for it is surely precisely in the "life of the mind", as Russell conceives it, that we can see the worst effects of state bureaucracy, in the Soviet Union, for example, with the demise of its once flourishing literary and musical culture.⁶⁸

In summing up Russell's views on human nature, education, and individuality, Russell's fallacy is that he assumes that both children and mankind generally are able to unfold their potentialities and fulfil themselves within the existing social system. The problem, of course, is that existing social institutions, such as the educational system, tend to prevent this because, by sustaining the capitalist system,

correctly: "Economic sufficiency and leisure for thought, these are the primary conditions for the free man. But economic sufficiency . . . comes when the productive capacity of a society is so organized that the free man has continuous access to these two conditions and the organization of productive capacity involves certain economic relations between men." Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, p. 7.

⁶⁸"The ballet is a survival of the czarist time . . . I think it is now purely a museum piece". B. Russell, Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind, p. 140.

they sustain injustice and exploitation, and, to a large extent, repress human expression and development.

Even if Russell's dream for men to become cooperative instead of competitive were to be realised through education, the new morality would be doomed to failure without a complete and fundamental change in the ethic of society—for competition, not cooperation, is the very heart of the capitalist economy.

Russell's educational theories, with their good intentions and humanitarian motives, have helped to make the education of children a happier experience for children and teachers, and more responsive to their needs. Education is today slightly less concerned with the aims of conforming teachers and administrators.

In the universities, Russell's rather Platonic ideal of an aristocracy of the learned is and always has been a pipe dream, and even the dream is receding in the face of an entirely different trend, the "wide diffusion of moderate academic knowledge", as Russell himself put it. He recognised this development in the 'forties at American universities and commented at the time that "the schools provide the State with loyal citizens and the universities with freshmen who need to spend their time on elementary matters, which ought to have been dealt with at an earlier stage".⁶⁹ But

⁶⁹B. Feinburg (ed.), Bertrand Russell's America, p. 314.

with the growth of technology and the demand for technicians, who need a practical education, the cultural values of a university education and of society generally are in decline, and not only in America but actually throughout the capitalist world.

There are three particular aspects to Russell's educational theory. He sincerely wanted children to be treated as human beings, and for their positive virtues to be nourished by the school system. Then, there is the side to Russell which beseeches us to be better than we normally are, the ethical polemicist whose effect is ultimately negative, for he misleads us with his unrealizable hopes. Katharine Tait⁷⁰ felt this negative effect deeply, for she desperately wanted to be the type of person Russell wanted us all to be. But in the real world we have to confront the reality of society's concern for property rights, justification of privilege, and money values. Finally, there is Russell's ideal education, which, like his ideal of socialist society,⁷¹ is a kind of aristocratic fairyland. Comparisons can be made between Russell and Lewis Carroll, both mathematicians, both lovers of children, and both capable of fantasies which transport us beyond the hurly burly of common people and their problems. Russell's ideal

⁷⁰See, K. Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, pp. 180-184.

⁷¹See the following chapter.

is to improve the lot of all children, but his heart is with the gifted ones. Not for Russell the modern Chinese method of expecting students and their professors to work alongside the common folk every now and again; such egalitarianism was beyond the comprehension of a man with his nineteenth century aristocratic values.

This leads to my concluding remarks about Russell's view of individuality. Here, again, we meet a duality. The question posed by Russell is whether people are to value primarily individuality or citizenship, and whether the demands of society or the demands of the individual are to prevail. But why cannot the interests of the individual and the interests of society be compatible? There are many examples of this even in our present society. A symphony orchestra satisfies this requirement, as does a group of artists or a tennis club.⁷² Of course, there may be conflicts within the group, but the means are normally there to resolve them. Society needs to be reconstructed in such a manner that neither the good of the individual nor the good of the state comes first but, instead, the common good should be paramount. In such a society the individual would discover his or her personality by serving the interests of the group, while the group's purpose is solely to serve the

⁷²B. Russell, in Principles of Social Reconstruction, puts it this way: ". . . the problem which faces the modern world is a combination of individual initiative with the increase in the scope and size of organizations." His emphasis on the individual over society developed after 1920.

interests of its members.

Russell's concern that socialism may ignore the "life of the mind" is, in my view, an important insight, although Marx had discussed this question in a more positive form as early as 1944:

It is above all necessary to avoid postulating "society" once again as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual is the social being. The manifestation of his life even when it does not appear directly in the form of a communal manifestation, accomplished in association with other men—is therefore a manifestation and affirmation of social life . . . man is a unique individual—and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really individual communal being . . . Thought and being are indeed distinct but they also form a unity.⁷³

No educational system can develop a normal personality in a child, except in so far as the child becomes a social being, and if we are concerned not simply to preserve, but also to expand, the "life of the mind", it is necessary to encourage social consciousness in the child, involving him in human relations of help, consideration, cooperation and recognition of his and other beings' rights. Russell desired this, of course, and his criticism of A. S. Neil's experimental school, Summerhill, was that it was too passive, that children needed direction and guidance in the basic skills. But Russell's own educational opinions were lacking in a realistic theory of how we might bring this transition to

⁷³Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in Karl Marx Early Writings, p. 158.

social awareness into effect.

This deficiency is crucial, for it is what makes Russell's views on education and individuality somewhat unsatisfactory and it is the hallmark of the well-meaning liberal, characterized by Karl Marx in his typically harsh but explicit manner as "so much worthless earnestness". It would be less than just to regard Russell as only a well-meaning liberal. He was also a crusader, whose liberating views on marriage, birth control and the separation of sex from paternity, in addition to the educational improvements already mentioned, are accepted today, even "by the pillars of the church".⁷⁴ These improvements, which Russell helped to bring about, were not the fundamental changes he hoped for, but they have reduced unhappiness to some degree.

Russell's greatest contribution to education and individuality is to be found in his life rather than his theory. The persecutions that hurt him most concerned the collision of his individuality with academic conformity. His crusade against the horrors of the First World War led to his dismissal from Trinity in 1916, and his views on marriage, morals, and education led to the squashing of his New York City College appointment in 1940 on the grounds that, like Socrates, he was a corrupter of the young. It

⁷⁴Michael Foot in the B. B. C. Television film, "The Life and Times of Bertrand Russell" (1962).

is by examples such as these that the "heroes in history" have value, for they enable later generations to recognize the dangers of conformity to authority.

CHAPTER II

RUSSELL, MARX, AND SOCIALISM

- (1) From liberal humanist to socialist revolutionary—and back to liberal again.

There could have been few men in Britain more politically active than Bertrand Russell during the war years 1914 to 1917. He wrote articles and editorials in The Tribunal, the publication of the No Conscription Fellowship, almost every week until January 1918; published Justice in Wartime; spoke at open air meetings and gave lectures throughout the country, all of which was part of a campaign against the war with Germany. His pacifism was the cause of his dismissal from Trinity College, Cambridge, and led to two court cases, in both of which he was found guilty, the second in 1918, resulting in a sentence of six months in gaol. During this period, Russell joined the British Labour Party and published three books, Principles of Social Reconstruction, Political Ideals, and Roads to Freedom, all written between 1916 and 1918, in which Russell made public his conviction that capitalism was a total failure as an efficient system of production, and that the capitalist state should be replaced by a combination of Guild Socialism, Syndicalism, and Anarchism. But he was wary of revolution as a method of social change, and class war was to be avoided,

for "Those who have been inspired to action by the doctrine of the class war will have acquired the habit of hatred, and will instinctively seek new enemies when the old ones have been vanquished."¹

By 1920, however, at the beginning of what was to be a momentous year for Russell, he was adopting a more militant approach:

When I speak of Socialism, I do not mean a milk and water system, but a thorough going, root and branch transformation, such as Lenin has attempted. And if its victory is essential to peace, we must acquiesce in the evils involved in conflict, in so far as conflict is forced upon us by Capitalism.²

In this speech, unequivocal in its support of the Russian Revolution, Russell "passed over from Liberalism to Socialism, not because I have ceased to admire many of the Liberal ideals, but because I see little scope for them, except after a complete transformation of the economic structure of Society".³

In a long, enthusiastic lecture on international socialism as a necessary next step in a historical process, Russell says:

Marx, the great exponent of the doctrine of class

¹B. Russell, Roads to Freedom, p. 103.

²B. Russell, Socialism and Liberal Ideals, p. 14. (February 26, 1920), R. A. Also published as "Democracy and Revolution", The Liberator (May 1920), pp. 10-13.

³Ibid., p. 28.

war, asserted that, in England, Socialism might come by peaceful means. Let us hope that in this, as in so much else, he was a true prophet. But on the Continent, as the example of Russia has shown us, such a hope is probably chimerical.⁴

This speech, later published in Max Eastman's Marxist publication The Liberator, goes on to stress the need for internationalism rather than nationalism after the victory over capitalism, and demonstrates a remarkable prescience about the dangers of bureaucracy and nationalist fervour in a post-capitalist society. And, indeed, a post-capitalist society was, according to Russell, not only necessary but also highly likely:

Capitalism has lost all the merits by which, in the past, it sought to commend itself to the average man. Through trusts and an intimate union with the State, capitalism has succeeded in destroying almost all vestiges of freedom. Through control of education and the press, it has made democracy a farce. Through national rivalries, it has made peace impossible except by its overflow. And by arousing the discontent of the workers it has become inefficient as a method of production. The first three of these failures are reasons for desiring its overthrow. The fourth, fortunately, is also a reason for expecting it.⁵

The mood was soon to change, the gap between theory and reality was for Russell to prove a chasm that his fundamental class outlook could not bridge. It was to be more than forty years before Russell approved of revolutionary methods again. His pacifism prevented him from having much to say about the

⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

destruction of democracy in Spain, but in his final years, once more an activist, he supported the Vietnam Liberation Front and in 1968 called for revolutions to end starvation and disease in the poor nations of the world.⁶

Between February 1920, when Russell acknowledged the possibility of class conflict and revolutionary socialism in favour of liberal idealism, and October of the same year, when he lectured the Chinese at Peking University on the advantages of education and the appeal of reason over the dictatorship of the workers and peasants, we can see the conversion and reconversion of Russell from a liberal democrat to a socialist verbal revolutionary and back to a liberal again, but now in the name of social democracy and gradualism.

Never again did Russell write or speak approvingly of the class struggle, or refer as warmly to Marx as he had in that speech made in 1920, only weeks before his visit to the Russian Soviet Republic. A decisive break had occurred, and it probably took place during that visit to Soviet Russia when Russell, as an unofficial member of the first British Labour delegation was brought face to face with the reality of the revolution's aftermath and he, who only three months earlier had been, at least verbally, a revolutionary, recoiled from it in horror: "My first impulse was to abandon political thinking as a bad job."⁷

⁶See Chapter III, p. 109.

⁷B. Russell, Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, p. 157.

He was suddenly confronted with the living face of revolution, harsh and merciless, with the gentry and all those he would have regarded as civilized and cultured dispossessed and rough workers running things everywhere.⁸

The Trade Union and Labour Leaders in the delegation were also critical of restrictions on personal liberty and the excessive powers of the Extraordinary Commission, but they recognized the responsibility of the interventionist nations for much of this state of affairs. Russell (like André Gide, a decade later) considered his time in Soviet Russia one of "increasing nightmare", and wrote to Lady Ottoline Morell: "Bolshevism is a close tyrannical bureaucracy, with a spy system more elaborate and terrible than the Tsars and an aristocracy as insolent and unfeeling, composed of Americanized Jews."⁹ Something more than a rejection of Bolshevism shows through in this letter—there is also an element of upper class snobbery and its frequent companion, anti-Semitism. Shortly after, he wrote to Ottoline Morell: "How heavenly it was to be back among people who are sane and kindly. Russia seemed like an asylum of homicidal lunatics, where the warders are the worst lunatics. It is very hard to keep one's sanity."¹⁰ What did Russell expect to find in Russia? In the letter to Ottoline quoted

⁸R. Palme Dutt, Labour Monthly, pp. 97-110, Vol. 52, (March 1970).

⁹Ronald W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 380.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 382.

first, he ends with the remark that he went to Russia hoping to find the promised land, but, instead, "I have returned more than ever a pacifist, as much against revolutionary wars as against others."¹¹ Yet, The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, published upon his return from Russia, does not reflect the degree of revulsion and despair that is exhibited at this time in his letters to Ottoline Morell and Constance Malleon. In this book, his summary of the Bolsheviks concludes: ". . . they are neither angels to be worshipped nor devils to be exterminated, but merely bold and able men attempting with great skill an almost impossible task."¹² One may ask how Russell could equate "homicidal lunatics" with "bold and able men". Nevertheless, this book is dedicated to the proposition that the revolution had failed and that the Bolsheviks were responsible for that failure. In one passage, notable for its smugness, and its total incomprehension of Winston Churchill's stated desire to "strangle Bolshevism at birth", Russell writes:

Since the revolution of October 1917, the Soviet Government has been at war with almost all the world, and has had at the same time to face civil war at home. This is not to be regarded as accidental, or as a misfortune which could not be foreseen. According to Marxian theory, what has happened was bound to happen. Indeed, Russia has been wonderfully fortunate in not having to face an even more desperate situation.¹³

¹¹Bertrand Russell, "Letter to Gilbert Murray" (August 2, 1920), R. A.

¹²B. Russell, Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, p. 56.

¹³Ibid., p. 76.

This statement also demonstrates a misunderstanding of Marxism, for nowhere does Marxist theory predict "what was bound to happen" in a given situation. Marx did not hold a determinist theory of social development.¹⁴ Russell was confused and frequently contradictory in his statements concerning the Revolution during this period.

One might suppose having written The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism that Russell was opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat, but we are confounded again, for in 1924, when in the United States, he says:

You have in the East an enormous bulk of the population not knowing how to read or write, totally ignorant of political events, hardly knowing even that they belong to a country. These men are not capable of exercising democracy. And if you are going to take the next step from autocracy or from any ancient evil in a country of that sort, you cannot take it by the line of democracy, such as we have in the West. The Soviet leaders have discovered another line—that is, the Government of a certain group of intellectuals. And I am inclined to think, as a transition stage, that it is the very best that you can have. I do not believe that there is a better way of making the transition from the old autocracy to the new democracy. As a transition in an uneducated country, I think the Bolsheviki have chosen probably the better way.¹⁵

We need to consider his visit to Germany in 1896 to understand at least one cause of this confusion, his misunderstanding of Marxism.

¹⁴"We must not say to the world, listen to us for we possess the real truth. Instead we must show the world why it struggles, and that consciousness is something which it must acquire even if it does not desire to do so". Marx-Engels, Selected Works, Vol. I, p. 345.

¹⁵"Can the Soviet Idea Take Hold of America, England and France?" Bertrand Russell versus Scott Nearing. The League for Public Discussion, N. Y. (1924).

(2) Russell contra Marx

Russell married Alys Pearsall Smith in 1894, and immediately afterward they went to Germany to investigate the Social Democratic Party and try to establish what its future prospects were. The result of this visit was a series of six lectures given by Russell at the London School of Economics, which had been founded in 1895 by Sydney and Beatrice Webb. As was to happen so often during the next sixty years, the lectures provided Russell with the material for a book. German Social Democracy, which was published in 1896, was written when Russell was only twenty-three years old.

Russell's principal objection to Marxism was that the materialistic conception of history was, according to him, at the base of all communist philosophy. That all political struggle and political parties are the outcome of economic conditions and embody economic interests allowed no room for compromise, said Russell.¹⁶ The doctrine of class struggle forced the German socialists into uncompromising opposition, alienating their possible supporters among the middle class by their sectarian programme. Russell's objection, therefore, was at this time mainly on tactical grounds, for in his view the concept of the class struggle polarized politics into two hostile camps, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: "The battle becomes a battle for all or nothing,

¹⁶"German Social Democracy as a lesson in Political Tactics". A lecture given to the Fabian Society in February 1896, which analyzed his visit to Germany and provided the basis for his lectures to the London School of Economics, R.A.

and no step can be won till all is won."¹⁷ He criticized Lasalle's refusal to support the German Progressive Party, pointing out that the only alternatives left to a sectarian, tightly-knit group of dedicated revolutionaries were either to remain a struggling minority or fight its way to victory by revolution and civil war. Russell, who did not identify himself with either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, opted for gradualism. He argued for winning the support of the liberals by employing less fervour, intolerance and bigotry, and ended with an early example of his lifelong ability to look at a question with tolerance and understanding whenever he chose to do so: "Sectarian intolerance may have been a necessary stage in their growth, but to persist in it now seems a daily increasing folly."¹⁸ It was unfortunate that by investigating the German Social Democratic Party, the most prestigious Marxist socialist party of the period, he was confronted by a party led by the most doctrinaire Marxists in Europe at that time, the elder Leibknecht, Karl Kautsky, and Auguste Bebel. I believe that the impressions received by Russell on this short visit were of great importance in the formation of his subsequent political thought.

In Britain, the Marxist Social Democratic Federation

¹⁷Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 10.

was challenged by the Fabians, and, after 1893, by Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party. In Continental Europe Marxism was the main political force and of all the European socialist parties the Marxist German Social Democrats were the party of prestige. It is noteworthy that it was in the German Social Democratic Party that the great split in the Marxist parties had its origins.

With the adoption of the Erfurt programme in 1891, the German Social Democratic Party proposed the socialist transformation of society through parliamentary means. The architect of the Erfurt programme was Karl Kautsky, who with Engels was the principal theorist of the party and whose writings, in an attempt to win wide support for the party, gradually transformed the policy of the Marxists from proposing the socialist transformation of society through revolutionary class struggle to advocating the peaceful triumphs of socialism by parliamentary success:

Such a revolution may assume many forms according to the circumstances under which it takes place. It is by no means necessary that it be accomplished with violence and bloodshed . . . Neither is it necessary that the social revolution be decided at one blow.¹⁹

The soil was now fertile in Germany for the growth of the most revisionist theories of Marxism, those of Eduard Bernstein, who, having been converted to communism in London by Engels, was eventually more impressed by the progressive

¹⁹Karl Kautsky, The Class Struggle, p. 91.

reformist ideas of the Fabians.²⁰ Russell's analysis in German Social Democracy concerns the nature of utopianism, the sectarian programme and the electoral policies of the German socialists, but he appears unaware of the fundamental split that was taking place in 1895. He also appears unaware of Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme, first published in German by Engels in 1891. The conclusions drawn by Russell in German Social Democracy from his examination of Lassalle's mistakes, were that Marxists, if they were to achieve success, would need to abandon their utopian and sectarian policies and compromise with all other socialists in the achievement of the common cause of socialism. But these were precisely the conclusions which had led Marx to write the Critique of the Gotha Programme and which, upon its publication, led to the Erfurt Programme of 1891.

Rather in the manner of a scientific investigator in search of evidence, Russell's findings in Germany provided him with an attitude to Marxism which, in its fundamentals, remained unchanged throughout his life and which profoundly influenced his political philosophy. He adopted a similar investigative approach in 1920, when he visited the Soviet Republic. Notwithstanding the particular circumstances of each of these "investigations", they were to form the basis

²⁰For a full account of Bernstein's theories, see G. D. H. Cole. History of Socialist Thought, Vol. III, Part 1, pp. 249-296, and Peter Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism.

of Russell's views on Marxism. Unlike many other opinions held by Russell with conviction and later renounced in the light of changing circumstances, his attitude to Marxism, derived from the twin sources of doctrinaire German socialism and Soviet mechanistic materialism, was to remain unchanged.

In Russell's eyes, Karl Marx was twice condemned, first, for his debt to Hegel, and, second, for "substituting his Prussian discipline for freedom as the means and end of Revolutionary Action".²¹ The latter presumably refers to the dictatorship of the proletariat. As to his opinion of the undoubted influence of Hegel on Marx, Russell takes little account of Marx's disagreement with Hegelian philosophy by emphasizing the dialectic to the exclusion of everything else, Russell overlooked the important distinctions between Marx and Hegel.²² Hegel's view that "Philosophy comes too late to teach the world what it should be" is clearly opposed to the position taken by Marx, for whom the purpose of philosophy was to change the world. As to the dialectic, while Marx adopted the dialectical approach to life, he disassociated himself from Hegel:

²¹"J. S. Mill", radio broadcast (December 22, 1954).

²²The most fundamental difference between Marx and Hegel, which Russell did not recognize, concerned Marx's view of man's development as the outcome of a continuing natural process, whereas Hegel saw the history of man as the existing realization of the Absolute Idea. Hegel's static view of Society is idealist, compared with the empirical naturalism of Marx.

. . . my own dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but it is its direct opposite. For Hegel, the thinking process is the creator of the real world and the real world is only the outward manifestation of "The Idea". With me, on the other hand, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into terms of thought.²³

Russell could not have been unaware of such an unequivocal denial as this. Yet, he persisted in linking Hegelian idealism with Marxist theory, and, coupled with his lack of comment on the first publication, in 1927, of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,²⁴ written by Marx in 1844, it is puzzling. Despite the publication of these important writings, which reveal Marx in a more comprehensive philosophical manner, Russell did not modify his previous views on Marx. Yet, these early works of Marx are mostly preoccupied with issues which Russell himself sees as central to the question of man in society—man in an alienated world. It is also curious that after 1920 Russell, in his attack on Marxism as a doctrine of hatred and appeal to force, never credits Marx with the following clear statement on the possibility of a peaceful victory for socialism:

One fine day the workers must inevitably take political power into their hands, to terminate the old sort

²³K. Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. 25.

²⁴The first English version was published in 1959 in Great Britain by Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., using a translation by the Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow. The first translation by any Western scholar is by T. B. Bottomore, in Erich Fromm Marx's Concept of Man.

of politics, which protects obsolete institutions . . . but we have never asserted that this aim is to be attained by means that never vary. We are aware that the institutions, character and traditions of every individual country must be taken into consideration, and we do not deny that there are countries, such as America and England . . . in which the workers may be able to attain their aims by peaceful means.²⁵

Russell had two unspoken objections to Marx, which have nothing to do with "Prussian discipline" and "an appeal to force", but which reflect the powerful influence of his aristocratic outlook upon his political philosophy. In the first place, there was an inbred unwillingness to idealize the proletariat. While Russell gives thought the central role in his theory, for Marx this role belongs to labour. It is revealing of the attitude of an aristocrat and a middle-class liberal that they have placed so much reliance on educating the working class. Russell followed in the paternalistic tradition of John Stuart Mill, assuming that all would be well if "they" were as cultured and intelligent as "we". Examples of this attitude crop up every now and again in Russell's correspondence with Gilbert Murray and

²⁵K. Marx. Speech at a meeting in Amsterdam (September 1872). Quoted in The First, Second and Third International, pp. 121-122.

See also, F. Engels, "Preface" to the first English translation of Capital, p. 32: "At least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable and social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means".

other friends of his social class.²⁶ It is fundamental to the liberal misunderstanding of working class needs, as well as working class common sense, and is the cause of pessimism and despair so frequently encountered when humane and well-intentioned men, such as Mill and Russell, are considered irrelevant by the majority of political activists among the working class.

Russell, during his last years, found common cause with ordinary men and women in active civil protest, which he eventually identified with political struggle. This phase, of the nuclear and civil disobedience campaigns, was perhaps the greatest periods of his political activity since his First War pacifism, and it restored some of his

²⁶The following examples can be found in Bertrand Russell's correspondence with Gilbert Murray in the Russell Archives:

"He is too democratic for me, he said his charwoman was more in contact with real things than anybody else he knew. But what can a charwoman know of the spirits of great men or the records of fallen empires or the haunting visions of art and reason?"
(December 12, 1902)

"I agree with you that Wells was a lower type".
(September 13, 1953)

"I strongly suspect that the moral and physical degradation of women is essential to an adequate birth rate, that races where women reach an equality with men tend to die out and I suspect other instances might be found".

(June 21, 1900)

"It seems to me that academic English people are better able to appreciate the Chinese than any other white people."

(December 29, 1922)

faith. "I feel that youth could teach me again many things that I may have forgotten. For example, hope, certainty that not all human acts are evil."²⁷ A new faith did not bring Russell closer to a belief that before human nature can change it will be necessary to change the economic foundations of society, from the private ownership of the means of production and distribution, to the planned production of economic resources. And herein lies Russell's second objection to Marx, for Russell could not accept that the mind and nature of man are a product of the material world.²⁸ The "passions" and "desires" about which Russell wrote and spoke for over fifty years were, according to him, innate in man, and apart from a vague but fervent hope that man will become more creative and less acquisitive, envious, and so on, there is throughout Russell's philosophy of man (although not in his political activities) a pessimistic view of man's nature. Although he clearly understood and appreciated the influence of his own upper class background and environment on his nature, and regretted the passing of the best of those upper class values, he regarded man, generally, as possessed of instincts which were independent of his environment, and

²⁷B. Russell, in "Interview with Enrique Raab", Sunday Citizen (November 7, 1965), pp. 7-8.

²⁸"It is not consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness". K. Marx, "Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy", in Marx, Engels, Selected Works, Vol. I, p. 362.

one could therefore only hope that the "lower" instincts would somehow be subordinated to the "higher" instincts. Marx, however, not only recognized the effect of environment on the nature of man, but that man was not passive but capable of changing his environment, the economy, and the institutions of society to the benefit of his needs.

Russell's critique of the German Social Democrats and, later, of the Russian and Chinese revolutionaries arose from his belief that workers could not act as an independent force. Like so many social democrats and liberals, he hoped that the ruling class might be convinced that injustices and other imperfections in the social system should be put right. While liberal humanists blamed the capitalist class for its lack of morality, Marx believed that the attitudes and actions of the capitalist class were the inevitable result of the capitalist system and in particular of the nature of the relations of the ruling class to the forces of production and distribution in that system. For more than seventy years, Russell did not appear to lose an opportunity in speech or print to pronounce upon Marxism. Having read a very large number of these pronouncements, I am drawn to the conclusion that Russell's understanding of Marxist theory was superficial and that it derives mainly from his experiences in 1895.²⁹

²⁹Although he never admitted it, Russell, whose erudition was prodigious, could hardly have considered

In the History of Western Philosophy, Russell, writing about Karl Marx, says:

He disclaimed always all ethical or humanitarian reasons for preferring socialism or taking the side of the wage earner; he maintained, not that this side was ethically better, but that it was the side taken by the dialectic in its wholly deterministic movement . . . It is only because of the belief in the inevitability of progress that Marx thought it possible to dispense with ethical considerations. If socialism was coming, it must be an improvement.³⁰

This quotation from Russell's most popular exposition of philosophical ideas, demonstrates either a complete unawareness of the early writings of Marx or a deliberately superficial treatment of Marx's theory of historical materialism. It could be argued with at least as much conviction that it was precisely because Marx believed that socialism would enable man (and not only the wage earner) to emancipate himself from alienation, to realize himself, that he "preferred socialism".

Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropria-

himself learned or knowledgeable on the writings of Karl Marx. His personal library (to be delivered in due course to McMaster University) of over four thousand volumes, includes only seven works by Marx: Capital (3 Vols.), The Poverty of Philosophy (in French), The 18th Brumaire, Revolution and Counter Revolution, or Germany in 1848, The Communist Manifesto, The Russian Menace to Europe, and On Historical Materialism: Selected Writings to Marx, Engels and Lenin (2 Vols., in German). There is only one work by Frederick Engels, namely, Socialism, Utopian & Scientific, and two by V. I. Lenin, Imperialism and Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.

³⁰A History of Western Philosophy, p. 753.

tion of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man himself as a social, i.e., really human being, a complete and conscious return, which assimilated all the wealth of previous development. Communism as a fully-developed naturalism is humanist, and as a fully-developed humanism is naturalistic. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species.³¹

Space does not permit an extensive exposition of Marx's concept of the self-realization of man, which is an essentially humanist approach, but, far from believing in socialism because "it was on the side of the dialectic", Marx saw the objective of communism in ethical and humanitarian terms. Indeed, the main aim of socialism was to abolish human labour as both an economic commodity and a form of repressive, dehumanizing activity: "The central theme of Marx is the transformation of alienated meaningless labour into productive labour by a private or abstract state capitalism."³² Socialism attacks not only the economic system of capitalism, but its entire moral basis. Marxists believe that the concern for individual and property rights is frequently a justification for the existing privileges in capitalist society and they challenge liberal ideas of liberty and equality not because they reject such concepts but

³¹Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, p. 127.

³²Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 43.

because of the use to which such ideals have been put. Previous movements of reform were movements of minorities or movements in the interests of minorities. As a consequence of this, the demand for liberty, for example, has often meant liberty for the minority to restrict the opportunity of majorities as well as liberty to remove restrictions upon the minorities' right to make money.

The moral objective of socialism is to pass beyond a class society to a classless society, not a society without differences or contradictions, but a society where the minority no longer fulfil themselves by depriving the majority of their opportunities for fulfilment. The term "emancipation" does not for Marx mean simply political or economic emancipation but human emancipation, which requires an end to the social and economic reasons for man's alienation. The liberal humanist and the Marxist humanist do not disagree on the nature of the evils within society, but they usually differ over the causes of those evils, and as a consequence, they frequently disagree over where attention should be focussed concerning change. Whether individual capitalists may be good men or bad is immaterial to the Marxist; both are merely a reflection of the basic problem, the nature of society. A liberal humanist, Russell believed until the last decade of his life that it was possible to effect the necessary changes within society by education and intellect. To give an example, he believed that it was

possible to convince people by intellectual argument that religion or anti-Semitism was against their best interests. Marx looked for the basic causation of the particular ills in society and recognized religion and anti-Semitism as symptoms of the evils of capitalist society. Marx believed that it was impossible to expect that rational argument could be effective in dispelling the ideas which men hold, for they are only a reflection of a deeper cause. Religious ideas arise from the desire within society for reassurance and solace, providing, as Freud discovered, consolation from the sufferings of social existence. Marx recognized that, in a society where man was a mere factor in an economic process, to argue as Russell does in Why I Am Not a Christian, on the grounds of logic that God does not exist, is futile: "The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a call to abandon the condition which requires the illusion".³³

Discussing anti-Semitism, Marx describes the Jew in society as victimized because he was forced to perform functions considered undesirable by Christians, whose anti-Semitic persecutions arise because of the conditions imposed on the Jew by the Christian. On the Jewish Question³⁴ draws the

³³K. Marx, Introduction to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, p. 44.

³⁴K. Marx, "On the Jewish Question", published in T. B. Bottomore (ed.), Karl Marx Early Writings, pp. 1-40.

lesson that to resolve the particular defects of a society requires that the general defects be transcended.

Russell frequently asserted that the materialist conception of history was based on economic determinism and on the desire of individuals to seek their own advantage:

Marx assumed the "economic man" of the orthodox economists who preceded him, that is to say, he supposed that for practical purposes one could regard a man as solely actuated by a desire for his own pecuniary advantages.³⁵

This is a crude oversimplification of Marx, who never wrote as if there were an absolute law which moves history toward inevitable objectives. Contrary to Russell's assertion, historical change was never regarded by Marx as inevitably progressive, for he believed that in the last resort it is thought which is the determining agent of historical change, and men's responses are never inevitable in a given situation. While the economic conditions are objective and man's thoughts are subjective, it is mankind which influences the course of events: "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing . . . forgets that circumstances are changed by men."³⁶ The Marxist view of history is that men make their own history and do so in the

³⁵B. Russell, "Bernard Shaw's Last Will and Testament to Humanity", Forward (July 15, 1928) A review of Shaw's "The Intelligent Women's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism", R. A.

³⁶K. Marx, "Thesis on Feuerbach, III", in C. J. Arthur (ed.), The Germans Ideology, p. 121.

economic sphere. Marx was opposed to "mechanical materialism", believing that man was not merely an object of nature in the grip of forces beyond his control, but that man could, by asserting his true individuality, shape his environment. In The Holy Family, Marx and Engels take up the tradition of Democritus and Locke, that the source of all knowledge is the senses, but they depart from "sensuous materialism" with their belief, first, that the environment shapes man's character and that man, in turn, is himself the agent of change, and second, that while consciousness provides the programme of change, the necessary condition is thought, linked to activity. Neither mind nor matter has priority, neither economic conditions nor man's awareness, both are coexistent in nature:

According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life. More than this, Marx and I have never asserted. If, therefore, somebody twists this into a statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis but the various elements of the superstructure, political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.³⁷

³⁷F. Engels, "Letter to J. Bloch", (September 21, 1890), in K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Correspondence, p. 498.

Russell, whose Marxism appears to have begun and ended with the dogmatism of the German Social Democrats, invariably made sweeping assertions which do not stand up to scrutiny. In an article "Soviet Russia—1920", dated July 31, 1920, in The Nation he wrote: "The whole tendency of Marxism is against psychological imagination, since it attributes everything in politics to purely material causes." And, writing later that year:

. . . the materialist theory of history, in the last analysis requires the assumption that every politically conscious person is governed by one simple desire, the desire to increase his own store of commodities and, further, that his method of achieving this desire will usually be to seek to increase the share of his class, not only his own individual share, but this assumption is far from the truth.³⁸

The view that Marx believed the strongest motive in man to be the material improvement of his objective condition has been challenged as false by many humanists, some of whom, such as Erich Fromm, do not agree with the sociological or economic theories of Marx. Fromm, in Marx's Concept of Man, points out that Marx never used the terms "historical" or "dialectical materialism", and, discussing the theory that Marx based his interpretation of historical materialism on man's desire for material satisfaction, states:

The fundamental misunderstanding on which this interpretation rests is the assumption that historical materialism is a psychological theory which deals with man's drives and passions. But, in fact, his-

³⁸B. Russell, The Practice & Theory of Bolshevism, p. 63.

torical materialism is not at all a psychological theory; it claims that the way man produces determines his thinking and his desires, and not that his main desires are those for maximal material gain.³⁹

Although Russell had criticized Marx for holding this view, it was an opinion that he had himself propounded in 1916:

The most widely accepted philosophy of life at present is that what matters most to man's happiness is his income. This philosophy, apart from other demerits, is harmful because it leads men to aim at a result rather than an activity, an enjoyment of material goods . . . rather than a creative impulse which embodies man's individuality.⁴⁰

The publication of The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in 1927 in German (a language in which Russell was fluent), and in English in 1959, has greatly added to the appreciation of Marx as a humanist and assisted those who had consistently refuted the claim of Stalin and the leaders of the Soviet Union to be the true disciples of Marx. It is not to Russell's credit that he accepted Stalin's claim and never attempted to make a distinction between the theories of Karl Marx and the practices of the Soviet State:

The Soviet government accepts an ideology according to which hate has always been, and still is, the moving force in human affairs. It believes, with the superstitious fervency of unquestioned dogma, that an internecine struggle between Capitalism and Communism has been decreed by the blind forces

³⁹Marx's Concept of Man, p. 12.

⁴⁰Principles of Social Reconstruction, p. 168.

of economic determinism, and that this struggle, when it comes, must end, as the Marxist Scriptures foretell, in the world-wide victory of Communism.⁴¹

Russell, before 1958, with statements such as this, made a significant contribution to the literature of hatred engendered by the Cold War. He never distinguished between the Marxism of Marx and the "Marxism" of the revisionists of Marx.⁴²

During the period between 1946 and 1958 Russell enjoyed what he referred to as his "establishment phase". He was listened to with respect for five consecutive years as a lecturer at the Imperial Military College for he was regarded with justification as an opponent of Marxism with over fifty years experience (a distinction at that time probably shared only with Winston Churchill). Given circumstances such as these it is somewhat incongruous that Russell frequently gave as a reason for his uncompromising opposition to Marxism that it is "an appeal to force", yet this was an

⁴¹B. Russell, *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, p. 229.

⁴²I do not wish to imply that "the Marxism of Marx" is confined solely to the writings of Karl Marx. In this context, I agree with Edward Thompson, who describes this attitude as "narrowing the notion of Marxism to a kind of family tradition—a sort of Royal Legitimacy, from which alone descent may be derived". Edward Thompson, "Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism: The Case of William Morris", New Left Review (December 1976).

My concern is with the frequent gaps between Marxian words and Marxian essence, that which Lenin drew attention to in the following quotation: "Marxian words have in our days become a cover for the absolute renunciation of Marxism: to be a Marxist one must expose the "Marxian" hypocrisy of the leaders of the Second International." Collected Works, Vol. 21, p. 265.

important reason for his dislike of the concept of class struggle.

Here we meet again a fundamental disagreement between the liberal and the Marxist. While the liberal knows, but does not admit, that force, like liberty, depends on who uses it and against whom it is used, the Marxist leaves us in no doubt: "Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one".⁴³ And is it not strange how a member of the Russell family, one of whose illustrious ancestors was William Russell, beheaded because of his opposition to authority, could oppose the ever present factor of force in all societies throughout the history of man? Erich Fromm, referring to the liberal democrats who criticized Marxism as an appeal to force, writes:

First of all, it should be noted how peculiar it is that the western democracies should feel such indignation about a theory claiming that society can be transformed by the forceful seizure of political power. The idea of political revolution by force is not at all a Marxist idea; it has been the idea of bourgeois society during the last three hundred years. Western democracy is the daughter of great English, French and American revolutions; . . . ⁴⁴

A visit to Germany in 1896 provided Russell with a justification for his inherent distrust of mass participation in politics, and his visit to Soviet Russia in 1920 confirmed it. The mechanistic Marxist interpretation of the doctrinaire

⁴³K. Marx, Capital, Vol. I, p. 824.

⁴⁴Marx's Concept of Man, p. 23.

Wilhelm Leibknecht, sectarian, dogmatic and confident of eventual parliamentary success, and the brutal reality of life in Soviet Russia, among revolutionaries, unsophisticated dispensers of rough justice (and, at times, brutal injustice), were the stereotypes from which Russell derived his attitude to revolutionary socialism.

(3) Russell and the Labour Party

The socialist movement in Britain, while it welcomed the Russian Revolution, was not revolutionary. The success of the revolution in Russia encouraged confidence in the belief that capitalism was collapsing and that a change of society was both possible and likely. There was considerable disagreement, however, on how such a change would occur, and we have already noted some of the differences of opinion which were held about the nature of socialism. The Labour Party, which participated in the wartime coalition governments of Asquith and Lloyd George, was neither Marxist nor, until 1918, even rhetorically committed to socialism as an objective.⁴⁵ Unlike the socialist parties of Germany and France, the Labour Party was anxious to win parliamentary power on a programme designed for, and by, its Trade Union supporters. Affiliated to it was the Independent Labour

⁴⁵G. D. H. Cole, Socialist Thought, Vol. IV, Communism and Social Democracy, 1914-1931, p. 404.

Party, whose denunciation of capitalism was based mainly on the immorality of exploitation and private property, and, after 1916, the British Socialist Party. This party was the Marxist successor to the Social Democratic Federation and was Britain's sole representative in the Second International.⁴⁶ Another section of the Labour Party was the Fabian Society, which, although small, attracted many of the leading socialist intellectuals and was, as a consequence, influential as a theoretical wing of the Party. Fabian Socialism was derived from the progressive liberal tradition and was Britain's unique contribution to the transformation of socialist policies from revolutionary programmes to parliamentary democratic reform.

The triumph of Fabian ideas and, with it, the assumption of the mantle of respectability took place at the end of 1918; Labour and the New Social Order, the manifesto of the British Labour Party, committed the party to socialism through parliamentary democracy and liberal, rather than revolutionary, reform.

Russell was the Labour Party candidate in Chelsea in 1922, and again in 1923 (his wife, Dora, stood as the candidate in 1924). He had little chance of winning the seat and Ronald W. Clark reports him as writing to Ottoline Morell:

⁴⁶The left wing of the Independent Labour Party, most of the British Socialist Party, and some members of The Workers' Councils formed the nucleus of the British Communist Party, founded in 1921.

"I never wanted to get in but only to do propaganda."⁴⁷

Before his return from America in 1944, Russell never gave his wholehearted support to the Labour Party, he was not satisfied with a concept of socialism which consisted mainly of social welfare and which, to use the words of Engels, desired "this society without its defects". He was concerned that a socialist state could be as oppressive and intolerant as any other, and this was one of his objections to revolutionary socialism. Russell favoured, with reservations, the absence of coercion in anarchism and the absence of political control proposed by Guild socialists, although he realized that their chances of success were small. After the publication, in 1920, of The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, Russell appears to have increasingly favoured State socialism. In the chapter "The Case for Socialism", which appears in his book In Praise of Idleness, published in 1933, Russell defines socialism as both the state ownership of "ultimate economic power" and the democratic use of political power. Persuasion, not force, would be used to bring this state of affairs about:

I am persuaded that, if socialist propaganda were conducted with less hate and bitterness, appealing not to envy but to the obvious need of economic organization, the task of persuasion would be enormously facilitated and the need for force corres-

⁴⁷The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 414.

pondingly diminished.⁴⁸

Although he was a consistent opponent of state bureaucracy, he inconsistently argued in this book for government planning: "Economic insecurity will no longer exist . . . since everyone will receive a salary so long as he is not a criminal . . . There will be no economic dependence of one individual upon another, but only of all individuals upon the State."⁴⁹

Russell's political allegiances were never confined by the programme of a political party, although he was a member of the Labour Party for almost fifty years; he remained an individualist, a sceptical intellect more frequently out of step with the majority of his comrades in the Labour Party than in agreement with them. Russell was always, even during the "establishment years" (which will be discussed in the next chapter), his own man. The enthusiasm, optimism and growing scepticism of his early and middle years developed toward the end of his life into an increasingly pessimistic view of man's fate, and this is reflected in his political outlook. Always opposed to the unwarranted interference of the State in the lives of people, he, nevertheless, became a supporter of social democracy and state socialism, at least until the 'sixties, when he turned his attention to mass civil disobedience. His early support for syndicalism and anarchism,

⁴⁸B. Russell, In Praise of Idleness, p. 78

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 94-95.

with its total commitment to anti-authoritarianism, was tempered by common sense and logic, and the more practical programme of the Guild Socialists came closest to his ideal of socialism at that time. Scepticism replaced optimism in the years following his visit to Soviet Russia in 1920, and especially after the collapse in May 1926 of the General Strike, defeated by its own leaders. When Russell tore up his membership card following the Labour Party Conference in 1965, he not only registered his disgust with the Labour government's Vietnam policy, but he also recognized how far from socialist ideals and practices that Party had travelled. Everyone who knew Russell spoke of him as the most courteous of men, but he could not hide his contempt for the leaders of the Labour Party in the 'sixties.⁵⁰ Referring to Krushchev, Kennedy, and the leaders of his own party, he wrote:

Ever since 1914, at almost every crucial moment, the wrong thing has been done . . . murderous humbug, such as would have shocked almost everyone when I was young, is now solemnly mouthed by eminent statesmen . . . Until 1914, I fitted more or less comfortably into the world as I found it. There were evils, great evils, but there was reason to think they would grow less.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See, for example, R. W. Clark, Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 616: "Mr. Wilson approached Russell and thrust out his right hand with the words, 'Lord Russell'. Russell thrust both hands into his pockets", or B. Russell's letter to Stephen Bagnall (March 21, 1967), R. A.: "My belief that Mr. Gladstone was the greatest Prime Minister is equalled only by my certainty that Mr. Wilson is the most despicable. If I were to meet him in Hell, I should have the greatest difficulty in shaking his hand".

⁵¹ B. Russell, "For and Against Being Ninety", The Observer (May 13, 1962), p. 10.

Three years later, referring to Labour party support for the United States policy in Vietnam and answering his interviewer's question whether Britain should have a policy of non-alignment, he said:

In Britain? Please! We have lost all our power, all our influence. We crawl on our bellies to please the Americans. We are happy. Bah!!! (gesture of disgust and ironical laughter). The only way out for Great Britain is to form a new progressive party . . . constituted on the basis of British Trade Unionism but, I repeat, we shall have no chance for at least fifty years . . . I am a pessimist, you see.⁵²

The greatness of Bertrand Russell's politics lay in his political activities rather than in his political theories, for, with Russell to think and feel was to act. He went to the German Social Democrats, threw himself into the struggle against the 1914-1918 war, founded and ran his own experiment in progressive education—there has never lived a philosopher more involved with the events of his time.

True to the family tradition, civil disobedience and outright opposition to authority suited Russell better than the mantle of the elder statesman possessing oracular wisdom, which a somewhat relieved establishment had placed upon him in the 'fifties, and which was, in my opinion, the logical outcome of his anti-Communist crusades of that time and of his jaundiced view of Marxist theory. The civil disobedience

⁵²B. Russell, "Interview with Enrique Raab", Sunday Citizen (November 7, 1965), p. 11.

campaign and the War Crimes Tribunal⁵³ aroused furious antagonism against Russell from the left and the right in politics. Characterized as a fellow-traveller of the Communist Party, he was considered no better than a traitor by many of his fellow peers in the House of Lords, an institution Russell believed to be both otiose and anachronistic. The violence of this reaction was due to a feature of these last years of activity which was significantly different from other Russell campaigns. For the first time since 1918, he displayed an awareness of mass action as opposed to purely individual expressions of dissension. Even in the pacifist campaign of the First World War Russell distrusted "movements". Never completely in step with the No Conscription Fellowship or the socialist movement, he was essentially an individualist whose ideal socialist society was one that gave individuality full rein. His last campaigns were appeals for mass participation in political action, even though they were frequently contradicted by the results of his individualism.

In the next chapter I will discuss what I believe was Russell's perception, during the final decade of his life, that the illusion of social change through social democracy as it exists today was a fraud, and with that perception came another, that the only chance left to mankind is to rely on mass participation rather than individual goodwill.

⁵³To be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE PURSUIT OF PEACE—A CRITICAL SURVEY OF RUSSELL'S POLITICAL ACTIVISM

In the previous chapters I have advanced the theory that the British Whig tradition, coupled to the liberal humanism of John Stuart Mill, both of which were represented by Russell's political theory, rendered his remedies for educational and social reconstruction ineffectual. In what follows, I hope to show that it was when Russell broke with the traditional Whig liberal resistance to political activity, in a popular movement for social change, that he was most effective as a political figure.

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 was for Russell a shattering experience. He found the popular mood of jaunty optimism terrifying and never forgot the sight of men and women cheering at the prospect of Britons killing Germans. Russell was profoundly distressed to discover many socialists abandoning their internationalism and advocating support for the war as "patriots". Among the many friends whom Russell lost because of his unrelenting pacifism were his former tutor and collaborator Alfred North Whitehead (whose son was killed in the war) and Gilbert Murray.

Murray wrote a pro-government pamphlet, The Foreign

Policy of Sir Edward Grey, 1906-1915, which called the war resisters "pro-German, clever but naive". Russell, who was included in this attack, answered with a pamphlet of his own, The Policy of the Entente, 1904-1914: A Reply to Professor Gilbert Murray, in which he described Murray as "a snivelling sentimental ass".¹ A few weeks after conscription became law in 1916, Russell joined the No Conscription Fellowship. Too old to be conscripted, he, nevertheless, soon became the movement's most active propagandist as a lecturer and pamphleteer. He published Justice in War Time, written two years earlier, and contributed either an article or an editorial for the N.C.F. paper, The Tribunal, every week throughout 1917. His lectures were often heckled and harassed, but they inspired many who returned to England from France confused and dismayed by the horrors of the front line.² Russell enjoyed his new involvement: "For my part I get so much fun out of it that I have difficulty in looking the part of the martyr."³ Reading the accounts of his activity at this time, one is given a glimpse of exceptional energy released in a man totally committed to

¹Ronald W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 266.

²A good description of Russell's lectures is given by Miles Malleon in "The Life and Times of Bertrand Russell", a B. B. C. Film (May 1962). Malleon, who had just returned from France, attended a Russell lecture in 1916 and was at once converted by him to the cause of pacifism.

³R. W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 279.

a cause.⁴ The urgency of this situation led him into wild statements and exaggerations, a weakness that was to occur frequently in later campaigns and was to damage his reputation and his causes. He claimed that conscientious objectors ran as great a risk of being shot by the authorities as did the soldier at the front, and that since King George V had announced that he was giving up the consumption of alcohol for the duration of the war, he, Russell, would now start drinking, since being a teetotaler must have something to do with the killing of Germans. These remarks added to his reputation as a crank with ordinary men and women who did not know him.

During 1916 Russell wrote a leaflet which protested the savage sentence of two years of hard labour given to a young schoolmaster named Everett, who, as a member of the N. C. F., had refused to carry out non-combatant duties or obey military orders. After six men had been sentenced to a month in gaol for distributing the leaflet, Russell wrote a letter to The Times of London which appeared on May 17, 1916: "I wish to make it known that I am the author of this leaflet and that, if anyone is to be prosecuted, I am the person primarily responsible".⁵ The result was a fine of one

⁴For a detailed account of Russell's First World War activities, see Keith Robbins, The Abolition of War, and Jo Newberry, Bertrand Russell & The Pacifists in the First World War, Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University.

⁵Quoted in G. H. Hardy, Bertrand Russell and Trinity, p. 33.

hundred pounds. Russell and the N. C. F. had hoped for a gaol sentence, but his appearance in court, his speech in his own defence, and the publicity it aroused⁶ all seemed to be worthwhile: "What I want permanently, not consciously, but deep down, is stimulus, the sort of thing that keeps my brain active and exuberant".⁷ While official persecution served only to arouse the traditional Russell spirit of rebellion,⁸ an unofficial persecution, his dismissal from Trinity College, Cambridge, hurt him deeply and destroyed for him whatever faith remained in academic impartiality.⁹

By early 1917, Russell was losing interest in the No Conscription Fellowship. He considered himself a poor administrator and better able to pursue the objectives of the movement without the constraints of an organization. But he also had ideological differences; in a letter written shortly before he resigned as the acting chairman of the movement, he wrote:

It seems to me clear that so long as the war lasts, any work that hastens the coming of peace is more important than anything else, particularly if peace comes in the spirit advocated by the Russian revolutionaries . . . the N. C. F. is not a suitable body

⁶Everett's sentence was commuted after three weeks as a result of the publicity aroused by Russell's trial.

⁷Quoted in R. W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, pp. 285-6.

⁸One favourite ancestor, William Russell, carried rebellion so far that he was finally beheaded.

⁹Robert Bolt, in his commentary to the film, "The Life and Times of Bertrand Russell", refers to Russell's loss of faith in the honour and impartiality of the academic world.

for action in general politics because thousands desire an end to the present war for every one who accepts the extreme pacifist position. I think we ought as individuals to do what we can to help those who aim at ending the war, even if they do not accept the view that war is always wrong.¹⁰

Russell was applying the lesson he had drawn about Lassalle's sectarianism in German Social Democracy, that if the main objective, which was to end the war, was to be pursued, the widest possible unity should be achieved. To confine the anti-war movement to those who believed that war was wrong under all circumstances was sectarian. But this was not the sole reason for Russell's decision to leave the pacifist movement: the Russian Revolution had taken place, and it influenced his political outlook:

I am a conscientious objector to the present war and to almost any imaginable war between civilized states. But I have always held, and publicly stated, that the use of force in revolutions is not to be necessarily condemned. Until lately, this was mere academic reservation, without relevance to the actual situation. Now, however, it has become a pressing practical consideration. A certain amount of bloodshed occurred during the Russian Revolution, probably unnecessarily. If it was unnecessary, I can, of course, condemn it; but if the revolution could not be accomplished without it I cannot condemn it. And I should hold the same opinion as regards this country, if the circumstances were similar. If the "sacredness of human life" means that force must never be used to upset bad systems of government, to put an end to wars and despotisms, and to bring liberty to the oppressed, then I cannot honestly subscribe to it.¹¹

¹⁰Letter to the National Committee of the No Conscription Fellowship, (May 18, 1917), R. A.

¹¹Ibid.

This letter was his farewell to the pacifist movement, but not to his anti-war campaign. His weekly articles in The Tribunal continued throughout 1917 but ended abruptly with the second issue of 1918. In an article in the previous issue, dated January 1918, entitled "The German Peace Offer", he wrote:

The American garrison which will by that time be occupying England and France (in the event that early negotiations fail and the Germans continue to advance), whether or not they will prove efficient against the Germans, will no doubt be capable of intimidating strikers, an occupation to which the American army is accustomed at home.¹²

Russell was charged a few days later with "having in a printed publication made certain statements likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with the United States of America".¹³ He was found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment.¹⁴ He began his sentence only a few days after the completion of

¹²Tribunal, No. 90 (January 3, 1918), p. 1, R. A.

¹³G. H. Hardy, Bertrand Russell and Trinity, p. 46.

¹⁴In "The Life and Times of Bertrand Russell", a B. B. C. Film made in May 1962 to honour his ninetieth birthday, Russell, with a twinkle in his eye, recalled this occasion: "The magistrate started his sentence saying, 'You have committed a despicable offence'". In the same film Russell told how he used to go to Waterloo Station in London and watch the troop trains going off to France: ". . . it was horrible; I learnt for the first time that parental affection was a fraud, it meant that having children provided parents with an opportunity to be proud of their children."

Roads to Freedom.¹⁵

Between 1920 and 1954, Russell's response to the momentous political events of that period was to be less and less in keeping with the humanitarian ideals of his former beliefs. I have already discussed his visits to Russia and China and the books which resulted from them, The Theory and Practice of Bolshevism and The Problem of China. In Praise of Idleness, published in 1935, could be construed as a joke in poor taste with its discussion of a four-hour working day as an antidote to unemployment; with two million Britons in search of work, there was little to praise in idleness. Which Way To Peace?, published in 1936, was a book Russell never wanted reissued. In it he advocated a pacifist attitude to the threat of Hitler, arguing that Britain should renounce rearmament and welcome German troops should they invade, for to resist would invite gas warfare and devastating bombing attacks. Throughout Russell's voluminous personal correspondence and the published articles there are occasional references to his abhorrence of Mussolini and Hitler, but only one article condemns the Nazi persecution of the Jews.¹⁶ Sadly, there is not much evidence

¹⁵In reply to a comment that Roads to Freedom was remarkable owing to its economy and clarity of prose, Russell said: "I had an incentive to say what I had to say in that book as briefly as possible. I was on the point of going to gaol, and I wanted to get it finished before I went". "Kenneth Harris Talks to Bertrand Russell", The Western Mail (February 14, 1970), p. 4. This interview which took place in 1958 was not to be published, at Russell's request, until after his death.

¹⁶B. Russell, "Why are Jews Persecuted?", Time & Tide (January 12, 1935), pp. 54-55.

of his former political vigour during the eventful years of the 'thirties. Although he was on holiday in Spain in 1936 and was in regular correspondence with Gerald Brenan who reported on the Spanish Civil War for the Manchester Guardian, there is almost no reference to the Spanish Civil War. He did not believe that the Spanish people should defend their socialist government against Franco's military coup. Writing to Gilbert Murray about this and also about the threat of a German invasion of Czechoslovakia, he says:

Spain has turned away from pacifism, I myself have found it very difficult, the more so as I know Spain, most of the places where the fighting has been, and the Spanish people, I have the strongest possible feeling on the Spanish issue. I should certainly not find Czech-Slovakia more difficult. And having remained a pacifist while the Germans were invading France and Belgium in 1914, I do not see why I should cease to be one if they do it again. The result of our having adopted the policy of war at that time is not so delectable as to make me wish to see it adopted again. You feel "they ought to be stopped". I feel that, if we set to work to stop them, we shall, in the process, become exactly like them, and the world will have gained nothing. Also, if we beat them, we shall produce in time someone as much worse than Hitler as he is worse than the Kaiser. In all this I see no hope for mankind.¹⁷

Unlike Einstein, who in 1933 renounced his pacifism, Russell believed in 1938 that "war should, at this moment in history, be avoided, however great the provocation."¹⁸

¹⁷ Russell to Gilbert Murray, (March 3, 1937), R. A.

¹⁸ This statement was made in 1941, in a letter which explained what his views were at the time of Munich (1938) and which went on to announce his support for the war. New York Times (February 16, 1941), p. 9.

In 1940, Russell decided not to be a pacifist any longer. By this time Hitler had completed his occupation of Europe and filled his concentration camps with Jews and anti-Nazis from every occupied country. Was it a sudden awareness of the sufferings of these people and of the unconcealed policies of German fascism which changed Russell's mind? It does not appear to be so. Instead, both Ronald Clark and Katharine Tait draw attention to another, more basic reason for this decision, his patriotism. In 1940, with the British army defeated at Dunkirk and the collapse of French military resistance, the Germans reached the Channel coast and were less than thirty miles from Britain.

My father and Peter [Russell's third wife] knew there would be war and they were sure their beloved England would be destroyed while they were away [Russell was in America from 1939 to 1944] he faced the possibility that England might be devastated by bombs and overrun by Nazis. All his friends might be killed and every place he loved destroyed.¹⁹

Tait says that although her father thought that reason had led him to support the war against Hitler, and had said that his emotions "followed with reluctance", she believed the division in his mind to be not between reason and emotion but rather one of conflicting emotions, love of country against love of peace: "My father's love of England was deep and passionate, perhaps his strongest emotion . . . No,

¹⁹K. Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, pp. 136-137. For other numerous references to Russell's patriotism as a motive for his policies, see Ronald W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 555.

it was not reason that led him to support the war".²⁰ Patriotism as a strong motivational factor cannot be ignored when considering Russell's politics. It provides a possible explanation of his sudden switch from pacifism in 1940, and it may explain why he renounced his former support for the American production of atomic bombs in favour of unilateral disarmament in Britain and, eventually, the total abolition of nuclear weapons. Referring to a statement made in 1948, when he advocated threatening the Soviet Union with atomic war if she refused to accept United States control of atomic energy (the Baruch Plan), Russell, in 1954, explained his change of mind on the subject:

I thought at that time that perhaps the Russians could be compelled to accept the offer by the threat of war in the event of their continued refusal. Whether such a threat would have been wise became a purely academic question as soon as Russia also had the bombs. The situation now is that we cannot defeat Russia except by defeating ourselves.²¹

One realises with a shock that Russell, despite the renowned intensity of his feelings for those who suffer, did not protest the barbarity of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and was able to view with equanimity the pros-

²⁰Ibid., p. 138.

²¹B. Russell, Letter to Saturday Review (October 16, 1954), pp. 25-26.

Russell first raised the question of the "opportunity" provided by America's monopoly of the atomic bomb in "Humanity's Last Chance", an article in Calvalcade (October 20, 1945), pp. 8-9.

pect of similar attacks made upon the Soviet Union, should she not comply (which must have seemed hardly likely).

" . . . pressure should be put on Russia to accept the Baruch proposals and I did think that if they continued to refuse, it might be necessary actually to go to war."²² Could it be that his concern for peace was confined to Britain? Was dropping nuclear bombs on Japanese and Russians less of a crime than dropping them on Britons? Certainly, he realised that, when the Soviet Union began the manufacture of atomic and hydrogen bombs, Britain's role as a front line "defender of the faith" placed her survival, in the event of nuclear war, in jeopardy. "If there is a nuclear war, Britain is finished, whatever policy our government may have pursued."²³ As a consequence, once the American monopoly of atomic weapons was broken, Russell advocated a neutral Britain and the establishment of a world authority with a monopoly of major weapons of war. I hold that, in fact, Russell's political attitudes were usually an emotional response rather than the result of rational thought: "he himself has said that his politics were founded in his emotions. It is strange and disturbing to find that so profound a philosopher should allow reason to play little or no part in his political theory and

²²B. Russell, quoted in Kingsley Martin, Editor, p. 195.

²³B. Russell, Letter to The Times (March 8, 1958), p. 7.

practice."²⁴ A striking example of this is provided by a letter written to Constance Malleon in July 1920, upon his return from Russia:

The major despair was far worse. I observed that only the energetic can hope for political influence, and that, as a rule, only those who love domination are energetic. I realized that any attempt to improve the world politically rouses fierce opposition, and that only people with all the Bolshevik defects can hope to combat the opposition successfully, while only people utterly unlike the Bolsheviks could make any good use of victory. So the whole political method of seeking progress came to seem useless. Conflict requires organization and tyranny, which destroy the individual; but the preservation of the individual seems to me the one really important thing. But absence of conflict is only to be got by submission to existing tyrannies, which destroy the individual equally, except for a fortunate few. I see no way out except the gradual development of kindness that comes of long times without desperate conflict; and so pacifism, however slow, seems to me the only method.²⁵

These emotions are later given a rationale in The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism.

The period between 1944, when Russell returned to Britain from the United States, and 1954, when he began to campaign against nuclear disarmament, was marked by his intense hatred of the Soviet Union and Communism. It is ironic that Russell, who criticized Marxism as a doctrine of hatred and an appeal to force, was in the forefront of those who contributed from the Western world to the Cold War politics of that period. It was not coincidental that this was also

²⁴Leonard Woolf, "Russell's Autobiography", Political Quarterly (September 1968), p. 343.

²⁵B. Russell, Letter to Constance Malleon (July 24, 1920), R. A.

the period when Russell "came in from the cold" to become a prized member of the Establishment.

Russell's New Hopes for a Changing World, published in 1951, provides many unfortunate examples of a viewpoint reflecting hatred unsupported by plausible evidence. From a list which I have compiled, I cite two instances from the first pages of Chapter One, discussing why people in England were perplexed and uncertain in a situation where another devastating war was possible: "A young woman who might live constructively thinks to herself that she had better have a good time while she can since presently she will be raped by Russian soldiery until she dies".²⁶ This was certainly not current belief among the young women of my acquaintance in England during 1951. Indeed, it could be argued that a statement such as this might well add to the mood of doubt and perplexity which Russell is supposedly describing. The second example concerns the very real situation which arose in Korea when General MacArthur was attempting to provoke a military "confrontation" with China and threatening to use atomic weapons, a situation so real that he was eventually dismissed by President Truman. Russell criticizes MacArthur but cannot refrain from adding a comment, inspired not by facts but by anti-Communist malice.

After we have killed a sufficient number of millions of Chinese, the survivors among them will perceive

²⁶B. Russell, New Hopes for a Changing World, p. 9.

our moral superiority and hail MacArthur as a saviour. But let us not be one-sided. Stalin, I should say, is equally simple-minded and equally out of date. He, too, believes that if his armies could occupy Britain and reduce us all to the economic level of Soviet peasants and the political level of convicts, we should hail him as a great deliverer.²⁷

After 1958, Russell's crude anti-Communism moderated. Both nuclear powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, were seen as equally responsible and Russell's solution was for Britain to opt out with unilateral disarmament.

It is most significant that, at critical times during his life, Russell attempted to intervene directly in affairs of state, using his prestige as a philosopher in political matters. This practice began in 1916 with an open letter addressed to President Wilson.²⁸ Russell maintained a steady flow of letters to famous persons on various political matters throughout the 'thirties and 'forties, which culminated in a flurry of activity and personal communications to Eisenhower and Krushchev, Kennedy, Chou En-lai, and Nehru.²⁹ But there was always, it seems, a duality in Russell. While his individual activities were to continue and intensify until the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁸ The original text of this letter and copies of the press coverage are in the Bertrand Russell Archives. The text of the letter is to be found in The Autobiography, Vol. II, pp. 28-31.

²⁹ Russell's "Open Letters to Eisenhower and Krushchev" was published in the New Statesman (November 23, 1957), p. 638. For a detailed account of Russell's personal interventions and correspondence concerning the Cuban missile crisis (October 1962) and the Sino-Indian Dispute (September 1962—January 1963), see B. Russell, Unarmed Victory.

last days of his life,³⁰ he also began to perceive, dimly at first, the necessity for a mass movement if peace was to be secured. Consequently, his individualistic approach to politics reinforces the opinion that in a man of such intellect, his political philosophy was remarkable for its naivety. Russell's personal interventions in international politics seemed to reflect an inability to grasp the underlying factors which compel nations and their leaders to adopt particular policies at a given time, he seemed to believe that his personal moral appeal could influence men whose own ability as individuals to effect significant changes was a matter of serious doubt. He was genuinely surprised at Nehru's belligerence during the Sino-Indian dispute and considered Krushchev's withdrawal of Soviet ships from the United States blockade an action of a peace-loving man (despite the fact that Krushchev had provoked the incident by installing missiles in Cuba in the first place).³¹ Writing in the monthly journal of the British Communist Party, a few months before the Cuban

³⁰Russell's last message written two days before his death, was a call for a new world campaign "to help bring justice to the long-suffering people of the Middle East." Referring to the need to return Arab refugees to their homeland, he wrote, "How much longer is the world willing to endure this spectacle of wanton cruelty?" (January 31, 1970), R. A.

³¹See Unarmed Victory, where Russell discusses his role in both the Cuban missile crisis and the Sino-Indian dispute.

missile crisis, Russell stated:

I say with all the emphasis I can muster that the men of power who are prepared to base "security" on the readiness and the willingness to incinerate men in their hundreds of millions are global butchers. I am indifferent to the ideology which provides the language in which they couch their cruelty. It is a lie and an obscenity to pretend that such justifications change the plain fact of mass murder in heart, in plan and in action . . . The absolute duty of sane men and women is to rise up, to join together in an international movement of resistance, to cease acquiescence in policy and practice which betray everything worthwhile in the human experiment.³²

Two months later he revised his opinion that the two nuclear powers were "equals in power and wickedness". "I think America will embark on a preventative war. I don't think Russia will. There is an alliance of the Pentagon and the arms industry which is very powerful . . . Russian militarism is a response to American militarism and would rapidly vanish if there were no threat."³³ In 1960, Russell, who had been a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and its President from 1957, threw his support behind the "Committee of 100 for Civil Disobedience against Nuclear Warfare". The purpose of civil disobedience, wrote Russell, "is its employment with a view to causing a change in the law or in public policy".³⁴ Within a year, Russell found himself back in court at Bow Street and back in Brixton gaol, where he was imprisoned

³²Bertrand Russell, "Nuclear Disarmament: What I Think", Labour Monthly (March 1962), pp. 123-125.

³³B. Russell, Daily Herald (May 17, 1962), p. 4.

³⁴B. Russell, "Civil Disobedience", New Statesman (February 17, 1961), pp. 245-246.

Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, he referred to the Baruch Plan, the same plan which he had in 1946 proposed that the Soviet Union should be forced to adopt under the threat of atomic war. In 1964, however, he drew attention to factors which had influenced the Soviet Union's rejection of the Plan, factors which had apparently escaped him in 1946: "Its intentions were admirable, but Congress insisted upon the insertion of clauses, which, as it was known, the Russians would not accept."³⁷ In 1966, Russell cabled Prime Minister Kosygin, asking him to turn part of the Soviet air force over to the Vietnamese for the purpose of defending Vietnam against American air bombardment. In a letter replying to criticism of this action he wrote: "Unless the Soviet Union intervenes now with its air force to protect Vietnam, American imperialism will extend the scale of the war outside Vietnam, precisely as it has within Vietnam."³⁸

Whatever we may think about our politicians, it is indeed fortunate that neither President Truman in 1946 nor Prime Minister Kosygin in 1966 were inclined to heed the advice of the founder of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. One is forced to conclude that personal diplomacy of the kind

³⁷ Bertrand Russell, "A New Approach to Peace", The Minority of One (June 1964), p. 6.

³⁸ Bertrand Russell replies on Vietnam", Tribune (September 2, 1966), p. 7.

forty-three years earlier. During his trial he stated:

"Patriotism and humanity alike urged us to see some way of saving our country and the world."³⁵

During the final eight years of his life, Russell campaigned for the withdrawal of American troops in Vietnam, initiated the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in 1964, and launched the International War Crimes Tribunal in 1966.

The influence of Ralph Schoenman, an American who became Russell's secretary in 1960 at the age of twenty-four, has been the subject of a good deal of speculation in assessing the final period of Russell's life. Schoenman has linked his own theory and practice with those of Russell during the years of their association.³⁶ Russell was most likely influenced by the vigour and dedication of Schoenman, and while the Russell Archives show evidence of corrections to statements drafted by his secretary (usually moderating their tone), there were occasions when Russell did not, for one reason or another, check statements which bore his name.

There is, however, abundant proof that Russell, after 1962, became increasingly critical of United States policy. In 1964, in a statement announcing the formation of the

³⁵Russell, speaking from the dock at Bow Street Court, September 12, 1961. Quoted in Ronald W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 590.

³⁶Ralph Schoenman, "Bertrand Russell and the Peace Movement", George Nakhnikian (ed.) in The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell.

in which Russell engaged could, were it effective, be a highly dangerous exercise. Russell despite the support he gave to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Committee of 100, remained to the end an individualist. Schoenman drew attention to this in an article, "Bertrand Russell and the Peace Movement", written in 1974: "He did not believe in the creative energy and untapped possibilities in great masses of ordinary men and women." Ronald Clark describes Russell telling an interviewer that his attitude to the common man had always been on the verge of contempt, although he tried to judge people kindly. Clark goes on to quote Russell, who had written half a century earlier that "no one could pretend that a working man has as a rule the same equipment for forming sound political opinions as a professional man or a man of leisure."³⁹

Most fair-minded scholars of Russell and politics during the past thirty years would wish to pay homage to the record of his activities for peace, but that record is marred by his emotional rather than his rational responses and by his political naivety. In the interests of world peace, he was prepared to risk world war. In 1946 his judgement was impaired by hatred of the Soviet Union, and in 1966 by hatred of the United States. In both cases, it is not sufficient to criticise his head and not his heart, for his

³⁹Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 631.

emotions were surely as faulty as his logic. It is familiar criticism in this study and underlies Russell's entire political philosophy.

Throughout human history, man has looked to brilliant individuals for leadership and inspiration, but history provides sufficient examples of the dangers in such a hope. All of these "heroes in history" have needed the support of ordinary men and women in the furtherance of their "inspired" plans and Russell was no exception. His campaigns against nuclear disarmament, for civil disobedience, and against the war in Vietnam were carried out without apparent reference to the people who joined them; they were "Russell campaigns", supported by men and women who desired the principal objectives of these movements, they were not organizations of people supported by Russell. How many of the thousands involved in the anti-Vietnam campaign were consulted or would have agreed with Russell's telegram to Prime Minister Kosygin? Russell's campaigns, from the formation of the Committee of 100 to the War Crimes Tribunal, six years later, were supported by a decreasing number of ordinary men and women. Eventually he drew support from a small coterie whose influence over him grew in proportion to the decline of his influence among ordinary people who desired peace. The consequence of brilliant individualism in this case, as in so many others in the past, was that a developing, broadly based movement for peace (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) was split and through

a series of increasingly sectarian developments was eventually reduced to the War Crimes Tribunal, comprising a group of brilliant, committed individuals, with little popular support and virtually no impact upon events.⁴⁰

The formation of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in 1963 was an important step taken away from mass participation in the peace movement. Russell concluded after the Cuban missile crisis that "the pursuit of peace requires a different technique from that of marches and demonstrations". He announced the formation of a body which "will, in time, prove adequate to deal with all obstacles to peace and to propose such solutions of difficult questions as may commend themselves to the common sense of mankind".⁴¹ The new organization was The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. It is impossible in this survey to discuss in detail the work of the Peace Foundation, work which continues to the present. My interest here concerns the relationship between the Foundation, Russell's long-cherished hope for world government and peace and popular participation:

The ultimate goal will be a world in which national armed forces are limited to what is necessary for internal stability and in which the only forces capable of acting outside national limits will be those of a reformed United Nations, or, possibly, of some

⁴⁰The War Crimes Tribunal comprised, inter alia, Jean-Paul Sartre, Vladimir Dedijer, and Isaac Deutscher, and was described by its Secretary General, Ralph Schoenman, as "a partial body of committed men".

⁴¹B. Russell, "A New Approach to Peace", The Minority of One (June 1964), p. 6.

new international body which should have sole possession of the major weapons of war.⁴²

Russell resigned from the Committee of 100 in 1963, and turned his attention to the Foundation. In a press statement issued on the 29th of September of that year he announced its formation and said:

The anti-war movements have lived from hand to mouth. They have gone begging to the press and film media for a crumb of publicity. That publicity which has been achieved concerning the danger of nuclear war and the necessity for disarmament has been distorted, inadequate and sporadic. We intend to develop our own media of communication—radio, press, films, journals—a community of discussion which will not depend upon the establishment-controlled or government-intimidated press.⁴³

Ronald Clark, when discussing the work of the Foundation, pointed out its minor successes and some of its blunders, the apparently disruptive influence of Ralph Schoenman, the wild and unrealistic schemes of Russell and Schoenman, and the adoption of policies in defiance of popular opinion by Russell and his associates. The Foundation, initially involved in activities around the world, focussed increasingly on the Vietnam War and the setting-up of the International War Crimes Tribunal.

The International War Crimes Tribunal, originally considered by Russell to be a Tribunal of "genuinely impartial people",⁴⁴ failed to win popular support because no

⁴²Ibid., p. 8.

⁴³Ronald W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 604.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 625.

attempt was made at impartiality in deciding upon its members, providing a perfect example of the "mountain fortress mentality".⁴⁵ The organisers of the Tribunal abandoned any pretence at an impartial examination of evidence and as a result it failed, before it began, to fulfil its purpose. That purpose was, of course, to help bring about an end to American aggression in Vietnam by raising the consciousness and touching the conscience of men and women unaware of the results of that aggression. Russell considered the National Liberation Front to be a resistance movement similar to the anti Nazi resistance in Europe and the Warsaw Ghetto rising during the Second War.⁴⁶ The Tribunal met eventually in Sweden and concluded its business in Denmark on December 1st, 1967, finding the United States "guilty of genocide and other atrocities". These findings, dismissed as biased in 1967 and largely ignored, were confirmed in 1972. Acts of barbarism, indiscriminate torture, mass killings and the systematic use of bacteria and napalm against civilians and military were employed by the American forces against the Vietnamese. The

⁴⁵The increasing sectarianism of Russell and his associates was reflected in the embattled air of defiance in statements made, particularly by Ralph Schoenman, during the period 1966-68. One is reminded of the Chinese description of this type of situation as a "mountain stronghold mentality", referring to the bandit heroes of Mao Tse-tung's favourite novel, Water Margin, who sallied forth from their mountain fortress to carry out heroic exploits on behalf of the masses, instead of rousing them to undertake their own insurrection.

⁴⁶B. Russell, "Partisan Defence in Vietnam", letter in Daily Telegraph (September 30, 1966), p. 16.

record will show the War Crimes Tribunal to be proved correct in its findings but its methods and its original purposes failed owing to the sectarian policies of its organisers. A small group formed a Secretariat to advise Russell during the last years of frenetic international activity. Russell, in War Crimes in Vietnam, acknowledges his debt to three men as researchers. Two of them, Christopher Farley and Ralph Schoenman, were appointed as secretaries to Russell during this period, often travelling abroad as his ambassadors. Attempting to develop a movement such as the Peace Foundation on behalf of the masses, through the prestige and personality of one individual, however brilliant he might be, was unlikely to succeed while its organisers were isolated from the ordinary people they hoped to serve. The increasing sectarianism of Russell's campaigns may well have been due to the negative influence of Russell's advisors, who may have been cut off from the aspirations of ordinary people by their privileged position "at court", so to speak. Jean-Paul Sartre may have had this in mind when he told Ralph Schoenman: "You can't hide behind Russell and keep him in your pocket at the same time".⁴⁷ To what extent Russell was in command of the situation is difficult to determine, but his political attitude certainly appeared to have developed an uncharacteristic neo-Marxist "world view" by 1968:

⁴⁷Ronald W. Clark, The Life of Bertrand Russell, p. 627.

It is not enough, however, to identify the criminal. The United States must be isolated and rendered incapable of further crimes. I hope that America's remaining allies will be forced to desert the alliances which bind them together. I hope that the American people will repudiate resolutely the abject course on which their rulers have embarked . . . I hope that the peoples of the Third World will take heart from the example of the Vietnamese and join further in dismantling the American empire.⁴⁸

This statement appears in the Introduction to the proceedings of the War Crimes Tribunal and is written in terms similar to those of an Introduction to an earlier book by Russell, War Crimes in Vietnam, in which he brilliantly analyses the historical, political and economic causes of the Vietnam war and links American military involvement with American colonialism. This analysis is a Marxist interpretation of the war, and I doubt whether Russell wrote it, although he must have read it and was, therefore, prepared to adopt that point of view.

The Russell who could hope that "people will repudiate resolutely the abject course on which their rulers have embarked" held, in earlier times, a rather different view of the causes of war. In Principles of Social Reconstruction he wrote:

The ultimate fact from which war results is not economic or political, and does not rest upon any mechanical difficulty of inventing means for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. The ultimate fact from which war results is the fact that a large proportion of mankind have an impulse to conflict rather than harmony . . . ⁴⁹

⁴⁸B. Russell, in John Duffett (ed.), Against the Crime of Silence, p. 8.

⁴⁹B. Russell, Principles of Social Reconstruction, p. 75.

It is conceivable that Russell, in these last years, was sufficiently influenced by his closest associates to change his mind. If that was the case, it would have entailed a change from his liberal humanist philosophy, for if he believed in the statements made in his name during the period 1964 to 1968, then he was adopting a Marxist evaluation of international politics. For confirmation, one need only compare the previous quotation with the following, written in 1968: "There is only one way to remove starvation and disease in the poor countries—to overthrow the puppet regimes and create a revolution capable of withstanding American power".⁵⁰ This was the position adopted by Mao Tse-tung in 1921 when he opposed Russell's argument against the use of force in favour of persuasion.

In this survey of Russell's attitude to war, I have found many occasions to criticise his lack of political awareness, his dangerous individualism, and the emotional basis of his political activity. But this is not to deny the tremendous effort and the sincerity, often misguided, of Russell's work for peace, and the Peace Foundation can still prove a lasting and fitting tribute to him.

⁵⁰B. Russell, Against the Crime of Silence, p. 8.

IV

CONCLUSION

It is not difficult, regardless of one's outlook on life, to be ambivalent about a figure as complex as Bertrand Russell. Constance Malleon, Katharine Tait, Dora Russell, Leonard Woolf, indeed, all who knew him well have endorsed that view. Russell was the product of a loveless childhood, raised as an aristocratic prig. His first intimate relationships were formed in a rarefied, intellectual atmosphere of Cambridge among the "Apostles". Russell's principal attitudes to life were formed between this period and his visit to Russia in 1920.

In this study, I have advanced the theory that Russell failed to understand Marx, and this failure rendered his political theory negative and ineffectual. It is more a misfortune than a criticism that Russell failed to grasp the essential humanism of Marx, and by linking Marx to the Soviet Union's contempt for humanist values and individual dignity added to the distortion of Marx's philosophy.

It was not Russell but the world at large, which defined him as a philosopher of political and social affairs. In this, as in so many other instances, the common sense of ordinary men and women transcends the academic discussion whether Russell did work in political philosophy or merely

represented a particular philosophy which was not uniquely his own. The notion that there is a distinction to be made between Russell "the philosopher" of logic and mathematics and Russell "the writer" of popular books on social and political matters was advanced by Russell himself. While conceding that in each historical epoch there may exist a general understanding of what is right or wrong, he believed that moral judgements must be a matter of individual feeling and, as such, are not philosophical at all. To the average man and woman who has read Russell's books on politics, sex, power, happiness, morals and education, the questions which they raise are precisely those which philosophy ought to concern itself with. To the millions of people who live in countries where Marxism represents the national ideology, and in those nations of the Third World where it has an irresistible appeal, the separation between philosophy and commitment (or praxis) no longer exists. Of those contradictions which, I hope, this study has revealed in the personality and ideas of Russell, perhaps most basic is that whereby Russell, one of the most committed political intellectuals of this century, perpetuated the old tradition of sceptical rationalism which divides intellect from feeling. Despite Russell's commitment to his beliefs and his willingness to throw his entire energies, regardless of personal cost, behind that commitment, the discussion about whether Russell can really be defined as a political philosopher

continues.¹ Such argument is nothing more than an exercise in futility, for it surely depends on the viewpoint which one adopts to philosophy in general and to such specific, but highly relevant questions as to whether or not there is a relation between political fact and moral value. In any case, setting this discussion to one side, and repeating the assertion made in the Preface in this study, Russell attempted to make a unique contribution to political philosophy inasmuch as he combined the liberal humanism of John Stuart Mill with the best values of English Whiggery and attempted to adjust them (and himself) to the vulgarities, complexities and egalitarianism of the twentieth century. The result was a literary output of consistently brilliant, lucid, and often witty prose, frequently accompanied by passionate political activity; but as political philosophy, the outcome was, I believe, a failure.

Russell's earlier writings suffer from the legacy of John Stuart Mill, they indicate a similar inability to grasp the fundamental social causes which lie at the root of the human condition, and, as a consequence of a superficial diagnosis, his remedies are at times unrealistic and always

¹For example, Professor A. J. Ayer in the Fontana Modern Masters volume on Russell (1972) divides Russell's writings into "Philosophical" and "Political and Social", and Professor John Slater in his article "The Political Philosophy of Bertrand Russell", in Russell in Review, p. 139, writes: "We may conclude, then, that the total neglect of social and political topics in My Philosophical Development confirms the consistency with which Russell after 1914 held the view that none of his writings in our areas of interest today [political concerns] were philosophical".

unsatisfactory. When we have read Russell's political philosophy, it is not the ineffectual remedies that we remember but his brilliant depiction of human folly. Russell's later works are progressively dominated by a sense of frustration and despair, often the result of faulty logic and emotionalism. In almost all his writings Russell, despite the frequency with which many of his opinions were to change, seemed too sure of his conclusions. Setting up his argument so that the "certainty" of his conclusions derived from the "certainty" of his premises, he expressed no doubts. Yet, it was Russell who urged his readers and his audience to "doubt, doubt and doubt again."²

Between 1926 and 1954, sheer economic necessity compelled Russell to write an astonishing number of newspaper and periodical articles, mostly in the United States, but also in many other countries, and twenty-seven books were published during this period. They were often attempts to satisfy his own doubts, and it is noteworthy that Katharine Tait believed that her father's public certainties were always assailed by his private doubts.³ This particular conflict

²The following Zen poem, a favourite of Russell's, summarized his scepticism:

"What I prove, what you prove.
All that is no proof. Yet men call it proof.
Only what none has called proof
Is the ground upon which our feet stand."

Arthur Waley (trans.), A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems, p. 77.

³Katharine Tait, My Father, Bertrand Russell, pp. 182-183.

may well have contributed to Russell's frequent sense of despair and desolation. Discussing "the impossibility of reconciling ethical feelings with ethical doctrines", he wrote that "this dark frustration brooded constantly".⁴ But there was another reason for his despair, which I have referred to earlier. It was Russell's fate to witness the collapse of the liberal reformist dream and to have to "contort" himself to fit into the modern world. While Locke and Mill could die confident in the future of mankind, Russell became increasingly gloomy at the prospect of mankind's survival.

The following paragraph, which concludes Russell's book New Hopes for a Changing World (perhaps, his most pessimistic work), illustrates Russell's heritage of liberal hope in conflict with his inherent negativism.

Man, in the long ages since he descended from the trees, has passed arduously and perilously through a vast dusty desert, surrounded by the whitening bones of those who have perished by the way, maddened by hunger and thirst, by fear of wild beasts, by dread of enemies, not only living enemies, but spectres of dead rivals projected on to the dangerous world by the intensity of his own fears. At last he has emerged from the desert into a smiling land, but in the long night he has forgotten how to smile. We cannot believe in the brightness of the morning. We think it trivial and deceptive; we cling to old myths that allow us to go on living with fear and hate—above all, hate of ourselves, miserable sinners. This is folly. Man now needs for his salvation only one thing: to open his heart to joy, and leave fear to gibber through the glimmering darkness of a forgotten past. He must lift up his eyes and say:

⁴B. Russell, The Autobiography, Vol. III, p. 34.

This criticism is just, if we were to consider only Russell's writings but it is too harsh were we to view Russell's life in its totality, for while Russell's philosophy of life may eventually prove to be nothing more than a failed attempt to impart liberal humanism and Bloomsbury rationalism to a world totally alienated from such concepts, the passionate sincerity of his activities provides inspiration to all who care about human suffering and survival.

An interesting comparison can be made between Russell and Tolstoy, for the political life of both was a perpetual struggle against the values of their upbringing and social class. Contrary to Tolstoy, however, it was Russell's life rather than his social and political writings which will stand as a monument to his memory. Indeed, the lasting contribution of Russell may ultimately prove to be not his popular philosophings, nor even his work in logic or mathematics, but his activity on behalf of men and women wherever they suffered from injustice, bad education, superstitious beliefs, and the threat of war. This study has attempted to evaluate Russell's political philosophy not solely by discussing his written work but also by describing the richness of his active contribution, especially during his last decade, when, despite the results of his individualism, he crowned his life by devoting the last ounce of his strength to save mankind from nuclear war.

That which was once said by Oscar Wilde of himself, that he put his talent into his writings and his genius into his life, may be properly said also of Bertrand Russell.

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