

CND, PUGWASH, AND EDDINGTON

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My contact hours with Russell himself were limited and probably did not exceed fifteen, but they were almost all confined to companies of not more than four, and, usually, they were occasions on which I had gone to discuss specific matters with him.¹ My home, where I write this, is only some six miles from Plas Penrhyn where Russell lived for most of the last two decades of his life.

The key factor in our contacts was the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and, later, the Pugwash Conferences. Friendship with Professor Joseph Rotblat² meant that I knew of the formation of CND before it was presented to the public. As secretary of a small committee which included representatives of the United Nations Association, I went ahead to arrange a public meeting to discuss the consequences of nuclear weapons for 2 May 1958, at Aberystwyth, in west

¹ Perhaps it is worth mentioning for the Archives that I well recall my first exposure to Russell. He gave a talk to the Moral Sciences Club at a meeting in the Gibbs building of King's College, Cambridge; I can only guess the year as 1935. His subject was: What do I mean when I say "I see a black cat." He went through the statement—I cannot remember whether he had notes—syllable by syllable. It was a fine exercise in what to me is logic chopping. All comprehensible at the time, but, perhaps sadly, not adding much to my enlightenment; laboratory scientists are overwhelmingly empiricists.

The chairperson thanked Russell and asked for questions. None came. Then Russell said: "I would like to hear what Moore has to say." G. E. M. was sitting in a corner. There was a deadly silence which seemed to last for minutes but was probably twenty or thirty seconds before Moore shook his head, said nothing, but indicated he would not speak.

[Russell revised and published the talk as "The Limits of Empiricism", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 57 (1935–36): 131–50.—Ed.]

² See *Auto.* 3: 77–87.

Wales. As a faculty member, I was able to draw upon my contacts with the academic staff and the students of the University College of Wales in that town. The students were very helpful: the faculty members showed interesting reactions, some professors equating a discussion of nuclear weapons to a surrender of national sovereignty. Apart from Russell, the speakers chosen were Professor Rotblat, Lt.-Col. Lort Philips and Rev. Dr. Pennar Davies.

All these were for controlling, and some for eliminating, nuclear weapons, but the reader should be made aware that, at that date CND was not committed to the unilateral abandonment of these weapons: that aspect was injected by its first chairman, Canon Collins, largely at his own initiative. The meeting was referred to by Russell, even some years later, as "one of the most successful of the CND meetings".

A cousin joined me to bring Russell and Lady Russell from their home in North Wales to Aberystwyth where they were to spend the night. We stopped for tea en route. This allowed me to broach a question of general significance which, however, first involved me in asking Russell whether he recalled an occasion on the BBC Brains Trust programme when the question was put: "What practical consequences are there, if any, of Einstein's Relativity theory?" The instant reply startled me: "Yes" he said, in his high-pitched voice, it was on—and he gave the month, day, and year. Later I asked him how he could recall the date so precisely. "It was the first (Thursday?) after my return to England from the United States in 1944."³

My real concern was to ask Russell whether he had any inkling of the nuclear bomb project when he was asked the question, and whether, therefore, he had suppressed any mention of its energy release as a result predicted by Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. "No" was the answer on both accounts. But then came the significant comment.

I paraphrase as accurately as my memory allows: "I would not, at any time, think of quoting Einstein as the originator of the $E = mc^2$ equation. It had already been deduced by Poincaré and Lorentz."⁴ I was

³ [Documentation at the BBC Written Archives, Reading, places the broadcast on 9 January 1945. Michael Polanyi was a participant on that occasion, and Mansel Davies discussed their replies also with him.—Ed.]

⁴ This point is also emphasized by E. T. Whittaker in his *History of the Theories of*

particularly interested to follow the new developments in mathematical physics around the turn of the century, and the equation comes from generalized electro-magnetic theory."⁵ I do believe Russell mentioned the volume of the journal (*Physikalische Zeitschrift*) in which Lorentz's deduction had appeared. He explained that no one who was familiar in those years with the work of his predecessors would think of ascribing the equation's origin to Einstein. Certainly, he would not.

I have raised the ascription "Einstein equation" with senior contemporary physicists. The justification for the name seems to reduce to this: the earlier deductions were based on, and thus perhaps confined to, the electro-magnetic field; Einstein's has a more fundamental and general basis.

On later occasions my wife and I had tea at Plas Penrhyn. The tea was always china tea. Whilst he would not have come to the door on our arrival, he invariably took us there on our departure. The panoramic view from the front of the house which included, across the Glaslyn estuary, the house where Shelley had lived for about two years, especially pleased him. He remarked that, having grown up in Richmond Lodge with his grandparents, he was never happy to live where there was no broad outlook.⁶ As a young man he had frequently made long walks over the hills of North Wales, if only because it was one of the best ways to ensure a good night's sleep. "Now I have to get it by reading detective novels."

We had met Ralph Schoenman on at least one visit to Plas Penrhyn. His rapport with Lady Russell seemed to be stronger than with Russell himself. Later, from correspondence in the press and other indications, I developed the impression that Schoenman, who so often acted as Russell's agent, secretary and writer of letters, could perhaps have been misrepresenting Russell's views. Friends who were closer and, if anything, even more concerned for Russell's reputation than

the Aether and Electricity, Vol. 2. Students of this *History* will be aware that Whittaker minimizes Einstein's role.

⁵ Physically it is there related to the pressure/momentum of electro-magnetic radiation.

⁶ The grounds of Plas Penrhyn share a boundary with Portmeirion, the Italianate village built by the Russells' friend, Clough Williams-Ellis, the architect. On Russell's fourth marriage Clough commented: "Well, he is a remarkable person. He has now given a new collective noun to the language—a russell of wives."

myself, were convinced of this, but warned me that it was a matter on which he was sensitive and very defensive.

At the tenth-anniversary Pugwash Conference at Ronneby, Sweden, in 1967, I was able to discuss CND interests with Japanese leaders. When they knew that I was in personal contact with Russell, first hesitatingly, but then, with my assurance of total discretion, they came to the same question. They were anxious to report a disturbing experience. Having written to Russell for his guidance on a matter of substance, they had received two replies; as I remember, one came from Plas Penrhyn, the other from London. The replies were in contrary senses: one said the equivalent of "Yes", the other said "No". They had satisfied themselves that Russell's signature on one of the letters was not his own.

Armed with this information, I made a deliberate but very cautious approach to the question of Ralph Schoenman on a visit to Plas Penrhyn. Despite my care, the hackles rose visibly. (Paraphrasing): "Yes, others seem to suggest the same." (That he should contemplate the possibility that he was being misrepresented.) "But where is the evidence? I am not going to accept what may be merely people's opinions. And who is there who will do half the work for me that Schoenman does? He is prepared to take risks, and goes to extraordinary lengths of personal exertion to get my message to where it counts." It was clear that Lady Russell supported the rejection of the challenge I had raised, and having no documentary or other material evidence, I moved away from the subject.

It was far more than a year later that Russell wrote his letter to *The Times* dissociating himself completely from any representations on his behalf by Schoenman.⁷ What is of importance in Russell studies is to establish in what contexts and to what extent Schoenman's activities departed from what may otherwise be accepted as Russell's views. Perhaps this has already been attempted. My own opinion is that the divergences between these two aspects undoubtedly did a very grave disservice to Russell's general public repute.

Before I went to Ronneby I visited Russell to discuss these conferences of which he was then still the president. My general view, which

was shared by some other sympathizers, was that whilst they generated excellent discussions and promoted understanding between influential scientists on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, there were few recognizable results. Because of deliberately minimized publicity, they were achieving too small public or, as far as could be established, governmental impact. With those who defended the almost private nature of the meetings I argued that the results would be more significant if the public were informed of their general conclusions and if some momentum were given to the opinions arising from the Pugwash meetings.

My position might perhaps have been described as that of "an angry young man". After two hours with Russell, I came away almost shaken, having been with a more vociferous and distinctly more angry young man. He was ninety-five at the time. The Conferences had become a great disappointment to him: they were not having anything like the impact he had looked for: whilst the talk was illuminating and often led to agreed opinions on important facts, it was left in mid-air and got no further, at best, than the limited circulation of the printed record of the meeting: and more of the same. Somewhat taken aback by his highly critical, not to say dismissive, appraisal, I pointed out that the UK delegates to Ronneby included a number of our most eminent and influential scientists. His reply was instant: "They go provided, or perhaps to ensure, that nothing is done." Of course, the organizers of Pugwash Conferences can argue successfully that there were achievements: what they do not prove is that those achievements could not have been substantially greater.

Russell did, of course, resign from the presidency. He was followed by two younger men, Sir John Cockcroft and Lord Florey. It so happened that he outlived them both.

In 1960 I organized a week's summer school in nuclear energy at an adult education institution, Coleg Harlech, located some four miles south of Plas Penrhyn. The principal contributors, each of whose presentations was the subject of a day's discussion, were Professor Rotblat, Professor P. M. S. Blackett, Dr. J. N. Dunworth (then head of the UKAEA nuclear reactor research), and Lord Russell. It is worth recording that none of these outstanding participants (including two Nobel prizemen) was offered more than his expenses. Russell's role was to take a question-and-answer session, which he preferred to giv-

⁷ "Russell Aide Repudiated", *The Times*, 10 Dec. 1969, p. 1.

ing a prepared talk.⁸ The sixty or so members of the school had been divided into five groups for the purpose of the discussions. Each group was asked to submit questions to Russell, and I had the interesting task of selecting and putting the questions to him. To me, the most interesting one was: "Eddington has averred that the scientist is similarly placed to a fisherman, trawling the sea with a net and that, like the fisherman, he can miss a whole range of items which pass through his net. Is this so?" Russell avoided (or did not accept?) the existence of concerns beyond science implied in the question. He proceeded to argue how much more searching the scientific net had become during his lifetime: we were now trawling items not only much finer but of a character not imagined in his youth. He did not seem to consider the possibility of items beyond the finest conceivable scientific mesh being the subject of Eddington's concern.

In this philosophical context it has always surprised me that, as I understand it, whilst Russell concluded that ultimate certainty was not to be achieved even in mathematics, ultimate significance was to be aimed for in metaphysics.⁹ Was this because biological evolution was not an integral part of his outlook? We can reasonably suggest that the human mind has arrived at its present status over the past, say, three million years. How can that mind's abilities not be the result of its adjustments to its experiences in this planet's environment? And how can that circumstance lead to our capability of some *ultimate* degree of understanding? That there is some almost transcendental significance which we should struggle to grasp? Gotama, for whose teaching Russell had notable respect, showed one of his greatest insights in categorically denying the accessibility of absolutes.

One further occasion I would recall. There was a peaceful protest when CND supporters sat on the pavements for several hours on a Saturday afternoon in a gesture to block the approach to our Ministry of Defence building in London. For some of the time I sat with the Russells; the admirable Michael Scott (author of *Time to Speak*, his statement on apartheid) was with them. There was the possibility that the police would seek to remove us and charge us with obstruction of

public access, but this did not happen. Later, the Russells called me from the sidewalk to join them in the middle of the road, marching up Whitehall when we dispersed. They were pleased with what they regarded as the success of the venture: and I went off to hear the Oistrakhs play, *inter alia*, the Bach double concerto.

⁸ For a report of Russell's session see "World Rule—or End to Humans, Warns Earl", *Western Mail*, Cardiff, 8 Aug. 1960.

⁹ See, for instance, *Human Knowledge*, for his recondite analyses in that direction.