

Thrillers

Michael Craft and I set off to find Bertrand Russell sometime in 1959 – the exact date is no longer clear. I was the chair of CUCaND, the Colleges and Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and Michael its treasurer, but he was the moving force. Craft wished to enlist Russell in some sort of showdown with Canon John Collins, chair and prominent public voice for the newly formed CND of which Russell was president. It would be some time before Russell and Collins parted company over direct action and the Committee of 100, launched in October 1960, when in spite of negotiations between Russell and Collins (described by Peggy Duff in *Left, Left, Left*, pp. 170-78) Russell resigned. Craft was already on the radical wing of CND, though I do not recall the precise issue on which he sought Russell's support.

We knew that Russell was normally resident in Penrhyndeudraeth in Wales, and not being able to afford the train fare we hitchhiked all the way. After travelling all day and night, we arrived early in the grey morning and walked up the drive to Plas Penrhyn, the isolated Regency country house where Russell lived from 1954 till his death in 1970. Russell, we were informed, was in London – we had neglected to establish his whereabouts before setting out.

Craft then wrote a letter to Russell, which as I recall was quite strongly worded, saying in effect: Lord Russell, we went all the way to discuss an urgent matter, and you weren't there! Russell replied politely with his regrets, and an invitation to call on him at his flat in Millbank, which we soon did. We sat on one side of a small fire with Russell on the other side, and Craft argued his case. Still politely, Russell expressed sympathy but said he did not feel able to join in any action against Collins even though he had his own disagreements.

I had left Craft to present the argument, which was his anyhow, and sat quietly as they discussed it. Here I had ample time to observe my immediate surroundings. The alcove in which I sat was lined on two sides with bookshelves, and these were completely filled with detective stories, green Penguins and many others. Ever afterwards when asked whether I had met Russell in the early years of CND, I could honestly answer yes. But all I could remember was his thrillers.

John Gittings