Bertrand Russell as a moral force in world politics

by I. F. Stone

THE PHILOSOPHER WE are here to honour tonight has a unique distinction in the history of philosophy. There has never been in the history of the world a philosopher who was as much loved in his time and as world wide as Bertrand Russell. No other philosopher made himself so relevant to the concerns and the anguish of his time as Bertrand Russell. True, he did not develop a system, but every system merely takes a flash of insight and creates an elaborate fiction out of it. But I am not here to talk about Russell as a philosopher—I am not competent to discuss his achievements in the more recondite and technical fields of philosophy—but to speak of him as a moral influence, for the world has great need of men of this kind. He and Einstein (and one really has to think of them together) represented what is something almost new in world history. If we look about for a successor to exercise a moral influence on the rather tangled and immoral activities of mankind, we have to recognize that the human race is very, very primitive.

To exercise a moral influence over the human race requires, first of all, that you be associated with some tricks—a little bit of "circus" is required to capture the imagination and win the awe of mankind. Moses had the worst and the best of the Pharoah's sorcerers to prove his mettle, Jesus had to walk on water, and in our more enlightened age, we have much the same phenomenon, although it is in a somewhat more superficially subtle form. One of

the attributes required to become a great moral influence is to write a book that very few people have read, and even fewer can understand, or to develop a theory that everybody talks about, and pays tribute to, but nobody quite knows the meaning of—even sometimes its own creator. I know Ed Condon used to tell an amusing story about Einstein. He went to Princeton once in the twenties and heard a youngster at the blackboard demonstrating the theory of relativity. Einstein's face lit up with pleasure and surprise, and he said, "Is it really so? Is that really so? It really works!" So even Einstein was surprised that the damn thing worked. And of course the *Principia Mathematica* occupied a similar place in the lore of Sunday editors and journalists as a kind of magical performance, very weighty, full of abracadabra, of magical symbols, by whose manipulation we give the initiate strange powers, even an occult influence, over the workings of nature.

The second thing you need to become a moral influence and a kind of elder statesman and sage in the way that Einstein and Russell were is that you have to be elderly, in fact a little bit decrepit. It is a very good idea to be a little bit decrepit because human pride is still a little bit in awe of the old man of the tribe who remembers the early days before scientific progress began, when the first flint came into use in making a fire, and who knows the formula and keeps it a secret and won't give it out if you anger him. It is good to be old. The kids say they can't trust anybody over thirty, but the general population really don't take a man seriously until he at least gets past seventy. Russell, of course, was at his best when he passed ninety.

The fact is that if Bertrand Russell's life had been broken off at earlier periods, he would have left a rather different record. He was forty-two when the First World War broke out; and—let's see, the war ended in 1945, add twenty-eight—he was seventy-two (am I right in my mathematics?)[1] when the Second World War was over. At each of these various stages, his life's work added up rather differently. His technical achievements as a philosopher occurred mostly before the First World War. Had he died after the First World War, he would have been remembered as a pacifist

[1] [No. He was 73.—Ed.]

who went to jail for his ideas, and for many wonderful things that he had written that still inspire many of us today. If he had died before the Second World War, his position would have been very different from what it is today. In 1936 he wrote an obituary[2] in which he said that he was as isolated politically as John Milton after the Restoration; and he did indeed, in the Hitler period, find himself somewhat out of it in a very anguished position that I will discuss in a moment. Or again, if he had died about 1949 or 1950, the last item on his record would have been, I'm sorry to say, the advocacy of preventive war. It was really at eighty-three, with the shock of the discovery of the hydrogen bomb and with that urgent manifesto from some of the world's greatest scientists, led by Lord Russell and the document signed by Albert Einstein a few days before his death,[3] that he really entered upon his greatest period.

Russell, who had always wanted love, and who, like so many heretics, loners, beginners, wanted somehow to be part of a crowd, became part of a world movement, and in his latter years became a kind of a world ombudsman. He was an ombudsman of a kind that the world had never seen before, except perhaps in the case of Einstein, and earlier in the case of Voltaire. Newton by his discoveries, especially after the plotting of the return of Halley's Comet, exercised a tremendous fascination, but it was only with Voltaire that we find a philosopher who was also a journalist, a writer of fiction, and a gifted crusader for justice of a kind that Einstein was in his own way, though much less a journalist than Bertrand Russell was. Voltaire and Russell are really very much of a pair, except of course Russell was much the greater philosopher. And all over the world there were people in rather lonely places who felt for Russell in a way that people have never felt for any other philosopher in his lifetime. I know people love Spinoza and some people love rare spirits like Nicholas of Cusa, but to have a living philosopher loved as Russell was loved was something quite extraordinary. Czeslaw Milosz, the Polish dissident writer who wrote a marvelous book called *The Captive Mind* and who was cultural attaché of the Polish Embassy in Washington after the Second World War, where I had the pleasure of knowing him, and

[2] Reprinted in *Unpopular Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950).

[3] See Russell's *Autobiography, 1944–1969* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp. 128–33.

who later defected, wrote a novel about the underground during the war.[4] He has a character who takes the *nom de guerre* of "Bertrand"—for Bertrand Russell. I know in my own case Russell took on new meaning for me in the fifties in Washington at the time of the Cold War, which is not only metaphor, but really created a terribly cold climate for those of us who didn't want to cut Stalin's gizzard out the next Thursday morning and who were regarded as pariahs and heretics. It is very strange to live in a whore-house and be looked down upon because you are a virgin. I was very happy doing the *Weekly* as long as I was working, but as soon as it went to press there was nobody to talk to. If I knew a few people that I could talk to, I was afraid to go near them for fear they would lose their jobs. As for the others, I wouldn't go near them anyway.

I happened then to be wandering around the public library in Washington, and I pulled off the shelf a book with the title *Why Men Fight*, which was the American title of a book Russell published during the First World War as *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. And as I opened it and began to read, it was like finding a friend, and more than a friend. I would like to read you a paragraph. Russell was in many ways a super journalist; he could write an article at the drop of a hat. And he wrote for all kinds of newspapers and magazines. In the thirties he was really quite a star of the Hearst Sunday Magazine, and sometimes he sounded like a somewhat more elevated Frank Crane. But even in the fastest pieces of hack-work (he was often harried for money and really turned out a lot of journalistic stuff) he always exhibited a wit, and a grace, and an insight and a beauty that made him wonderful to read. This paragraph I want to read to you from 1916 was not, of course, hacked out, but really has permanent meaning in wars and cold wars, and in all the struggles to create a better world. Russell wrote:

> To one who stands outside the cycle of beliefs and passions which make the war seem necessary, an isolation, an almost unbearable separation from the general activity, becomes unavoidable. At the very moment when the universal disaster raises compassion in the highest degree, compassion itself compels aloofness from the impulse to self-destruction which has swept over Europe. The helpless longing to save men from the ruin towards which they are hastening makes it necessary to oppose the stream, to incur hostility, to be thought unfeeling, to lose for the moment the power of winning belief. It is impossible to prevent others from feeling hostile, but it is possible to avoid any reciprocal hostility on one's own part, by imaginative understanding and the sympathy which grows out of it. And without understanding and sympathy it is impossible to find a cure for the evil from which the world is suffering.[5]

The job of applying ethics to world politics is a very, very difficult one. Perhaps the consideration that weighs most strongly for the creation of a world order such as Russell hoped for all his life is that the anarchy of a system of national states (so-called sovereign states, which means the right to kill *en masse* whenever you feel like it) creates so many concrete problems, like the problem of the arms race, that simply cannot be solved within the confines of that system. These problems are like some of the problems in science which were insoluble within the existing frame of reference until men with a new frame of reference found a way to resolve them. And the same thing is true of problems arising from the system of sovereign states. But more serious than those problems is the fact that it is very difficult, even for the best men like Russell, with the utmost sympathy for human suffering, to know what is right and what is wrong. The personal component that makes some judges great and others mediocre is the deep-rooted feeling that even in the law of domestic society, no generalization ever applies universally. Every human conflict is unique, and there is always a gap between the statutory rule, or the adumbration of it in precedent, and the case to hand; and that gap has to be filled by some imponderable for which we have no scientific recipe, or even a scientific name. That fact is wisdom, a sense of harmony, a sense of beauty and the willingness to take a chance, because we never know what the ultimate effect is going to be, or sometimes what the near effect is going to be.

It is a real testimony to the difficulty of applying ethical precepts

[4] *The Seizure of Power*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York: Criterion Books, 1955).

[5] *Why Men Fight* (New York: Holt, 1917), p. 4.

to the jungle world of nation states that even a Bertrand Russell showed such diverse attitudes to the wars and the near wars of his own long career. At the beginning of the Boer War Russell was, by his own definition, a liberal imperialist, a rather odd combination, but we have seen a lot of liberal imperialists in our time—in George Bundy, a lot of the Kennedy crowd, and the whole Vietnam experience. A liberal imperialist is not as strange as he sounds, and we're suffering from the effects at home. You all know, I suppose, that dramatic passage in Russell's autobiography where he describes the moment of mystical insight which transformed him and which made him a pacifist.[6] One of the wonderful things about Russell and one of the things that give him a dimension lacking in many other philosophers is his combination of rationalism and mysticism. God knows that while rationalism and reason are not very satisfactory, they are still about all we have to work with. He was a rationalist and at the same time a mystic. Without being in any way superstitious, condemning conventional religion with all its shams and nonsense, and, worse than nonsense, the institutional lies it creates out of the visions of great men, of the ugly sepulchres it builds for visionaries and saints destroying their spirit—without any of the superstitions, he was a secular mystic, as indeed so many of the great mathematicians were, as far back as Pythagoras, Nicholas of Cusa and Newton. Russell became a pacifist and, unlike so many of the Fabians, to their discredit, he opposed the Boer War. And then when the First World War came along, even though he was very critical of the many things the Germans were doing, he stood aside from that conflict and instead took a purely pacifist position.

Then we have a rather curious period. I have just been going over it. I set myself a very painful task when I came to Hamilton and the Archives. I hope I may be pardoned a personal recollection to explain it. I remember when I was a little boy of about four or five, I was afraid to go to bed at night by myself because of the "bogey man" hiding out on the second floor. I soon discovered that the way to deal with the "bogey man" was to head for the darkest corner, where of course he hid, and that if I had the nerve to walk straight into that darkest corner of all, he would take flight

[6] *Autobiography, 1872–1914* (Boston: Atlantic–Little, Brown, 1967), pp. 220–1.

and disappear, leaving me to go to sleep peacefully. And so, when I arrived here Tuesday night, I thought I had better take the bull by the horns and march into the darkest corner and see what was all this talk about Lord Russell once wanting to drop the bomb on Russia. I had quite an adventure, and I want to share it with you because we are certainly not here to be necrophiles. Lord Russell was too great a man, too forthright, too wonderful a man for hagiography.

In the twenties and up until the rise of Hitler, he seems to have been very busy with education. I found very little about the rise of fascism in Italy or in Germany, although I know from my own personal experience on newspapers as a young man in the twenties in America, how concerned we were with the march of the Fascisti on Rome and with the rising shadow of the Hitler movement in Germany. Not until Hitler comes to power in 1933 did I find any considerable writings by Russell on Hitler.[7] He treats fascism in some ways more cursorily than he does communism because he regards it, rather improperly, with much greater contempt. At the same time Russell felt what everybody who tries to be a good human being feels, and the way in which such people get into trouble, because if the human race is to advance, then it can only advance if people have the courage to tell the truth to their own tribe, to their own culture, to their own nation, and hold up a mirror to them of the ugly face they see elsewhere. Otherwise, there is no lesson in it. Otherwise, it merely becomes a new cause of hatred. And so I can understand thoroughly how with the vision of a man like Russell, one of his first reactions was to say to the British, "Don't you feel self-righteous. Carlyle preached much of what you are getting from the Nazis, taken over by Nietzsche and watered down by Hitler, and in some ways what you have done in the Colonies to the coloured peoples in Africa and in India is what they are now doing to civilized people in the heart of Europe." Perhaps Russell was a little bit carried away with that message, a very necessary message since we all tend to fight the last war. Russell and the majority of the British Labour Party in those early years both condemned Hitler and, of course, the persecution of

[7] They commence with "History's Lesson for the Nazis", *Sunday Referee*, 9 Apr. 1933, p. 6.

the Jews, but sought to prevent a tidal wave of hatred from sweeping them into a war that might only destroy democracy elsewhere.

Then in 1936 Russell produced *Which Way to Peace?*, a book that he never wanted reprinted and one, as his autobiography shows,[8] he was somewhat uncomfortable about, although it has many insights and contains much genuine and sincere anguish. It is the book of an appeaser, but an effort somehow to equate his essential pacifism with the growing need for some kind of resistance, and yet marked by the fear of what a new war would do to civilians and to peoples over the world. It would be a very interesting study for graduate students, too many of whom are engaged in innocuous and recondite pursuits of little significance for which there is lots of foundation money available—the more insignificant, harmless and unimportant the thesis, the more money it seems you can get for it—it would be interesting to go back and survey the predictions as to a new war and see where men like Russell and H. G. Wells and others who were very prescient were wrong. One of the ways it turns out they were wrong, and that Russell was wrong, was that they thought like the military, who like all of us took much too seriously the air war theories that people like [... *tape inaudible* ...] and theories of victory by terror. They pictured civilian populations driven mad under bombardment, anarchy and barbarity. But the fact is that no civilian populations broke under fire during the First World War, the Second World War or today in Vietnam, despite all our firepower. Russell wanted to stand aside, and finally he actually proposed that Britain disarm, give up its army and its navy, and let the Nazis march in.[9] Indeed at one time he wrote that there was no use dealing with such barbarians, nothing can be done with them, though at the time he didn't want to condemn the Germans as a whole. He said that, well, if they come in, and there is no resistance, they will be shamed. It was not much of a position, I suppose, but if you read it, as I have been reading it the last couple of days, you share his anguish and you understand his struggle.

He predicted in the 1936 obituary that he was going to sit out the

[8] *Autobiography, 1914–1944* (Boston: Atlantic–Little, Brown, 1968), p. 287.
[9] Speech reported in *New York Times*, Apr. 1937, p. 9.

next war, and so he did. He went to America and didn't come back to England until late in the war. He didn't change his position until May 1940, after the European war started,[10] and I think that this coloured his position in the next period. You know how the life of Oliver Wendell Holmes (the father of the justice) was very much affected by his experience in the American Civil War. (Our Civil War is one of the few wars that Russell discussed in his 1916 book *Justice in War-Time*: he says that it was a war of principles, and it was to some degree; not enough, unfortunately, but to some degree). Holmes said: "Not to take part in the great struggles of your time is not to have lived." It is a hard saying for men like Russell, for a lot of us who in our smaller ways are like Russell, because to stand aside from the madness out of the desire to perpetuate human sanity certainly has its validity; and yet not take part in the struggle is not to live, and it was in many ways a great hour for England. Then we have Russell coming back to England and, as if belatedly, taking an anti-appeasement position *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union, which brings us to this dark corner of the Westminster Address in November of 1948, which unfortunately was not a minor aberration.

Going back over the records, there are about a dozen articles that really called for preventive war, beginning within ten days of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima when Lord Russell had an article in the I.L.P. Socialist paper, the Glasgow *Forward*.[11] There is a strong resemblance between the Westminster speech, the transcript of which was published in *Nineteenth Century and After*,[12] and the speech made by Churchill at Llandudno at the Conservative Conference earlier that month, in which Churchill called for a showdown with Russia now while we have the bomb and before they have it. There is an illuminating passage, because it shows the delusions to which we are all subject, in another of the articles Russell wrote at that time. You know the Romans had a wonderful saying: "nothing too much". And one can have too much even of reason, strange to say. The application of undue

[10] *Autobiography, 1914–1944*, p. 357.
[11] "The Bomb and Civilization", *Forward*, 18 Aug. 1945, pp. 1, 3.
[12] "Atomic Energy and the Problems of Europe", *Nineteenth Century and After*, 145 (Jan. 1949), 39–43.

rationality to human affairs sometimes leads to very horrible conclusions. Not because rationality is wrong, or there is something wrong with rationality, but because every rational analysis, by the very nature of the case, is an abstraction from and a simplification of an enormously chaotic and complex situation of perpetual interaction with so many imponderables and so many unknowns, that for us merely to think about it requires us to abstract-out a tremendous amount of living reality. I know in Jewish affairs the Stern Gang, who were not right-wing terrorists like the Irgun, but left-wing terrorists like the Narodnicks in Russia and very, very rational, and therefore very, very lunatic, had themselves a remarkable syllogism. They said: "Look, Hitler and we are both against the British Empire, a common enemy; Hitler and we both want to get the Jews out of Europe; therefore, we are allies against the British." It was *meshuga*. It was mad. It was impeccable logic, and it was crazy. And it stands as a warning if after you construct a beautiful syllogism, a beautiful truth, and then something ought to be done that is necessary, though horrible—if there's a "horrible" in it, don't do it. Forget it. Put it off. Procrastinate. Don't be rational. Don't be logical. And to have even Russell, who was so incisive and so astringent, so clever, so ungiven to taking even reason too seriously on most occasions, say during one of these preventive war speeches (this was for the New Commonwealth, a British Society for the Promotion for International Law and Order, presided over by the Right Honourable Winston Churchill), to have Lord Russell say, in the autumn of 1947, "The argument that I have been developing is as simple and as unescapable as a mathematical demonstration". (God help us! Down with mathematics!) "I will summarize it", as he continued, "in the following propositions:

1. Mankind can not long survive, in this age of scientific warfare, unless great wars can be prevented.
2. The only way to prevent great wars is to create a single government possessing a monopoly of the more formidable weapons.
3. The first step in this direction—for which governments and public opinion are ready in most parts of the world—is the creation of an international authority for the control of atomic energy. [That was the Baruch Plan.]

4. This step has been advocated by the United States and resisted by Russia.
5. If Russia's resistance can be overcome by diplomatic pressure, full international government may come peacefully by gradual degrees.
6. Diplomatic pressure is more likely to succeed if many nations join in it than if it is left to the United States.
7. If diplomatic pressure fails, war, sooner or later, is inevitable. [Beware of the word "inevitable".]
8. If there is war, it will be less destructive if it comes soon than if it comes late, and if many nations support the United States than if few do so.
9. If there is war, the main issue should be the creation of an international government; and if this is its outcome, the next great war may be the last. [How many dreamers have said: Just give us one more war, one more blood-letting, and then we will be in paradise.]
10. If peace can be made secure, there is every reason to expect that mankind will be happier than ever before; if not, unhappier.

This momentous issue is to be decided during the next few years by the collective will of mankind. No issue of equal importance has faced our species since it emerged from the ape.[13]

But this, I must say, with all due respect for the memory of our very great friend, and one of the greatest men that ever lived, was monkey business. It is very interesting that, in the last few months, the American government has released more of the secret documents dealing with what to do about atomic energy, and last year they released some of the preliminary documents.[14] To read them against the background of the debate in which Churchill and Lord Russell and the Labour Party and so many people engaged in proposing preventive war makes you realize the prospect of the destruction of our planet made it seem logical and rational—why not drop one more bomb on Russia before it is too late, and make

[13] "International Government", *New Commonwealth*, 9 (Jan. 1948), 80.
[14] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946*, vol. 1, *General: The United Nations* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1972).

them consent to world government and save mankind from what's coming? It is all very logical and rational. I must say that out of the secret documents the man who comes out best is Henry L. Stimson. Stimson pleaded with Truman; he said the Russians will have a bomb within four to twenty years, there is no secret about it. (Actually they got it in four years and one month.) Let's give them the secret. It isn't much to give anyway; see what they can do with it, and try to negotiate an entente with which we can rebuild the world after the war. And that was the course of wisdom.

In Russell's writings you will find, foreshadowed before they happened, the Baruch plan and the Truman doctrine. Now Russell had a curious love affair with our country. He both loved it and hated it. He was fascinated by it and repelled by it. As a British aristocrat and a Whig, he felt that America and Russia were both going in the same direction towards a mass-production, industrial civilization, a danger to individuality. But very early, at least as early as his book with Dora Russell on *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*,[15] he felt (and this idea kept recurring in his work) that perhaps it was hopeless to try to bring about international order by voluntary consent. For justice in ancient times there had to be a Rome; as Roman power established itself, Roman citizenship spread, and you had a real *pax Romana*—in which Spaniards, Yugoslavs, and North Africans all felt they were *cives Romani*, Roman citizens. You had Spanish emperors, and even a Yugoslav Serbian emperor late in the empire. Russell felt that America was the country that would have the preponderance of power and could force a *pax Americana* on the world. The idea reappears in his 1936 book, and it reappears in his writings after the war. He also outlined the idea of NATO. As a matter of fact, when he had that accident in Norway in 1948 when he had to swim through the icy water at Trondheim, he was in Norway on behalf of the British Government to speak to students and try to win Norway for NATO. Finally, in despair, he felt that the only way to bring about an international order was to have America impose it on the world, and that if it was going to be imposed, it would be better to impose it before Russia got the bomb and get it over with. It is a horrible idea, and it shows how all of us are fallible, even the greatest of us,

[15] New York, 1923, p. 76.

but when you read the documents, you really understand it better. You appreciate his anguish.

In the *Nineteenth Century and After* they printed not only the transcript of Russell's speech but the text of the questions afterwards and the answers he gave. This was at his request because he felt he had been "widely misrepresented in the press", and wrote to various newspapers to say so.[16] Unfortunately he was *not* misrepresented, I am sorry to say. Let's look at the transcript of the question period. I think there is no better way to honour our friend, our great friend, than to fearlessly examine weak spots in his own career for the lessons they hold for the future of mankind. He himself would have done so with any great man he revered. One of the questions was:

> Had not Lord Russell a more encouraging message to give to young people? Two succeeding generations had been desolated by war. Was all that he could offer to a third generation yet another devastating war? It seemed a most hopeless and gloomy prospect to be offered by so brilliant and distinguished a speaker. It was a deplorable picture for young people to have to contemplate.

The reply did not really deal with it:

> Earl Russell replied that he had come to tell the truth as he saw it, and while he agreed that the picture was a gloomy one as far as the immediate future was concerned, he thought that we should prefer to face facts. For the present state of the world other people, not he, were responsible and he could not help it. He was sorry that he could not give a more hopeful survey, but it would not have been a true one.[17]

If you read an early article after Hiroshima that Lord Russell wrote for the *Forward* on the question of what would be the future of Russian-British relations,[18] you would see that he himself

[16] "Resisting Russia", *The Observer*, 28 Nov. 1948, p. 3; "Lord Russell's Address", *The Times*, 30 Nov. 1948, p. 5.

[17] *Nineteenth Century and After*, p. 43.

[18] "What Should be British Policy towards Russia?", *Forward*, 29 Sept. 1945, p. 4; reprinted as "Britain and Russia", *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Oct. 1945, pp. 4, 6.

should have seen the answer. He pointed out that from the time of the Crimean War until the naval race with Germany that foreshadowed the First World War, British policy was obsessed with the supposed Russian danger to India and that, after the War, the old psychosis of the Russian bear revived until once more Germany was strong enough to endanger England. He might very well have thought *that* first of all (one of the great delusions of the time).

I must say in the new documents that came out in March, which very few scholars have noticed and little has been written about, there is a long document by our Joint Chiefs of Staff with much to do about the new world. But there is not a goddamn word about the atom bomb, and you might think they were still running the horse cavalry. They had universal military training, and all the bases they wanted around the world, including Saigon, but the atom bomb just passed right over their heads. The idea that it required new tactics, new strategy, new formations, new kinds of armed forces, just wasn't there. They were still speaking about the Civil War and Sherman's march through Georgia. But there is a document by General Groves, who ran the Manhattan project which developed the atom bomb, and he was quite a troglodyte. He used to call Robert Oppenheimer his "white Jew" to show his liberal attitude. Groves said that if mankind only knew the power in this bomb, they would rise up and demand an end to war.[19] But his own formula was that America should impose its power on the world and destroy the atomic plans of any other country that might be making a bomb and have a worldwide espionage system. The Baruch plan, if you look at it carefully, was a phoney. I must say that in *The Nation* I had a piece called "Atomic Pie in the Sky" that analyzed it when it came out, and I still think the analysis holds up today.[20] What was phoney about it was that it was asking the Russians to handle all their resources and factories through an American-dominated commission, on the promise that in stages, and at some future date, they would get the secret of the bomb, but not the right to produce it. It really meant handing over the control of the Soviet Union to another power, many of whose leaders were

[19] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946*, vol. I, *General: The United Nations*, p. 1201.

[20] *The Nation*, 162 (6 Apr. 1946), 390–1.

thinking of preventive war, as Churchill was and even as Russell was. There is a document newly released that puts the giving of the bomb as perhaps in seventy-two months, which would be six years after taking over the uranium mines and the atomic plants in the Soviet Union and other countries. Now the Russians got the bomb in four years and one month, which was better than waiting for Baruch. Of course Nixon's recent visit to Moscow is really the fruit of meeting brutality with brutality in this brutal world, and it paid off, I am sorry to say. So that on closer examination, even then without the secret documents, the real nature of the plan should have been clear to Russell.

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Russell was eighty-two in 1954. With the advent of the hydrogen bomb, with the realization, a full realization, that now there could be no little atomic war of any kind, that it would be a big war, and an end to civilization, Einstein and Russell and a group of the greatest physicists in the world launched their appeal to mankind, and Russell embarked upon the greatest part of his career, when he became a kind of world ombudsman.

You know the ethics of the struggle between the nations is very difficult to untangle. It's like living in a madhouse or a flophouse, full of guys armed with knives and guns. Who is right? Who is wrong? Should you defend yourself? Should you strike back? I mean, Russell was for the Boers? The blacks in South Africa would now be better off if Britain had won the Boer War. Who was right in the long run? But there are easier questions in international ethics that can be answered. We know, as in an equation, when x is on top of y, x is a bastard and y suffers, and y is ennobled by the suffering. When y is on top, y is a bastard, x suffers and x is ennobled thereby. And so you try to redress the balance and back up y when he is on the bottom, and give x hell when he is on top.

From all over the world, people appealed to Russell and he responded in his warm way, because he was a wonderful man. In the first place, unlike most philosophers, he was not a bore. Marx, wonderful as he was, was a frightful bore. Hegel, Marxist as he was on top of his monstrosity, was worse than a bore. If you ever try to read him, you will see how he addled the pate of three

generations of Germans with his glorification of war and the state. He is a model of the belly-crawling professor who serves the military and the powers that be, the kind of military intellectual that helped get us used to the atom bomb. In the secret papers there is a document by Mr. Hancock saying it is a little bit worrying that the public may begin to think that the atom bomb is so dangerous we ought not use it, and General Groves says yes, we ought not to talk about this publicly, but we better take steps to correct it. So for a whole generation of intellectuals like Herman Kahn, Henry Kissinger and all kinds of military intellectuals, there was a big market. And intellectuals respond to the money market just like some people to heroin or ladies to hats. There's a lush endowment for guys that will write theses about the atom bomb, how it won't really hurt you so very much, and they will turn them out, and a lot of them turned them out, and got the American public acclimated to it in the 'fifties and in the 'sixties. We are still getting over the effect. Russell had a liking for the human race, even felt toward it a loving kindness, but—without a trace of cynicism—he didn't take it too seriously. He wasn't given to jacobinical and democratic delusions. He was, after all, a Whig, God bless him. It was a wonderful combination, and we need somebody to take his place. And I really would like to suggest that the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation should, every few years, pick somebody of somewhat comparable stature (the same stature is impossible) to personify that same wonderful combination of gifts and qualities that Russell had. The Peace Foundation should get somebody like U Thant, for example, or somebody like Andrei Sakharov, and make it possible for him to live and to speak. We are living in a period of convergence of the great bureaucracies, and it has got to be very important to have private institutions who can speak against these bureaucracies and who can speak for the unjustly treated and the persecuted and the hounded intellectuals on both sides of the great line. And the Peace Foundation, if it is to live up to Russell's great heritage in those last two decades of his life, needs a commanding personality of the stature of U Thant. Certainly, U Thant, freed from the organizational pressures of the United Nations, Sakharov freed from the pressures of the Soviet, the very stultifying conservative, mangey ... —you know, Russia is ruled by a bunch of goddamn Nixons!—certainly such men

should be enabled to offer the world the full extent of their services.

Russell has left us a great heritage. First of all, he has carried on a great idea—the idea of an international order. Now it is no longer merely the arms race or the problem of war, but the problem of pollution. The salvaging of the planet, of its water resources, of its fish, of its animals, of its air, of its whole ecological balance, is now an international problem. It has to be handled by an international organization. Russell carried on from the earlier figures like Woodrow Wilson, who saw the necessity of an organization of this kind; and beyond that, Russell saw the necessity of getting away from nationalism. He saw that a world organization, once you get past the force that he looked to in despair, has to have a psychological underpinning; there has to be a sense of identification as human beings. Charles Lamb talks about imperfect sympathies, and it is hard for people to learn to sympathize with others of a different colour or a different race. Even sometimes they have the same colour, the same brogue, and they murder each other as in Ulster today. We need to develop a sense of common humanity and a pleasure in the varieties of the human garden instead of this cowardly fearfulness about little differences. And here too, Russell, in his understanding, in his joy, in his vision, carries on something for us. And then the world is in a position where it is moving towards socialism. It is no longer a question of utopias or blueprints. It is now a question of necessity, and whether socialism is good or bad is no longer the question. We are going to have it, and we had better start looking at the bad side, and preparing for the bad side, because it can't be avoided. Our cities are rotting away. There are acres of homes in the great cities that are given over to the rats, but even though thoughtful bankers and businessmen in many cities are getting together and trying to reconstruct parts of the city, no private financier, no matter how wealthy, no group of financiers, commands the capital and the power, the law, the demand, to deal with these enormous problems. We are in a position where almost all our fundamental problems are intertwined: the problem of justice for the blacks and the chicanos, that is, for the poor; the problem of pollution; of air; the problem of safe streets; the problem of the saving of the city; the problem of decent transportation; the problem of curbing

that monster, the automobile; and the problem of controlling technology.

That really is our greatest problem, in both war and peace. How do you control technology? It controls us, and this requires stronger government. There is no reason why stronger government cannot mobilize and muster grass roots participation. And it should, because it is very deadening to do anything from the centre. But there is going to have to be large scale governmental action, not only federal but even international, to meet these problems. Some parts of the world, like the Soviet Union, are suffering from too much socialism, in the sense that there is too much centralization. Their bureaucracy is going to try to save itself from basic reform with our third-generation computers, while our bureaucracy thinks it can save itself and get another lease on life by exploiting the riches of Siberia and giving Moscow a junior partnership in the *pax Americana*. Incidentally, Russell in 1923 foresaw this as a possibility. He wrote that an international order might very well be brought about by high finance, and that American high finance, seeing the possibilities of the Soviet Union and the Soviet leaders anxious for foreign capital and knowhow to develop a country, might very well join the Soviets in an absolutely irresistible block that would dominate the world and could bring an end to international anarchy.[21]

More important, really, than any of Russell's ideas is his spirit or approach. It seems to me that he offers something that is ideal for the problems we face, and that is, first of all, socialism with Whiggery."Socialism with Whiggery." That is socialism tempered with respect for, and some way to protect, the rights of the solitary individual against the government, the majority, or anybody, because there can be no progress, no good society, without the right to criticize, without the right to dissent, and without the right to defy everybody with new ideas. People hate new ideas. They hate new ways of seeing things. They hate new ways of listening to music. They hate to be disturbed in their comforts, and that's what new people do in painting and thinking of all kinds. This is what the Whig tradition protects against an excess of egalitarianism, which can easily lead to egalitarian dictatorship

[21] *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, pp. 83ff.

and has in past periods and which is one of the evils of jacobinism.

Russell offers us something else, too—joy without illusion, a willingness to fight with little chance of success, but taking that chance. Human affairs are so intricate and so complicated that many times you're surprised, you fight hopeless battles and you wake up one morning and, my God, it happened. I never thought, for example, in 1950–53, that we would have a new generation of wonderful kids in this country that would not be afraid of the government, afraid to join a radical movement, afraid to even throw rocks through windows. The new generation was a complete surprise, completely unpredictable. And who would have thought that Richard Nixon, who could have predicted, what mathematics, what third-generation computers, what IBM machine could have told us that Richard Nixon would bring China out of isolation, albeit for purposes of his murderous bloody war in Vietnam, or that it would be Nixon who would be the first American president in peacetime to visit Moscow and invite Brezhnev to come to America next spring and save Russia in the middle of a food crisis? If such things like that can happen, anything can happen. We might even win some day. And Russell taught us how not to be a goddamn martyr. To fight and lose and have fun at it, to see how black it looks to be a pessimist but to avoid despair and never lose your zest—it is this spirit that is so terribly important, more important than any concrete ideas, that offers us an example and is a real heritage from Bertrand Russell.