

In the second volume of his Autobiography Russell remarks that the success of the Kerensky Revolution in February 1917 led to a meeting of British sympathizers with it in Leeds. He went up to it with Ramsay MacDonald and others. They were joined on the way by Lady Constance Malleon, with whom Russell was then having a love affair, and her husband, Miles Malleon. Russell's account is very brief, but it tallies in every regard with the fuller one given by Lady Constance in her autobiography, After Ten Years (London: Cape, 1931):

We went from Cambridge to Leeds - where a conference was being held with the idea of establishing Workers' and Soldiers' Councils after the pattern of those in Russia. We joined a crowded train at Peterborough and we travelled up to Leeds in a third class carriage with about ten others: Ramsay MacDonald, Gerald Gould and Edgar Lansbury (a most delightful pair), B.R., etc. It was very hot - and Ramsay MacDonald kept telling long Scotch stories. On our arrival at Leeds, the hotels did their best to refuse us accomodation. ... The waiters slapped our food in front of us anyhow. The crowd hissed as we went through the streets to the conference. Some of the children threw stones. There were a lot of police about. I had a seat at the very back of the gallery, right at the top. Russell got up to speak. I couldn't see him, but I knew it could be no one else - because he always got a bigger reception than anyone. There weren't many men over military age who thought it worth while to come out hot and strong against the war. B.R. spoke of Allen (whom we had just seen sentenced at Newhaven to a further term of imprisonment) and at Allen's name there was a burst of applause that must have lasted fully a minute. It was rather fine. (Pp. 113-14)

The proceedings of this conference, held on June 3rd, 1917, were first reported in the next issue of the small Labour and pacifist weekly, The Herald. They were issued later that month by the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates in a pamphlet called What Happened at Leeds. Demand was sufficiently brisk to warrant a "Second Edition" in July. Although printed on very good paper at the Pelican Press (the beauty of whose work is well known), very few copies of it have survived.

Four resolutions were passed by those assembled. The first welcomed the Russian Revolution; the second called upon the British Government to change its foreign policy to coincide with that announced by the Russian revolutionaries; the third demanded that the British Government increase civil liberties so as "to place itself in accord with the democracy of Russia"; and the fourth called for the establishment, "in every town, urban, and rural district", of Councils of Workmen and Soldiers' Delegates to work for the implementation of these policies.

Russell spoke in favour of the third resolution. His speech is worth reproducing, not only because of the rarity of the original pamphlet, but also because it shows how completely the war and its victims had come to dominate his thinking. At best he only alludes to the Russians and their Revolution:

I wish to say a few words about the thousand men now in prison in this country because they believe in the brotherhood of men. ("Hear, hear.") I don't wish so much to plead on their behalf with you as to convey to you on their behalf the profound joy that it is to them, the profound help in the very difficult time that they have to go through, to feel that the seed of freedom which they have tried to sow is now bearing fruit. They who had to begin their battle when the world was very dark, now have the

knowledge that the world looks no longer so dark as it did, and the hope and new happiness which has come into the lives of all of us, that also is with them in prison. Clifford Allen, whom I saw during his brief liberty the other day, takes back with him into his prison the knowledge that the world is moving. He told the court-martial that he stands for liberty - (cheers) - as well as for peace. And we who are outside, who by the accident of a few years have failed to have the privilege of standing beside these men, owe it to them to remember how difficult it is for a man anxious to do what he can for his country and for the world to find himself now within prison walls, powerless, unable to help with his counsel, with his enthusiasm, and with his life - able only to sit still within his prison cell. It is that which they feel most, but they and we must know that they have done much to bring about the new state of opinion in this country and the world. It is by their refusal to serve that they have shown the world that it is possible for the individual to stand in this matter of military service against the whole power of the organised State. That is a very great discovery. It is something which enhances the dignity of men, something which makes every one of us feel freer as we look out upon the world. (Applause.)

The Hammersmith Bookshop planned to reprint What Happened at Leeds in 1967 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the meeting. Mr. Harold Gray, one of Hammersmith's directors, wrote Russell for his recollections of the meeting. Russell's response was immediate:

I well remember the excitement in connection with the early days of the Russian Revolution. The meeting at Leeds that you ask about took place between the February Revolution and that of October. That is to say, at the time when it looked as if Russia were about to become democratic. All the people of liberal feeling in the West had been troubled by the alliance with Czarist Russia. They were further troubled by the fact that the war seemed as if it would go on forever. When the Russian Revolution took place, practically everybody in the West rejoiced. Even the British Embassy in Petrograd took a part in furthering the Revolution. Those of us who had been troubled by the alliance with Czarist Russia felt a new surge of hope, which, unfortunately, proved illusory after a few months. I travelled to Leeds with Ramsay MacDonald, and he was soberly optimistic. It seemed as if the Russian revolutionaries were out to create Utopia, not only in their own country, but everywhere. It was a happy moment, but, alas, a brief one.

It was finally decided there was not sufficient demand to justify reprinting What Happened at Leeds. Someday, perhaps, it will be reprinted with Russell's letter serving as a new preface.

Department of Philosophy  
University of Toronto

John G. Slater