

A-BOMB MONOPOLY AND CENTENARY

KENNETH BLACKWELL

BLACKWK@MCMASTER.CA

George H. Quester. *Nuclear Monopoly*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000. Pp. 234. ISBN: 978-0-7658-0022-0 (hb). US\$47.95.

*Q*uester, professor emeritus of international relations at Maryland and a former director of peace studies at Cornell, leaves no hypothesis

unexamined in asking why the United States did not use its nuclear monopoly in 1945–49 to keep it that way, either by threat or by preventive war. In a later work, *Nuclear First Strike* (2006), he moves up nearly half a century to explore what might be the policy consequences if nuclear weapons were again used in anger. He perceives there to be a taboo on their use. This taboo, he believes, will be strengthened if the world makes it to 2045 without their use. Barring a nuclear, chemical, biological or other holocaust, some of us will be around to verify that.

Russell doesn't appear in Quester's later book, although his shared nightmares over proliferation do. In *Nuclear Monopoly* Quester has a chapter on advocates of preventive war. The very first advocate he considers is Bertrand Russell, because he was left of center. Others are Churchill, Groves, von Neumann, Szilard, LeMay, Norstad, lesser known generals, Truman's science advisor and a navy secretary, and an analyst. Public advocates of preventive war were few, he maintains, but one he overlooks is James Burnham in *The Struggle for the World* (1947). Quester refers many times to Russell in the course of the book, not only because of Russell's usual politics, but also for the moral element in his "fully articulated" proposal. "Bertrand Russell's shift, from advocating [with Churchill (see p. 68), the threat of] a war with Stalin's USSR before it got nuclear weapons, to advocating much greater accommodation with the Communist world later, might indeed have been totally logical, rather than so morally inconsistent", and he explains how (p. 39). There was a "moral ring" to Russell's advocacy: his primary goal was to make a thermonuclear World War III impossible (p. 16), rather than democratizing Russia. Russell would have been prepared to carry out the threat of a one-sided nuclear war in order to prevent a general nuclear war. (This was a utilitarian calculation, like the view in the heat of wartime that saw the nuclear terror bombing of Japan as costing fewer casualties than the planned invasion.) Quester sees, with Russell himself, that his very selection of the US for a "less imperialistic" role as enforcer had, as its obverse, democratic America's aversion even to consider inflicting destruction on Soviet cities. In his first nuclear writing, quoted by Quester, Russell had called the aversion "respect for international justice" (p. 38). Quester's thesis is that America, a liberal democracy, *could not*, in cold blood, have started a war of mass destruction during its nuclear monopoly.

Quester's surprisingly dispassionate willingness to evaluate all nuclear war scenarios may remind one of Russell's strong interest in another policy outcome book, Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War*. An important question for Quester is whether a preventive war against the USSR, with the attendant moral as well as physical sacrifices, would have been a temporary solution. He judges it "much less than the once-and-for-all solution to the problem of nuclear weapons" (p. 19)— unlike Russell's intended world government solution.
