

Editorial

Extinction rebellions

In Britain there is an unfortunate readiness on the part of some leading politicians to declare their willingness to ‘press’ the nuclear weapons button. When Jeremy Corbyn courageously demurred from such a catastrophic option, he was castigated far and wide. More assertively, Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland’s First Minister, said ‘before you ask, the answer’s “NO”.’ Of course, it’s not politicians who would actually press a button to launch these megadeath weapons, but submariners at sea. The legality of such an act is highly questionable, as retired Royal Navy Commanders Robert Green and Robert Forsyth have set out in previous issues of *The Spokesman* (nos. 141 and 142). As Commander Green wrote, the Commanding Officer of the currently deployed UK Trident-armed submarine is ‘acutely aware’ that what he is there to do is to actually ‘press the nuclear button’ on behalf of the Prime Minister, and would be placed in legal jeopardy by current British nuclear policy. Nuremberg Principle IV states:

‘The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his government or superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was in fact possible for him.’

Meanwhile, reckless acts such as US President Trump’s targeted murder of Iran’s General Suleimani highlight the dangers inherent in the current international order. Victoria Brittain scrutinises these global dangers, which have become the ‘new abnormal’, including the worsening Climate Emergency. The fires that have engulfed much of Australia have already left many people homeless and killed countless flora and fauna, threatening extinction of some species. Yet the Australian Government continues to encourage expansion the country’s massive coal industry with all its attendant fossil fuel emissions. Elsewhere, the new European

Commission rightly prioritises a Green New Deal in response to the Climate Emergency. But what is to be done about military emissions and the carbon ‘bootprint’?

Which brings us back to Scotland. In November 2020, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP 26 (Conference of the Parties), will meet in Glasgow under the presidency of the UK government. This needs to show more political will than COP25 in Spain in December 2019. UN Secretary General Guterres candidly said he was ‘disappointed’ with the results of COP25, adding that he ‘will not give up’. Auditing the carbon footprint of the military would be a big step forward. Audacious moves are required.

So it was that the No-Conscription Fellowship held its final celebratory convention on 29/30 November 1919 at Devonshire House in London, the Quaker offices. One hundred years later, at Friends House in Euston Road, the ‘Beyond Remembrance’ conference considered ‘Pacifism at the end of war’, and what peace movements in all their diversity are doing now to build and sustain the peace. Earlier in 2019, School Strike climate campaigner Greta Thunberg had spoken at Friends House during her visit to London. There is a compelling need to link growing public awareness and active concern about the Climate Emergency with the fundamental priorities of the peace movement. The huge carbon ‘bootprint’ of the military is one conspicuous area of common ground, which Jessica Fort and Nicholas Straub address in this issue of *The Spokesman*. Days after the ‘Beyond Remembrance’ conference, NATO heads of state gathered in London to ‘celebrate’ the nuclear-armed Organisation’s 70th anniversary. What is NATO’s carbon footprint? How much does it cost us all?

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Into the Sixth Decade

The first issue of *The Spokesman* is dated March 1970. It went to press in the days after Bertrand Russell died, on 2 February. He had ‘eagerly’ participated in its preparation, as recorded in the Editorial Notes for that inaugural issue (reprinted here). Founded by Bertrand Russell, 50 years on, *The Spokesman* remains ‘dedicated to carrying on his work’ for peace, human rights and social justice.

Ken Coates probably drafted those Editorial Notes for the first issue. He was to edit *The Spokesman* for the next 40 years, until his own sudden death in 2010. In this, Ken’s tenth anniversary year, we reprint his short

article about Workers' Control, which first appeared in *The Spokesman* Number One. It highlights the growing influence of ideas about democratic participation in the workplace, which blossomed throughout much of the Labour Movement in Britain during the 1970s.

Editorial Notes

The death of Bertrand Russell has come as an extraordinary shock to all the many people, in every continent, who were engaged in the innumerable campaigns which he was waging right up to the last moment of his life. Of course, we all knew he was an old man, very old indeed. But somewhat irrationally it had seemed as if the world's need for that often almost solitary voice might keep it speaking almost indefinitely. Now no more peace telegrams will go out to the governments from Penrhyndeudraeth, no more urgent appeals for the victims of political oppression, no more calls for the mobilisation of demonstrations all around the globe. The thought of that silence is awesome, forbidding.

Other people have celebrated the prodigious achievements of the man in half a dozen major fields. In our forthcoming issues we will try to explain some of those elements of his greatness with which we were particularly familiar. Now, we can say only a word or two.

The fact is, that during the last week of his life, after months of preparation in which he eagerly participated, we sent this first issue of "The Spokesman" to the press. It was virtually complete on the day he died. When we composed the brief editorial notes, we had gone over the ground with him, seeking together to formulate in the briefest way the multiplicity of issues upon which "The Spokesman" was intending to campaign. He had wanted the journal desperately in order to be able, the better, to organise support in all the various battles in which he was engaged: we therefore took some pains to get the first editorial declaration right, and it went to press late.

For this reason, we are able to stop publication and insert instead this sad but proud statement: "The Spokesman", founded by Bertrand Russell, is dedicated to carrying on his work.