

# Reviews

## Academic freedom in World War I

by Richard A. Rempel

Stuart Wallace. *War and the Image of Germany: British Academics 1914-1918*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1988. Pp. x, 288. £20.00.

ALL STUDENTS OF Russell will find their knowledge of his dissent during the Great War enriched by this important book. Wallace's exemplary and pioneering study focuses directly upon Russell as the leading British academic of a very small minority who opposed the aggressive and often hysterical Germanophobia of virtually the entire academic establishment. Wallace traces the process whereby this Germanophobia, first clearly manifested during the Boer War, assumed pronounced anti-intellectual and propagandist directions during and after World War I. The pervasiveness of academic Germanophobia is the most predominate theme of the book. Accounts and assessments of Russell's dissent from this widespread Germanophobia appear in nearly every chapter, and Chapter 8 is devoted exclusively to an analysis of Russell's arguments. Wallace's summary evaluation is that Russell "approached the reality of war and its significance for Europe more closely than any of his detractors" (p. 140).<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 9 Wallace discusses Russell's dismissal from Trinity in July 1916 as "perhaps the best-known case of the infringement of academic freedom in a British university during the First World War—or at any time since" (p. 141). As Volume 13 in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand*

Russell (1988) demonstrates, this censure "sounded a general alert" for many Liberal and Radical critics that civil liberties in general were in grave jeopardy.<sup>2</sup> In addition one can see effectively, from Wallace's analysis, that Russell's dismissal, more than any other event, underlines the alienation of the British academic community not only from German war policy but, more notably, from German culture itself. Wallace is certainly correct in implying this last point by concentrating on Russell. In identifying Russell as the symbol of this alienation Wallace probes far beyond a little-known article by M.E. Humble which, while not concentrating on Russell to strengthen his arguments, nevertheless presents an outline of the estrangement of British intellectuals from German culture over the period 1900 to 1920.<sup>3</sup>

A second major theme of this book is the examination of the famous German academic manifesto of October 1914 signed by ninety-three of the most prominent scholars. As Wallace emphasizes, this manifesto "became a byword among British and French intellectuals for the subordination of German scholarship to the dictates of state policy" (p. 33). The original signatories were joined, after an energetic campaign, by many others, so that finally about 4,000 signatures were appended. Fritz Fischer, the German historian, points out that this number represented almost the entire German professoriate. Fischer, it must be remembered, in 1961 published one of the most important history books of our century (translated into English in 1966 as *Germany's Reach for World Power*). His thesis, which virtually isolated him from the historians of his own country and which continues to be fiercely debated, was that Germany's bid for world power, supported by all sectors of the population, was the central driving force bringing about war in 1914. This thesis, so at variance from Russell's *The Policy of the Entente, 1904-14: a Reply to Professor Gilbert Murray*,<sup>4</sup> will be discussed later in the review.

Wallace is surely right to focus on the damage this manifesto did to the reputation of German scholarship during and after the war. As he points out in his introductory sections, universities in Germany by 1914 were held in much higher regard than was the case in Britain. German universities had many more academics and students, they were much richer and they constituted a much more distinct social and powerful group than their counterparts in Britain. Even between university teaching and schoolmastering in Britain by the late Victorian period there was not much difference in status, although often the latter had the edge. At Oxford and Cambridge, the most important achievement, in the eyes of the

<sup>1</sup> Wallace reaches this conclusion by citations from a portion of *Justice in War-Time* (Chicago: Open Court, 1916), pp. 110-11, 117, 120. One of the benefits of Russell's *Collected Papers* is that scholars can see that the quotations, in fact, come from the essay "The Danger to Civilization", first written in September 1915 at the request of D.H. Lawrence who subsequently rejected it. Russell then published it in *The U.D.C.* in Britain in two consecutive issues in March and April in 1916 and in America as an article in *The Open Court*, 30 (March 1916). It was only after these publications that it became a chapter in the first and second American editions of *Justice in War-Time*, 1916 and 1917 respectively. (See *Collected Papers* 13, pp. 332, 335 and 337). *Justice in War-Time* is an anthology composed of a number of articles, each written under different circumstances and for different reasons.

<sup>2</sup> *Prophecy and Dissent, 1914-16*, ed. R.A. Rempel with Bernd Frohmann, Mark Lippincott and Margaret Moran (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. xlii-xlv.

<sup>3</sup> See "Breakdown of a Consensus: British Writers and Anglo-German Relations 1900-1920", *Journal of European Studies*, 7 (1977): 41-68.

<sup>4</sup> See *Collected Papers* 13: 214-80.

dons and the pupils, not to mention the Establishment, was a First-Class B.A. The doctorate was at best not taken seriously and at worst regarded as a consolation prize for those who failed to win the coveted First. Given such casual attitudes towards advanced university study and research, it is scarcely a surprise that the United States accepted the German graduate model, first through the introduction of the PH.D. seminar at Johns Hopkins. As Gilbert Murray, Professor of Greek at Oxford, explained the difference, “the British approach to classical literature was simply that the Germans aimed ‘more at knowing: we at feeling and understanding. They are the professionals, we are the amateurs ... we are always aiming at culture in Arnold’s sense, not Bernhardi’s, they are aiming at research or achievement’” (quoted by Wallace on p. 38). More condescending, even downright stupid, was the statement in December 1914 by the Oxford Professor of Assyriology, A.H. Sayce, who claimed, “magisterially”, that in science “none of the great names” was German and in German literature there was no great writer apart from Goethe (*ibid.*). As Wallace indicates, Russell could scarcely find such assessments more mindless, given the degree to which “his philosophical horizons had been extended” by the Germans Georg Cantor and Gottlob Frege (p. 140).

The third important theme is the role of British academics in the war effort. This analysis is a significant contribution to British intellectual history of the twentieth century. However lacking in stature British academics were by comparison with their German colleagues, both the British university community and the politicians were anxious to mobilize the dons for propaganda purposes. Some aspects of this academic rush into cultural combat has been treated by M.L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor in their *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914–18* (1982) and in Peter Buitenhuis’s *The Great War of Words: British, American, and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction* (1987). But Wallace’s chapters on “Philosophers and the War” (2) and “Historians and the War” (3), in particular, present a focus on the academics’ roles in the war effort not evident in the above wider studies. Their objective is to gather together the entire propaganda effort by academics, journalists, novelists, drama critics, playwrights, and popular sages such as H.G. Wells. With his wealth of source materials and his grasp of the nature of the British university world, Wallace presents a more coherent, reflective and analytical work than any other book so far written on British intellectuals and the war.

The chapters on “Philosophers and the War” and “Historians and the War” provide lucid accounts of just how eagerly and uncritically most academics in these disciplines supported the British war effort. Wallace is careful to distinguish the minority of philosophers, notably G.E. Moore and to some extent F.C.S. Schiller, who were critical of the rampant anti-Germanism promoted by the Government and many of their colleagues. A number of leading British idealists or neo-Hegelians, such as J.H. Muirhead and to a lesser extent the Oxonians Bernard Bosanquet and

F.H. Bradley, were concerned to rescue Hegel and even Fichte from responsibility for the intellectual basis of the pan-German theorists. The idealist view, by contrast, was remorsefully attacked both by L.T. Hobhouse, the New Liberal theorist, and by Russell. In particular Hobhouse and Russell concentrated on the idealist view of the state in its foreign relations. Russell wrote a paper on the question, in which he castigated the Hegelian concept of a benevolent state without, however, directly mentioning Hegel or directly attributing Prussian militarism to idealism. Indeed, Russell attacked the idea that *any* modern states are benevolent. He indicted by implication all of the belligerents—the Central Powers and the Allies—as purposefully directing their foreign policies to “the exploitation of what are called undeveloped countries, and the successful assertion of claims by the use of force, or the threat of force, against other States”.<sup>5</sup> As one of his main intellectual tasks after the war, Russell persistently took up the challenge of attacking the writings of those whom he considered to be misguided philosophers using harmful metaphysics to demonstrate the wickedness or virtue of any given nation. For example, writing in 1919, he severely took to task the American philosopher, Ralph Barton Perry, and the English political thinker, L.T. Hobhouse, for arguing that all Germany’s guilt was caused by pernicious philosophical ideas.<sup>6</sup>

With greater unity than philosophers, historians, particularly from Oxford, set to work to justify the British decision to enter the war and to demonstrate the perfidy of the Germans, especially their Prussian leaders. Wallace draws attention to the substantial volume *Why We Are at War: Great Britain’s Case*, written by some of Oxford’s most renowned historians and published in five successive editions by the Clarendon Press (p. 60). Young historians, such as Arnold Toynbee and Lewis Namier, placed their services in the hands of the British propaganda officials at Wellington House. Wallace states that much of what was written by historians “in the heat of battle” alleged that Germany had provoked the war for no less than world power. This is the argument that was reaffirmed by a small group of German historians after 1960 led by Fritz Fischer, whose discovery and use of new documents led to the thesis that Germans from all sectors of society, including Bethmann-Hollweg, were determined to realize such a grand design (see Wallace, p. 66).

Wallace started his research in 1973 and completed it by 1977, although his book did not appear until 1988. By failing to cite any critiques of Fischer’s thesis either before or after 1977, he has missed some of the important scholarship attacking this controversial interpretation—an

<sup>5</sup> Russell, “The Nature of the State in View of its External Relations”, *Collected Papers* 13: 362–9 (at 367–8).

<sup>6</sup> See *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Vol. 9: *Essays on Language, Mind and Matter, 1919–26*, ed. J. G. Slater with B. Frohmann (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 401–3.

interpretation which initially took the English-speaking scholarly world by storm. For example, Wallace might have consulted *The Origins of the First World War*.<sup>7</sup> In his Introduction, H.W. Koch presents a strong argument that Germany felt “encircled” by 1914 and that in the estimation of the British Foreign Office this was the case (pp. 4–5). Moreover, Koch claims that Bethmann-Hollweg “felt a deep sense of betrayal by Grey” (p. 15) for having lied to Parliament in denying that between 1909 and early 1914 Great Britain secretly worked, albeit unsuccessfully, towards an Anglo-Russian naval convention similar to that concluded by Britain and France in 1912 (pp. 14–15). Such recent historical allegations bear an uncanny resemblance to some of Russell’s accusations deployed in *The Policy of the Entente, 1904–14* and “The Rights of War”.<sup>8</sup> Wallace, by raising the Fischer thesis, provides an opportunity for arguing the relevance today of Russell’s most extended essay on British foreign policy.

There are numerous other important sections in Wallace’s book. The chapter on “The Question of a Compromise Peace” describes in detail the concern of most British academics that the “danger was not that the war would be pursued too vigorously, but rather the opposite” (p. 92). Such evidence explains some of the overwhelming difficulties Russell and other dissenters had in attempting to win the minds and hearts of their countrymen to the solution of a negotiated peace. British aims to fight the war to a finish left no room for any serious Allied consideration of German peace initiatives, however limited such soundings were. Such British implacability was exemplified by the Pact of London on 5 September 1914 which converted the Triple Entente into a formal Alliance by which no member could conclude a separate peace. As well, the strength of British determination was revealed by the notorious Allied Secret Treaties, particularly those for dividing up Austria-Hungary and giving Constantinople to Russia. Such official resolve was reinforced by the British academic community, many of whom were active participants in British duplicity or at least evasion.

Wallace also provides valuable accounts of dissenters such as Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Russell’s pamphletæring antagonist Gilbert Murray. Moreover, the author is at pains to show that Russell’s harassment was by no means unique. The distinguished Cambridge economist A.C. Pigou incurred the wrath of many Cambridge academics by his advocacy of a negotiated peace. Others, notably F.C. Conybeare, one of Britain’s foremost Armenian scholars, was hounded at Oxford for his criticisms of Grey.

In conclusion, Wallace discusses the postwar legacies of this academic estrangement between academics of Britain and Germany. Stressing the

reluctance British academics had in working for reconciliation, particularly as epitomized by the British Academy, Wallace details the effective boycott imposed by British and French scholars against their German and Austrian counterparts throughout the 1920s and later at the level of organized conferences. The “spell of German *Wissenschaft* had been broken by the war, and any chance of re-establishing close links ... ended by the decline of German universities after 1933” (p. 198).

Why did so many academics support the war so uncritically? Wallace quotes J.A. Hobson’s indictment made in 1926:

The graver perils to free-thought and scientific progress lie in ... timid conservatism of ... professors and their genuine class sympathies and reverences. They are not so much the intellectual mercenaries of the vested interests as their volunteers. (P. 199, from *Free Thought in the Social Sciences*)

Hobson’s belief that many British academics were anxious to demonstrate their importance by excessive patriotism for a society which undervalued them was prefigured in part by Russell’s scathing dismissal of historians as “almost invariably sycophants”.<sup>9</sup> One is hard pressed to identify contemporary historians who stood out against the war or failed to buckle under Government propaganda. For a later period, however, Russell overstates his case, for the moral and intellectual courage of such British historians as A.J.P. Taylor, E.P. Thompson, Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Robert Blake are well known within the profession. Nonetheless, Russell grasped the pusillanimous behaviour of so many academics infected by “war-spirit”—a spirit so effectively captured by Wallace.

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<sup>7</sup> Ed. H.W. Koch, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> *Collected Papers* 13: 219, 223 and 261–9; and 7–9.

<sup>9</sup> *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916), p. 108.