

vides food for thought for those of us who want to align with Left and Queer politics. The liberal pursuit of individual choice which is so often advocated by the Left does not begin to address some of the conservative elements which underly this important debate.

Newfield provides new insights in his critique of neo-liberalism. He addresses neo-liberal claims that the market provides more choice and more individual freedom. He argues that the Left has been too quick to capitulate to these neo-liberal claims.

And Wendy Brown confronts the current paralysis of Left discourse within the halls of academia. She argues that the Left no longer has a vision of the future and she even admits that some of our “progressive” activities within the academy need to be revisited. She suggests that we academic Lefties have become defensive and moralistic because we lack a clear vision of the future we wish to live in. She uses her own experience within Women’s Studies as an example of a lively, engaged, and liberating academic politics that has now become uncertain of its path.

Together these 15 scholars of literary criticism, cultural studies, history, legal studies, and political theory provoke us to reassess the health of American democracy and to find it wanting: a vital debate which requires cross-fertilization from not just postmodernists but those who still engage in a materialist analysis as well. And the assessment would be even sharper if democratic scholars outside of the United States were invited to participate.

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Nicholas Griffin, ed., assisted by Alison Roberts Miculan, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell: The Public Years, 1914-1970* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Biography is inevitably retrospective. What men and women do in their final acts often determines how we judge their earlier deeds – or even their lives as a whole. For some, this can be a blessing: Winston Churchill outlived the military and economic blunders of his youth to become England’s fearless defender during World War II, which is how he lives on in public memory.

But for many others, the consequences of retrospective biography are much crueler. And few have suffered as grievously from this often pitiless practice as the great English philosopher Bertrand Russell. Never mind his fundamental contributions to analytical philosophy and mathematics, his Nobel Prize in literature, and his staggeringly prolific literary output. Despite his accom-

plishments, Russell will forever be identified with the “public years” of journalism and activism he embarked upon in the last half of his life.

And looming over everything will be his final decade, when Russell gave expression to some of the most venomous assessments of the West ever uttered. Western leaders were guilty of “organising the massacre of the whole of mankind. . . . They are the wickedest people that ever lived in the history of man,”¹ he lectured a crowd of protestors in 1961. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, he declared to the world that it was “likely that within a week you will all be dead to please American madmen.”² Sidney Hook, who had once befriended Russell, reflected sadly on the impact such statements might have on Russell’s reputation. “Bertrand Russell’s place in the history of philosophy is as incontestable as the place of Richard Wagner in the history of music,” Hook wrote hopefully in 1966. “Neither the anti-Semitism of the latter nor the anti-Americanism of the former can alter that fact.” But in practice, the fatuous politics of Russell’s later years *has* left an indelible stain on his reputation. In Ray Monk’s recent biography of Russell, Monk confesses that the “sloppy and ill-considered” quality of much of Russell’s later writings may have “distorted” his final reckoning of Russell’s life.³

Nicholas Griffin, who has edited two volumes of Russell’s letters, hopes to restore Russell’s reputation as philosopher and activist. Griffin is the Director of McMaster University’s Bertrand Russell Research Centre, and he is a spirited defender of Russell – even the widely-disparaged Russell of the 1960s. He writes in the Preface to this latest volume that he has tried to “combat some of the stubborn misconceptions about Russell. . . . I have found it impossible entirely to ignore the claims that have been made against him.”⁴ This is rather extreme understatement – Griffin attacks Russell’s critics with relish rather than reluctance, and more out of anger than sorrow.

In life, of course, Russell needed no defender – he regularly eviscerated his critics with scathing wit and precise logic. And he was certainly never at a loss for words. “My practice in writing a book is to compose it first completely in my head,” Russell wrote his publisher in a 1926 letter, “and only begin the actual writing at a moment which enables me to finish it on the specified date by writing 2,000 words a day.” (258)

But Russell’s published work was merely the tip of a massive iceberg, the hidden mass of which remains submerged in the formidable Russell Archive. Russell’s personal correspondence was legendary; Griffin tells us that Russell wrote letters almost every day of his life, and was known to dictate more than a dozen letters at a sitting, even in his final years. (ix) His celebrated wit sparkles on almost every page of this volume. Even into his nineties, as a multitude of health problems rained down on him, Russell maintained his sense of humour. “Whenever I get at all tired I cannot swallow and the food sticks in my

throat. I tell the doctor that this affliction has been brought on by my attempting to swallow the pronouncements of politicians, but so far they have not accepted my diagnosis." (508)

Russell's letters are often remarkable for the light they shed on an increasingly public life. He seemed almost perversely attached to unpopular causes, and took apparent pleasure in weathering criticism. After World War I, he condemned the brutality of Russia's new Bolshevik rulers, criticizing them when "their methods seem to involve a departure from their own ideals."⁵ Privately, he expressed even more radical doubts about Bolshevism. In a magnificent letter to Colette O'Neil in 1920, Russell wrote that he found the Bolsheviks "totally indifferent to the individual.... I found that *I disagreed with their ideals even more than with their practice.*" (207 emphasis added) Quite predictably, as Russell wrote his sister-in-law, he found himself "being quarrelled with by most of my friends, and praised by people I hate – e.g. Winston and Lloyd George." (223)

Russell always seemed more troubled by his allies than by his enemies. He declined to join Emma Goldman's campaign against the Bolsheviks, or to be "associated with any movement which might seem to imply that a change of government is desirable in Russia." (251) When a Bolshevik foe of a more conservative stripe offered his support, Russell pompously rebuffed him. Russians were dying of typhus and other diseases, Russell wrote in 1921, "because the comfortable plutocrats of other countries consider every inhabitant of a communist country deserving of death by slow torture."⁶ (220-21) Russell never seemed so happy as when he was a minority of one.

This could lead to nonsensical or even dangerous positions on important issues. One of the most appalling examples is found in Russell's *Which Way to Peace?*, published in 1936. Griffin describes the book as "Russell's strongest pacifist statement," advocating "unilateral disarmament and an individual refusal to fight," (342n) but this misses some rather crucial details. *Which Way to Peace?* argued that a Nazi occupation of Britain would be "infinitely less terrible than the consequences of a war, even if it ended in complete victory."⁷ Nonresistance to Nazi aggression might even help civilize the Germans: "With the fear of war removed, bullying would soon lose its charm, and a liberal outlook would become common."⁸ Britain, he suggested, would be far better off in practical terms by "imitating Denmark," which had drastically diminished its military capacity: "If we did this, could we become as happy, as prosperous, and as relatively safe as the Danes are now?"⁹

Thankfully, Britain never bothered to find out. And Russell himself soon started beating his plowshares back into swords; he eventually came to support Britain's war effort wholeheartedly. Indeed, after 1945, his sabre-rattling grew positively alarming. He encouraged America to use its atomic monopoly to

contain Soviet power, and even contemplated the possibility of nuclear Armageddon. Was he calling for a “preventive nuclear war” against Russia? This is a vexed question.¹⁰ Hostile biographers such as Ray Monk have pointed out that Russell “publicly advocated a policy of threatening the Soviet Union with atomic weapons on no fewer than twelve occasions,” while privately admitting that he did not expect the Russians to “yield without war.”¹¹ Griffin insists otherwise, stating that Russell never *publicly* advocated “a policy which he thought would very likely end in war.” (428) But it’s doubtful that Russell’s intended audience picked up on many of the conditional statements, caveats, and subtle distinctions that recent defenders have teased out of his published articles and speeches.

Take, for instance, one representative article by Russell published in the February 1947 issue of the American anti-Communist journal *Plain Talk*. “In the near future,” writes Russell, “a world war, however terrible, would probably end in American victory without the destruction of civilization in the Western hemisphere, and American victory would no doubt lead to a world government under the hegemony of the United States – a result which, for my part, I should welcome with enthusiasm.”¹² Even if Russell is not *explicitly advocating* war, there is something deeply troubling about the arc of the sentence, from its perfunctory “however terrible,” to its final, chillingly triumphant conclusion. Russell was an extraordinarily precise thinker, and careful in his use of language. Would he not be aware of the implications of such statements?

But Griffin rarely takes Russell’s critics seriously, and this occasionally leads him into error. One striking example involves a 1958 letter Russell writes to Herbert Philbrick, the infamous FBI informant in the American Communist Party. Philbrick had complained to Russell about the philosopher’s increasing dedication to the cause of nuclear disarmament at the expense of his earlier anti-Communism.¹³ Griffin notes that Philbrick had gathered some of his information from Alfred Kohlberg, publisher of what Griffin calls the “ultra-rightist magazine” *Plain Talk*. “It is not unduly surprising,” writes Griffin with evident amusement, “to find FBI agents associated with lunatic fringe rightist groups like that which published *Plain Talk*.” (510) Of course, as we have just seen, Russell himself had been “associated” with the same “lunatic fringe rightist group,” in whose magazine he published his reflections on nuclear war.

Philbrick’s letter also protested Russell’s association with the fledgling Pugwash movement, and noted that one of the attendees of the 1956 Pugwash Conference was an anti-Western Communist Chinese academic, Ch’ien Tuan-sheng. Griffin sarcastically notes that it is “less surprising than it ought to be that someone who was virtually a professional witness for the FBI should get his facts so wrong. There was no Pugwash Conference in 1956 and Ch’ien never attended any of those in subsequent years.” (511n) But Philbrick is right

about this point. There was indeed a Pugwash Conference in August 1956, and Ch'ien attended it.¹⁴ Griffin is ignoring the earlier "Thinkers Conferences" that were held at Cyrus Eaton's Pugwash home, and which were a prelude to the more famous Pugwash Conferences of Nuclear Scientists.

But distortion is more common than outright error. Sidney Hook is dismissed simply as an "excitable red-baiter," (498) though he was an early and vigorous opponent of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Flora Lewis, who published a deeply critical magazine profile of Russell in 1967, is accused of authoring "perhaps the most malicious" of many "personal attacks" on the philosopher. (598) But Lewis was merely expressing what many of Russell's former friends and colleagues had come to believe – that Russell's critical faculties had become impaired, and that he was being manipulated by his new secretary, a young American graduate student named Ralph Schoenman.¹⁵

It would be comforting to believe this were true. Russell's later tendency to demagoguery might then simply be dismissed as the product of an aging mind and a ventriloquist's voice. But Griffin avoids this easy defense, and makes clear that Russell's later intellectual path was organically connected with his youth. Russell's growing weariness with traditional protest methods, and his support of "direct action," for instance, predated his meeting with Schoenman. "I am constantly reminded of the agitation in favour of votes for women in which I was active 50 years ago," Russell wrote to Peggy Duff, the organizing secretary of the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, in early 1959. "I disliked the unconstitutional methods of the Suffragettes, but in the end one had to confess that it was they who had secured votes for women."¹⁶

Schoenman, a tireless organizer and uncompromising radical, was thus a natural ally for an aging philosopher whose radical ambitions outpaced his failing body. Russell's embrace of Schoenman appalled many of his former colleagues – even those who shared his views on direct action. When members of the radical Committee of 100 expressed concern that Schoenman's grandstanding might discredit the fledgling organization and lead to violence, Russell emphatically disagreed. The Committee "owes special tolerance to Ralph Schoenman," Russell wrote to one critic. "We are all rebels and cannot hope to succeed if we condemn those who show even more rebellious energy than most of us do."¹⁷ (545)

Schoenman came to inspire and direct virtually every major undertaking by Russell in the 1960s. This included the "Who Killed Kennedy?" Committee, which gave a sheen of respectability to the ludicrous conspiracy theories of Schoenman's friend, Mark Lane. Asked to serve on the committee, many refused, some quite bluntly.¹⁸

Equally controversial was Schoenman's idea for an International War Crimes Tribunal to investigate American war crimes in the Vietnam War.

Griffin has only included Russell's letters to the Tribunal's sympathetic participants; the many criticisms levelled at the undertaking are dismissed in an editor's note. "Inevitably," he concedes, "much of the Western press would dismiss the tribunal and its report for its anti-American bias. Nothing could be done about this, given the conclusions the tribunal was bound to draw from the evidence before it." (594) But it was precisely the restrictive nature of the evidence that raised serious concerns among many reasonable people – including some on the Left.¹⁹

Like the War Crimes Tribunal itself, Russell restricted his criticisms to outrages committed by the West.²⁰ It is puzzling for Griffin to dismiss this notion as a "cold war myth," (573) for Russell's thundering outrage inevitably dissipated when he addressed Soviet leaders. His numerous letters to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, none of which have been published in this volume, are almost uniformly sycophantic. "I am venturing to address you, not on this or that particular question, but to express my heartfelt admiration of the general lines of your foreign policy," Russell wrote to Khrushchev in a typical letter from August 1964. "Among the Heads of powerful States, you, alone – or so it seems to me – have any care either for your own country or for our common species."²¹

Even Russell's campaigns on behalf of persecuted Soviet citizens maintained this attitude of collaboration. When he asked Khrushchev in early 1961 to pardon two of Boris Pasternak's arrested friends, he made a stunning confession to the Soviet leader: news of their arrests, he told Khrushchev, had hitherto "been kept from the British and French Press, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to prevent publication."²² It's doubtful he would have provided the same services for *American* politicians hoping to suppress reports of human rights abuses in the USA.

Similar concerns arise from Russell's campaign for Soviet Jews, which Griffin calls "one of the most extensive he undertook in the last decade of his life – comparable in extent only to those for nuclear disarmament and against the Vietnam War." (573) Writing to Khrushchev in February 1963, Russell pronounced himself "troubled" that a disproportionate number of Jews were being executed in Russia for economic crimes. Or more accurately, he was troubled by the "*emphasis and attention given to the fact that many offenders have been Jews.*" Russell acknowledged that Jews "are bound to be vulnerable to popular feeling when they are among social offenders. I hope that steps can be taken about possible feeling of this kind."²³ Russell, in effect, was claiming that the Soviet state was blameless in its persecution of Jews, and that the problem lay with the apparently considerable power of "popular feeling" in Soviet Russia, which had to be restrained.

Such controversies retain their urgency in today's vastly changed political landscape. Indeed, the most striking aspect of this volume is how *contemporary* it all feels. Three decades after Russell's death, the Left continues to debate the efficacy and morality of "direct action." Anti-imperialism remains as vital a force as it ever was. And charges of "moral equivalence" and a lack of patriotism still dog the Left – especially in times of war.

In his 1941 essay, "The Lion and the Unicorn," George Orwell summed up the plight of a Left whose attitudes and inclinations were shared, among others, by Bertrand Russell. "The Bloomsbury highbrow," he wrote, "with his mechanical snigger, is as out of date as the cavalry colonel. A modern nation cannot afford either of them. Patriotism and intelligence will have to come together again. It is the fact that we are fighting a war, and a very peculiar kind of war, that may make this possible."²⁴ Six decades later, as the West once again finds itself fighting a "very peculiar kind of war," perhaps it's time for the Left to finally move out of the shadow of Bertrand Russell.

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¹ *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1944-1967, Volume III* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 144.

² Bertrand Russell, *Unarmed Victory* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), p. 36.

³ Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Ghost of Madness, 1921-1970* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), xii.

⁴ *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell: The Public Years, 1914-1970*, edited by Nicholas Griffin (London: Routledge, 2001), xi-xii. Later references appear in brackets in the text.

⁵ Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1920), 9.

⁶ It is worth noting that Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Administration spent more than 60 million dollars in famine relief for Soviet Russia. In the summer of 1922, it was feeding over 10 million starving Soviet citizens daily, while also providing medicine and seed grain. See Harold H. Fisher, *The Famine in Soviet Russia, 1919-1923: The Operations of the American Relief Administration* (New York, 1927).

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *Which Way to Peace?* (London: Michael Joseph, 1936), 139

⁸ Russell, *Which Way to Peace?*, 143

⁹ Russell, *Which Way to Peace?*, 137.

¹⁰ Certainly the fullest treatment of the issue is found in Ray Perkins, Jr., "Bertrand Russell and Preventive War," *Russell* 14 (Winter 1994-95), 135-53. Perkins argues, and Griffin agrees with him, that Russell's only unambiguous advocacy of preventive war is found in his famous letter to Walter Marseille written in May 1948. (See Griffin, 428-29.) "Communism must be wiped out, and world government must be established. . . . I do not think the Russians will yield without war."

¹¹ Monk, *Bertrand Russell*, 302.

¹² Republished in *Plain Talk: An Anthology from the Leading Anti-Communist Magazine of the 40s*, edited by Isaac Don Levine (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1976), 58.

¹³ Griffin writes that by 1954, Russell had “put his cold war hostility to communism behind him in the face of a danger that transcended all political, racial, and national differences.” Griffin, *Letters*, 486.

¹⁴ See Marcus Gleisser, *The World of Cyrus Eaton* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1965), 217.

¹⁵ Many published and unpublished sources verify this. See the letter from Malcolm Muggeridge below. See also David Horowitz, *Radical Son* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 129, and Brian Magee, *Confessions of a Philosopher* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 187, 221-22. Russell also acknowledged this perception in his 1969 “Private Memorandum Concerning Ralph Schoenman,” reprinted in Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 640-651: “Complaints, all couched as jokes, came to me in the early days as often as might be expected from the people upholding our civil disobedience work. Ralph would, they said, try to bully them into doing what he thought right by saying that he was speaking as my secretary and voicing my wishes.” Clark, 644.

¹⁶ Griffin, *Letters*, 517. A later letter to G.H. Petch in July 1960 made this point even more forcefully. Russell alluded to earlier struggles against slavery and the Corn Laws, and the campaign to extend to women the right to vote: “All of these began with a fanaticism which repelled the general public. All conquered in the end through the attention their fanaticism compelled. All these, though successful in the end, never got a good word from the Establishment. . . . Your approach is temperamentally congenial to me, but I doubt whether it is wholly valid from the point of view of mass psychology. I was ardently in favour of votes for women from the time of adolescence onwards, but I was opposed to the Suffragettes for reasons very similar to those which you give in your letter. In the end, I thought I had been mistaken. My mother addressed women’s suffrage meetings very nearly a hundred years ago. She and the others who confined themselves to rational arguments got nowhere, but, in a few years, the Suffragettes achieved victory. I felt I had been mistaken in my opposition to them, and I do not wish on this occasion to make a similar mistake.” *Ibid.*, 530-31.

¹⁷ Ralph Schoenman’s “rebellious energy” continues to grow. He has recently expressed his belief that the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 were planned and executed by agents of the FBI and Israeli Mossad.

¹⁸ One of the harshest letters came from Malcolm Muggeridge: “Like most intellectuals of my generation, I grew up holding you in the deepest respect. You have the great glory of having, from the very beginning, seen the dangerous course upon which Soviet Communism was set, when people like the Webbs allowed themselves to be cheated and deluded. I love the clarity of your style, your wit, the luminosity of your thought; but it saddens me the more when I see your name associated with propositions that have none of these qualities; when I feel that you, of all people, have been induced to appear in public as a performing seal in the weary, and wearisome, ideological circus of our time. Anyway, I respect you too much to join you in the act. No doubt Kennedy, like Gandhi, was in some obscure way a victim of the dark forces which have been loosed in the world. No doubt there are those who are trying, it may be successfully, to hide how this came about. I should be

eager to join in any honest endeavour to frustrate their deceptions, and get at the truth; but not, I regret to say, in co-operation with your present associates." Muggeridge to Russell, 19 June 1964. Russell responded simply: "I have read with interest your letter, which I am sorry not to have answered earlier. I am glad to know your opinion on performing seals." Russell to Muggeridge, 23 July 1964.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Staughton Lynd, "The War Crimes Tribunal: A Dissent," *Liberation* 12 (December 1967 / January 1968), 76-79. Lynd insisted that the War Crimes Tribunal, in order for it to have credibility, would have to investigate war crimes committed by both sides – even though he acknowledged the basic point that the Americans and their allies had committed the vast majority of offenses. "My position is that an action defined as a 'crime' remains criminal no matter who commits it."

²⁰ "The Americans are so abominable," he told Merv Griffin on 28 June 1965. "To have an American autocracy throughout the world would be one of the most dreadful things that could happen. The only thing worse is a nuclear war." Transcript of interview in the Russell Archives.

²¹ Russell to Khrushchev, 24 August 1964.

²² Russell to Khrushchev, 1 January 1961.

²³ Russell to Khrushchev, 26 February 1963. Emphasis added.

²⁴ George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1941), 50.

Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

"Son of a bitch! ... This is the worst decision I've ever made in my life," Omar Cabezas remembers thinking when he arrived at the heart of the mountains of Nicaragua, only to discover that the vaunted Sandinista guerrillas consisted of fifteen bedraggled kids lying around in hammocks.¹ Matilde Zimmermann's clear-eyed examination of that lonely period in the development of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) in the 1960s and early 1970s makes a valuable contribution to understanding the history of the Nicaraguan revolution.

The only English-language biography of FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca, *Sandinista*, joins a select group of ground-breaking works that are essential reading on the intellectual and social context in which the Sandinista movement emerged.² Zimmermann takes us behind the lenses of Fonseca's trademark thick eyeglasses, interviewing his contemporaries and mining a wealth of unpublished writings from Sandinista historical and military archives previously unavailable to outside researchers. By choosing to focus on the evolving ideology of this core protagonist who would not live to see the 1979 Sandinista