

RUSSELL'S SPEECH AT THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS IN 1965: A NOTE ON A PARTIAL FILM RECORD

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In an article recently published by the Royal Society of London I reviewed some aspects of Russell's anti-war activities.¹ The initial context was a speech that he gave in the Old Theatre in the Old Building of the London School of Economics in February 1965 to a student organization called "The LSE Labour Society", which I heard, in which he attacked the British government for its support of the American war in Vietnam. He published it in 1969 in the third volume of his autobiography (*Auto.* 3: 205–15).

In a footnote to that article I noted that Kenneth Blackwell had advised me that a rather dim film-shot (figure 1; hereafter, "FS") existed (not in the Russell Archives) of Russell addressing the LSE Labour Society, and that he took it to show the February 1965 speech. However, I demurred, for various reasons; and, recalling that Russell had spoken to the Society four years previously, in February 1961, I proposed that this must be the occasion recorded in FS; apparently no file survives concerning it.

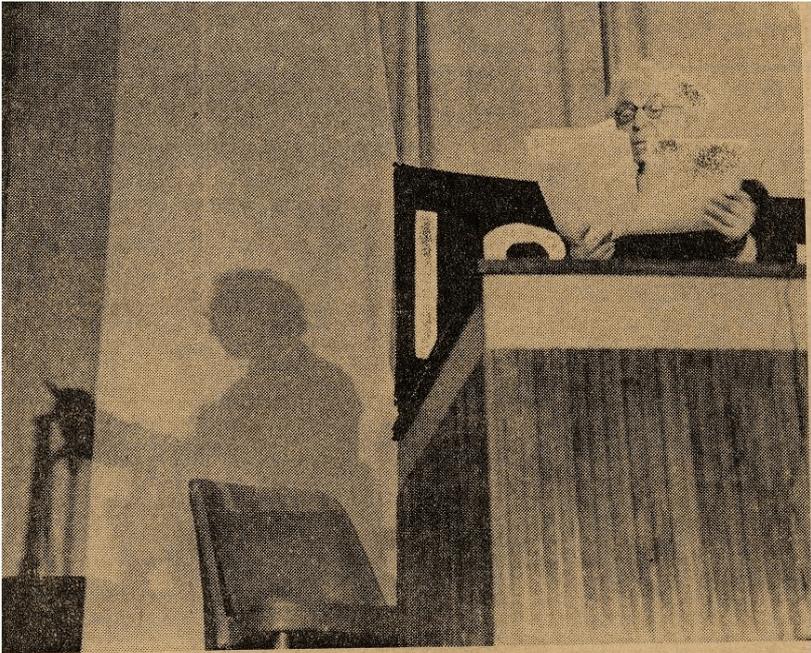
But this guess has been falsified by a source on the Internet that has recently come to light thanks to the librarian of the Bertrand Russell Society. It is about five minutes of short sections of moving film,² showing Russell delivering a speech to the LSE Labour Society, and also the arrival of some of the audience;

¹ I. Grattan-Guinness, "Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), Man of Dissent", *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 63 (2009): 365–79.

² The film came from the Associated Press News, and is available on the Internet at <http://www.russellsocietylibrary.com/lse.html>. Another film, lasting about three minutes, is available for a huge fee from Independent Television News (<http://www.itnsource.com/shotlist/RTV/1965/02/15/BGY505220323>).



Figure 1. A still from the film.



Ld. Russell

The shadow of Lord Russell fell across the Government yesterday. He launched a heavy attack on its performance when he spoke to students of the London School of Economics

Figure 2. The *Manchester Guardian* photograph, published 16 Feb. 1965, p. 1.

FS has definitely been taken from it, as some frame between 50 and 60 seconds in. Further, the film carries a soundtrack of quality just sufficient to reveal that Russell was reading out parts of the prefatory “emergency statement” about the fears of imminent war and early passages of the 1965 speech: they are published on pages 205–6 of his autobiography. So this film complements a close-up photograph of Russell delivering the speech that the *Manchester Guardian* published the next day (figure 2; hereafter, “MG”), which I had included in my article.

The film also corrects my description of the other figures that I gave in my footnote. Russell was standing behind a table with his wife Edith at its end to his left, his secretary Christopher Farley between the two of them, and with Ralph Schoenman seated at his immediate right; by the time MG was taken, for some reason Schoenman had moved away.

In my article I recalled the hostile reception that the speech received: that surely Russell had not written it, and that the anti-American position taken in it was so extreme. For us in the audience part of the disappointment was due to his frequent inaudibility, caused by his poor technique with the microphones. The lighting in the theatre caused part of the difficulty. For the first few minutes of the speech strong lights were switched on for the benefit of photographers and the film cameraman (or -men); but they troubled him, and so were switched off. Edith recalled later:

The difficulty was that the TV lighting was trained upon the platform at just the height to catch B’s eyes. He could not see anything — neither audience nor his own notes. No complaints had any effect, though it was admitted later that this lighting, so adjusted, was quite unnecessary. The result was, unhappily, fumbling and disjointedness. It was a sorry occasion, but the blame for it lay not upon B. or R. S. [Schoenman] or upon B’s speech, but upon the organizers of the occasion.³

I think that the apportionment of blame is somewhat skewed; and who admitted what to whom?

Figure 3 shows the Old Theatre today. The stage and the seating have been substantially refurbished since 1965.

³ Edith Russell, “‘Clark’s Fatuous Book’ (Part 3)”, *Russell*, this issue, p. 136; text kindly supplied by the Editor.

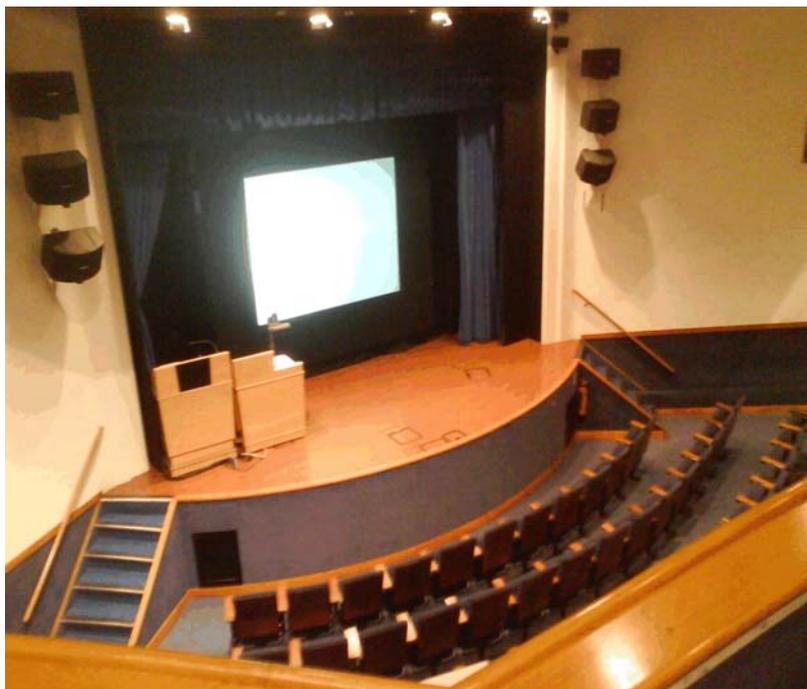


Figure 3. The Old Theatre today.