

Discussion

Reply to Greenspan / Russell on the '80s

by Michael H. Malin

I AM A very recent member of the Bertrand Russell Society.

I received the very first current edition of *Russell*, Vol. 1, No. 1, containing your note, "Russell on the '80s", which expressed such a totally different view of Russell than my own that I felt compelled to write.

Your reference to Russell as being a revolutionary allied with revolutionaries in support of the Vietnam struggle is historical fact, but you make a quantum leap which I must admit I cannot fathom, i.e. that he would no longer be a revolutionary in support of anti-imperialist struggles, but instead would be a rationalist and an empiricist as if rational individuals could not support anti-imperialist struggles as the basis of world peace. Your thesis is that Russell in the '80s would not support, for example, the struggles of the African National Congress to overthrow the brutal apartheid regime of South Africa, or the rights of the people of Namibia to be free of the illegal control of South Africa over its territory and resources or of the Palestinians against Israeli expansionism and terrorism, etc.

Do you really think that Russell would have moderated the belief he expressed in the late '60s, i.e. that Western imperialism backed by American power represented the principal threat to survival? Especially, if that threat became graver, as it has? (See Russell, "Peace through Resistance to U.S. Imperialism", in *War Crimes in Vietnam*.)

I suggest that your view represents a bias which does not or cannot accept the enormity of the psychological implications of being a member, or supporter, of the most evil and dangerous power-grouping known to mankind. Accordingly, this "denial" cannot see Western and U.S. militarism as the principal threat to the establishment of world government, a new economic order with a possibility of population stability and hope.

I find your denial and bias evident when you state, "The communist powers have embarked on wars of aggression", citing "Russia in Af-

ghanistan, China against Vietnam and Vietnam against Cambodia" (expressing a monolithic theory of "international communism" long since discredited). The premisses of your speculations are highly dubious. Russian intervention in Afghanistan as an "act of aggression" has a weak basis considering the attempts to destabilize Afghanistan by the U.S. and China and the long history of British imperial plots against that nation.

The China-Vietnam conflict is not relevant as an aggressive struggle against "liberal democracy" because both are communist states. Their war (a) represents a territorial dispute over China's longstanding claim to areas of Vietnam, and (b) is punishment of Vietnam for alignment with the Soviets; (c) China is supported by U.S. imperialism. The Vietnam intervention in Cambodia to oust the brutal Pol Pot regime can hardly be called "aggression". Pol Pot's regime, which murdered half its population, has the diplomatic and material support of the Western powers. Subsequent events have shown that there has been a restoration of public sanity and of the Cambodian economy. To characterize Vietnam's action as "aggression" is not mere philosophical speculation, but propaganda.

Your claim that a fear of an oil shortage means superpower war (i.e. Russia and the United States), is, I suggest, dubious. Russia has no oil shortage; only the United States *may have* and is using Israel and other puppet regimes to maintain Western access to Middle East oil without regard to the rights of Middle Eastern people to use their resources in their own interests. Again, the problem is imperialist exploitation, which Russell found detestable.

The rise of the Reagan regime in the United States has *not* increased opposition to a world government *per se*, it has merely emphasized the degree to which U.S. imperialism will go to retain its economic and political hegemony and its own "world government". The factors that you cite interpreted objectively, I suggest, would merely have reinforced Russell's anti-imperialist belief in liberation and revolution as rational and inevitable if the possibility of representative, humane world government is to have a chance.

Your claim of an increase in religious fundamentalism is, I suggest, greatly exaggerated and more properly explained in terms of Russell's analysis of U.S. and Western imperialism. The Ayatollah Khomeini's regime was a reaction to brutal Western exploitation and dominance in the name of the Shah. Because Islam was the only institution which had not been so totally demoralized and/or destroyed by the Shah's regime, it was the only popular institution capable of mass protest and so became its vehicle.

The Gush Emunin in Israel are a group seeking to expand Israel's territorial empire and control with the help of the United States as a

method of controlling the Arabs and the resources of the Middle East. Without U.S. diplomatic and military support, they would be of no consequence to anyone. To view their activity solely as religious fundamentalism, seems to me to miss the mark.

In short, I do not believe that Russell's views would have changed. You certainly make no plausible argument that they would have. If anything, they would likely have, in the '80s, been more articulate in opposing the brutal violence of Western imperialism in Africa, the Middle East and Central and Latin America and more and more exposing its racist character.

I really do not understand the portion of your article which appears to say that liberal civilization, moderation and restraint will save the world. Western liberal civilization supports the repression of legitimate aspirations of the Third World. What, for example, do you think would be Russell's reaction to the revolutions in Nicaragua and El Salvador and forthcoming revolutions in Guatemala and Honduras and the repression and brutality supported by Western "liberal civilization", which has accompanied and will accompany them?

Is "small is beautiful" any answer to the El Salvador peasants? What does "moderation and restraint" mean to them? It means being slaughtered by Western arms in order to keep them and their resources subject to investment and exploitation by Western transnational companies. Do you seriously believe that Russell, in the light of the imminent threat of nuclear extinction, would have concerned himself with "small is beautiful"?

Can you seriously say that Russell would in the '80s have changed his views of the '60s, which included:

In the course of history there have been many cruel and rapacious empires and systems of imperialist exploitation, but none before have had the power at the disposal of the United States' imperialists. This constitutes a world system of oppression, and represents the true threat to peace and the true source of the danger of world nuclear war.... (*War Crimes in Vietnam* [London: Allen & Unwin, 1967], p. 99)

Whenever there is hunger, whenever there is exploitative tyranny, whenever people are tortured and masses left to rot under the weight of disease and starvation, the force which holds down the people stems from Washington. (*Ibid.*)

Somehow I must believe that Russell would have feared the extinction of his idea of peace through resistance to imperialism (revolution) more

44 *Russell* winter 1982–83

than any of the propositions which you speculate he would have feared. I also believe he would have characterized “Russell on the ’80s” as obscure-ant.

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