



Bruce Kent

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Plain speaking

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Bruce Kent's collected reviews for *The Spokesman* reveal not only an engaging intellect but also a very clear sense of purpose. The titles he reviewed and his rigorous interrogation of the ideas presented within them show an enduring commitment to peace. Even where he found much to agree with, Bruce always had an insight not otherwise addressed in the text.

As Bruce reflects in his autobiography, *Undiscovered Ends* (Harper Collins, 1992):

‘In one lifetime I have already had more than my share of privileges. Above all I have been blessed with a sense of purpose which still hasn't faded. In the field I know best there is still much to do in a world which can spend even now nearly a trillion dollars a year on war and the preparations for it. One day it is going to dawn on the human race that war is as barbaric a means of resolving conflict as cannibalism is a means of coping with dietary deficiency. If we had only read the right parts of the right books we might have learned long ago:

A King is not saved by his great army,
A warrior is not delivered by his great
strength.

The war horse is a vain hope for victory
and by its great strength it cannot save.

Psalm 33

“One day” can be a long way off. However, it seems to me that we are now in the middle of a Copernican revolution in understanding, which some have not yet begun to notice ...’

Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Russell, *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*, Routledge, 2001, 112pp, £45.00 hardback, ISBN 0 41524 994 5, £8.99 paperback, ISBN 0 41524 995 3

Thanks to the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation we now have this new edition of a book which first appeared in 1959. I was not one who read it the first time round, and therefore it was interesting indeed to see how lasting and contemporary the Russell warnings of 1959 still are.

Yet so much has changed. Nuclear weapons have spread to at least eight countries. Largely unnoticed, two countries – Ukraine and South Africa – have actually possessed nuclear weapons but have independently relinquished them. We have been through the lunacies of the Cold War, with nuclear weapons reaching levels which even George Kennan, one-time United States hawk, described as grotesque. We have, by the grace of God or sheer good luck, survived a whole series of accidents and misperceptions which could easily have resulted in catastrophic nuclear exchange.

Thanks to the lobbying and expertise of those involved in the World Court Project, we now have the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. That opinion makes it clear that in current circumstances the threat and use of nuclear weapons would actually be illegal. However, that was not a unanimous opinion of the judges. What was unanimous was their ruling that the nuclear powers have a legal obligation to start and complete negotiations aimed at the elimination of all their nuclear weapons. There are still no such negotiations in progress.

Is Russell's book relevant to all this nearly 50 years later? Very much so. There is much that is very contemporary. The Greens of today would certainly take him to their hearts: '...when I read of plans to defile the heavens by the petty squabbles of the animated lumps that disgrace a certain planet, I cannot but feel that the men who make these plans are guilty of a kind of impiety.' Theologians of a peaceful bent would warm to that word impiety as we contemplate the possibility of circling satellites armed with pinpoint lasers targeting the earth every minute of the day. Scientists and politicians get a practical reminder. 'The spread of power without wisdom is utterly terrifying'. Russell even looks forward to a demilitarised world in which there could be for everyone 'a life of joy such as the past has never known'.

His reputation is that of a rather eccentric prophet of doom urging instant action to avert immediate disaster. This book shows him to have been not

only idealistic but highly practical. Clear steps are proposed for United Nations reform. Stages on the way to general disarmament are laid out in pragmatic fashion. Though he clearly believed in unilateral nuclear disarmament for Britain, he makes no such proposals for the major powers. Perhaps some proposals are so far into the future as to seem bizarre even today. What would the Royal Navy think of crewing its submarines with sailors ‘of different nations so that mutiny in some national interest would be impossible’? That sounds odd, but is it really so different from the UN peacekeeping forces of today, drawn from many different countries but deployed together in a common cause?

The dangers of aggressive nationalism which Russell describes have not gone away. There is happily today strong public support for the development of democratic globalism as opposed to selfish corporate globalism. Russell’s stress on education is quite inspiring. ‘It should be one of the tasks of education to make vivid in the minds of the young both the merits of the civilised way of life and the needless dangers to which it is exposed...’

The book comes with a very contemporary 27-page foreword by Ken Coates, who knew Russell well, and it starts out with a commendation from Noam Chomsky. One critical note. I did not find very satisfactory, or even convincing, Russell’s attempt to justify his suggested threats in the late 1940s of military action against the pre-nuclear Soviet Union. But then some great men with more than average egos find it hard to admit inconsistencies or mistakes. The same goes for lesser men, too.

Russell’s little book is well worth reading even now, long after it first appeared. Plenty of people are always wrapped up in the problems of the day. Too few can look to the long future with hope. Russell clearly did.

The Spokesman 74, 2002

Human Action

Conor Foley, *The Thin Blue Line: How Humanitarianism Went to War*, Verso, 256 pages, hardback ISBN 9781844672899, £ 14.99

This provocative, informative and useful book is well worth reading. Essential reading in fact for anyone who is serious about building a more just international order, and who is ready to start from where we are, not from where we would like to be.

The author seems to have landed up in nearly every crisis location – Uganda, Kosovo, Angola, Bosnia, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia –

under one or another humanitarian umbrella in recent years. His theme is the relationship between humanitarian activity, which ought to make human need, rather than borders, its priority, and the State sovereignty on which the United Nations (and most of the political world, since Westphalia) has been based.

My own belief is that the UN never did confer on states quite the sovereignty that they now claim for themselves. Article 2.7 of the UN Charter affirms that the charter does nothing 'to authorise the UN to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state'. Surely, there is an open door for the lawyers. What is domestic jurisdiction? Can a state claim that such jurisdiction overrides the obligations set out in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights? It does not, of course, follow that, as the book rather implies, military intervention is the only or the most effective form of intervention. In Kosovo, the observers of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) did a very effective job, until they were thrown out by those who had sent them there, and the NATO militarists took over.

Intervention of any kind is now suspect because it has been used too often for national priorities other than humanitarian, and very selectively. We will live with the lies of Iraq for a very long time. No one is suggesting, for obvious practical reasons, military intervention on behalf of the beleaguered and blockaded inhabitants of Gaza, for instance. Nor is it being suggested on behalf of the occupied inhabitants of Tibet.

There are questions still to be answered. Why did we do our best to maintain the unity of Federal Nigeria when Biafran secession was the issue, but do our best to break up the Yugoslav federation when Croatian and Slovenian secession was the issue?

Who are all these humanitarian non-governmental organisations referred to frequently in the book? Is the Campaign Against the Arms Trade one of them? If not, why not? I suspect that it is the Oxfams and the Christian Aids who qualify, not the groups with more radical programmes.

The author fairly recognises many of the problems. Of NGO work in general he concludes that, while such activity can 'prick the world's conscience that "something must be done" simultaneously it reinforces the delusion that humanitarian action can ever be enough'.

I would have liked more stress on the obvious truth, which is that the real work of the agencies is to awaken their home populations to the need for radical political action and cultural change. After all, the budgets of all the agencies put together are miniscule by comparison with national budgets, and worse than miniscule when looked at alongside the trillion and quarter

dollars the world spends on weapons and war every year. The unjust way in which we run our world is a permanent ongoing disaster in its own right.

The author recognises that some agencies are committed to playing safe. How well I remember little Operation Omega, based in Calcutta in 1971, bravely running through East Pakistan's borders and refusing to use any name but that of Bangladesh. Quite unlike Save the Children, who stuck to 'East Pakistan' until the Foreign Office declared that it was safe to do otherwise. It was in Calcutta, too, that I saw first-hand the competitive nature of NGO work. Who got what time on television and radio, so that activity was noted, and donors encouraged at home, was a major part of NGO concern. The bottom line is always there even in the world of altruism.

I hope this book will push many to ask questions and to take action. We need an International Criminal Court which has the teeth to deal with the major violators of international law, not just the nastier small fish. We need a range of non-military as well as military/ policing options in advance for when the time comes for legitimate UN-authorized intervention to protect the innocent from cruelty and violence.

Most of all, we need a people with a sense of involvement in the reality of political power. We, in the nice liberal democratic West, deceive ourselves if we think we have influence in international affairs. Most people have never seen the UN Charter or the Declaration of Human Rights. Few could name those who represent our country on the various important UN agencies. Vital reports like that of the 1978 Special Session on Disarmament gather dust on shelves.

The great merit of *The Thin Blue Line* is that it will stir some into activity. It is not only Obama who thinks that the future is ours to make.

The Spokesman 103, 2009

Conscience

Ozgur Heval Cinar and Coskun Usterci, *Conscientious Objection: Resisting Militarised Society*, Zed Books, 272 pages, hardback ISBN 9781848132771, £75, paperback ISBN 9781848132788, £19.99

This interesting and, at times, mildly irritating book is a very useful contribution to the scholarship of conscientious objection. It consists of twenty-three essays, the majority of which have been written by Turkish authors. Many were presented at a conference on this subject held in January 2007 at Istanbul's Bilgi University. Granted the cultural and legal hostility

to conscientious objection in Turkey, it is a surprise that the conference went ahead at all. But then the Turkish Government wants to prove its European credentials. Already a member of the Council of Europe, it wants to be granted membership of the European Union as well. In this area of human rights it has a long way to go to catch up with the rest of Europe. Essay after essay makes this very clear indeed.

There are ways of escaping Turkish conscription, but they are not based on any legal recognition of human rights. Homosexuality is one ground for exemption, but the ways in which sexual orientation has to be proved are disgusting beyond belief.

The book is not only concerned with the situation in Turkey. There are contributions covering Greece, Spain, Chile, South Africa and other countries. The description of what went on, in the past, in Spain rang a few bells with me. I well remember being told, by an official at the Spanish Embassy in London, that 'to be a Spaniard and a catholic is to be a soldier'. This was their response to our Pax Christi opposition to the cat and mouse game played by the Franco Government with the lives of young men refusing to fight in the colonial African wars. As in many other countries, it was the Jehovah's Witnesses who led the way and who suffered greatly in regimes on both sides of the communist/capitalist divide.

An interesting book, but why is it irritating? Because there seems to be an underlying conviction expressed by many that objectors who are not inspired by a collective desire to reform society, but who base their decisions on personal and moral grounds, are somehow second class citizens in the world of conscientious objection. The real CO needs to be 'anti-patriarchal, anti-heteronormative, anti-homophobic and pro-feminist', one author suggests. Some of my heroes amongst those who have refused at great cost, such as Franz Jagerstatter who was executed in August '43, had no notion of social change at all. But they stood and died for a moral principle.

It is also a little irritating that the reader is meant to have more than working knowledge of European legal and political structures. Without such knowledge it is difficult to follow the ramifications of the legal road to the recognition of conscientious objection as a human right.

The 'historical' essays were of great interest to me. I had no idea how much influence Prussian militarism had on the Turkish state long before Attaturk arrived on the scene. Universal conscription we owe of course to Napoleon, but it was refined and polished by Kaiser Wilhelm 1, who launched the phrase about 'the nation in arms'.

The Prussians set about the wholesale militarisation of the state. Said a German-trained Turkish Staff major, in 1908, 'there is no separation

between the army and the nation’.

‘Peace time should be regarded as the continuation of wartime without fighting,’ said another. Militarised as our own British society is today, we have little idea of how the army still dominates in Turkish life, which is why granting rights to conscientious objectors is so difficult.

The global statistics are of great interest too. There are at the moment 192 ‘sovereign’ states. More than 20 have no armed forces. 168 of them do and 80 of those rely on volunteer forces. Some 88 still depend on conscription. Turkey is the only member of the Council of Europe not to grant alternative service rights to COs. There are devious ways of escaping service in Turkey, so it is probably only the most honest and straightforward who find themselves in head-on collision with the law.

What the book does not deal with is how we can resist the claims of a militarised society even if we are not confronted with the call to arms. Supporting ‘Conscience’, once known as the Peace Tax Campaign, is one such way. Choice of occupation is another. I have always felt that when Joseph Rotblat refused to continue to work on the atomic bomb, in 1944, that his was a CO stance.

Not everything can go into 272 pages. There is more than enough in this book to make it both important and useful.

The Spokesman 106, 2009

Diego Garcia

David Vine, *Island of Shame: The secret history of the US military base on Diego Garcia*, Princeton University Press, 282 pages, hardback ISBN 9780691138695, £20.95

I got angrier and angrier as I read this book. It is a story of ruthless military and economic imperialism, Cold War driven, and underpinned by servile British governments. Diego Garcia is today only one of a thousand military bases which the United States has in other countries. No wonder the Russians and the Chinese see themselves as encircled.

Diego Garcia is a large island military base which dominates the South Asia region, and played a major part in both the Iraq wars. It first came to the attention of US military planners because they were looking for locations for air and naval bases which would not be subject to opposition later on from hostile populations or nationalistic governments. Unoccupied islands were ideal for that purpose.

So Diego Garcia came into focus. There were, however, two problems. It was part of Mauritius, a British colony, and it certainly was populated, if by only a few thousand inhabitants – but they had been there at least for two centuries.

The colonial problem was solved, on behalf of the Americans, by the British, who made a major financial grant to the future leaders of Mauritius with the promise that independence would be speeded up. The price tag was that the islands, of which Diego Garcia was one, would be cut off from Mauritius. This involved ignoring the spirit, if not the letter, of article 73 of the UN Charter, which said that, in the transition period from colonialism to independence, ‘the interests of the inhabitants ... are paramount’. The division was effected, and a new administrative structure was set up in 1965: the British Indian Ocean Territory.

At least one British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Francis Pakenham (the author does not know that he is naming our Lord Longford) was quite honest. He suggested that we should just tell the UN that, in this case, we did not intend to accept that Article 73 was binding. Other civil servants and government officials were more devious. Said one: ‘The legal position of the inhabitants would be greatly simplified from our point of view – though not necessarily from theirs – if we decided to treat them as a floating population’.

Another, Alan Brook Taylor, suggested turning them into residents of Mauritius. ‘This device, though rather transparent, would at least give us a defensible position.’ Worse comments came from Sir Paul Gore-Booth and D.A. Greenhill (later Baron), whose racist and sexist comments have to be seen to be believed. The aim was clear: empty the islands and prepare for US occupation.

That is exactly what happened. The first some Chagossians knew about it was when they were told, when trying to return from a hospital visit to Mauritius, that there was to be no return. So it went on, until in 1971 an entire ship-full were dispatched, in disgraceful conditions, away from their homes for good. In a disgusting piece of brutality, their pet dogs were gassed in a shed as the inhabitants were leaving. An empty island means just that.

The future of those expelled has been hard. They have been given minor compensation grants but, for the most part, they have lived in poverty. Unemployment has been the norm. Their efforts to get the legal right to return at one stage looked hopeful, but this was eventually blocked by the House of Lords.

Meanwhile, the base now employs other imported workers, and the harbour has become a yacht haven for tourists as well as a military location.

There are strong indications also that the island has been used for ‘rendition’ flights.

Ironically, the American who promoted the whole idea of safe US island bases had a change of heart at the end of his days. Too late, Stuart Barber came to understand how his schemes had ruined the lives of innocent people far away, and wanted justice to be done. His pleas were not heeded, and his letters ignored.

There is one gap in the story. What were international human rights nongovernmental organisations doing at the time, both in the United Kingdom and on Mauritius, to protect these victims? Bishop Trevor Huddleston, whose name does not appear in this book, was actually Bishop of Mauritius for some years immediately after the expulsion. Did he, with his anti-apartheid record, not speak out? We are not told.

This moving and very informative book is not well served by its maps. They are quite inadequate. If there is to be a second edition, as I hope and recommend, then let there be more detailed maps of the Indian Ocean area. For instance, where are the Seychelles, another set of islands which might also have been turned into a base?

The Spokesman 107, 2010

Keep Talking

Mark Perry, *How to Lose the War on Terror*, Hurst Publishers 2010, 270 pages, hardback ISBN 9781850659624, £37.45, paperback ISBN 9781850659631, £12.99

This is a book which gets more and more interesting as the pages turn. It started life as a series of articles in the Asian Times in 2005. Then it developed into a book project when the author became involved, in 2005 and 2006, in attempts to dialogue with the Sunni resistance in northern Iraq. It became a full-blown book after further involvement with Hamas and Hezbollah leaders in Palestine and Lebanon.

The message which runs through it all is clear: ‘Jaw Jaw is better than War War’. Perhaps, granted the hints now emerging from Afghanistan of talks with the Taliban, we are beginning, at last, to learn that lesson there. We ought to have learnt it decades ago during the Northern Ireland civil war.

The book starts with a very good quotation from that remarkable historian Barbara Tuchman:

‘To halt the momentum of an accepted idea, to re-examine assumptions, is a disturbing process and requires more courage than Governments can usually summon’.

The entrenched idea in this case is that military power can defeat armed resistance which has some level of popular support. It can't. Sooner or later there have to be talks with ‘the enemy’. There are always differing political aims, which have to be faced. Slapping labels on insurgents and calling them terrorists only manufactures yet more real terrorists.

The author's experience in Northern Iraq several years after the 2003 invasion is fascinating. It was, in fact, the United States military and the Civil Affairs group who responded to an invitation from some influential Iraqi exiles in Amman. Their up-front aim was to help to rebuild the Iraqi economy, but discussions went much further than that. So far, in fact, that hostile but significant people such as Paul Wolfowitz slammed down the shutters with a vengeance and humiliated the officials involved. His understanding of the situation, and I am sure others shared his ideas, was simple: ‘Don't you know that these people are all Nazis?’

The official United States line was that there could be no talks with those they defined as terrorists. That is not even true according to their own past practice. The PLO and ANC and the opposition in Iraq were all called terrorists in their time, but US discussions went on with them nevertheless.

The chapters on Hamas, Hezbollah and Israel all tell the same story. There is an interesting quotation from a senior Hamas leader about the explicit clause in their Charter calling for the destruction of Israel, which is hardly compatible, anyway, with the Hamas offer of a ten-year truce. Says he: ‘The Charter is not the Koran - it can be amended’.

There might have been a very different story to tell about the Middle East if the United States had not mounted such heavy opposition to the democratic result of the 2006 Palestinian elections. All CIA stops, at the orders of President Bush, were pulled out to make a Fatah/Hamas partnership impossible. Hamas leaders wanted to talk but their terrorist label made that impossible. Condoleezza Rice's staff were clear. The Secretary of State ‘doesn't talk to terrorists’.

Probably all readers of this book will begin to wonder if we are not following much the same path as that of the United States. Islamophobia is now spreading in Britain. Many Muslims see themselves as a people under threat. Expulsions and imprisonment, or the indefinite house prison of control orders, without knowledge of accuser or accusations, are now normal. Yet this is in the land of Habeas Corpus. If Bin Laden is still alive

he must be delighted. There is no better way to provide him with more local recruits. Those responsible, at Government level, for our security would do well to read Mark Perry's interesting book.

The Spokesman 111, 2011

Afghanistan

Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars – The Inside Story*, Simon & Schuster 2010, 464 pages, ISBN 9780857200440, £20

Even though this book is really only about one war – Afghanistan – it is a very revealing story. More than that, it is also an astonishing one for reasons that the author would not have had in mind. The dysfunctional relationship between the White House and the Pentagon, which this book reveals, is quite scary. These are the same people who make nuclear weapon decisions.

The book is a blow-by-blow, meeting-by-meeting account of the way in which, during 2009, a policy was agreed which resulted in Obama's statement about Afghanistan of November 2009. He announced then, after all these discussions, that there would be a troop increase (not as large as the Pentagon wanted) and, most significantly, the start of a military withdrawal in July 2011.

There are several surprises. Since Afghanistan is meant to be a UN/NATO operation, no one seems to have thought of consulting their so-called partners in the run-up to this decision. Ban Ki-Moon does not even appear in the index. British forces get the briefest mention. Even so, they get more than is given to those of the other countries with troops deployed.

Solutions to problems are overwhelmingly framed in military terms. 'The man who is equipped only with a hammer sees every problem as a nail' rings true on every page. Obama, with Vietnam in mind, is clearly desperate to get out of the Afghanistan swamp. He is, however, squeezed at every point by the military. His Vice-President, Joe Biden, has, perhaps, the most original ideas, but he gets marginalized.

There is no evidence that any one realises that the United States is not thought, by the rest of the world, to be God's gift to world order. No one asks why terrorists take to terrorism or if insurgents have some reason for insurging – if I may invent a word. At one point, even an intelligent man like the President himself says 'We don't seek world domination or occupation'. The 1,000 US bases and military facilities strung around the world tell a different story to most of us.

US connivance in the occupation of Palestine or the slaughter in Iraq, as reasons for Muslim hostility, gets no mention. Palestine itself is not even in the index. It is indeed revealing that Pakistan, with its eyes on India, has played such an ambivalent role in the whole conflict.

In a rather *Readers' Digest* style the author describes in detail all the various lengthy top level meetings that went on before the November announcement. I had to wonder how Obama sleeps at night, and when he has time to think about the other pressing problems on his mind.

Thankfully, the book starts with a helpful list of all the participants, military, diplomatic and White House. The reader is left with no idea where the lines of authority actually run. Loyalty to the President, much trumpeted, is actually in short supply. Time and again the military come back to challenge his views with amendments, alternative suggestions and even media contradictions. This habit is not just a military weakness. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defence, tells a dinner gathering in Washington, at which President Karzai is present, 'we are not leaving Afghanistan prematurely ... in fact we are not leaving at all'. This was exactly the opposite of the Obama position, which all had agreed to support. General Petraeus, the new commander in Afghanistan, says more privately, 'this is the kind of fight we're in for the rest of our lives and probably our kids' lives'.

This is a very important book which ought to be studied carefully. It is not the details of the discussions that matter or the pecking order of infights amongst the military, of which there are plenty. What it reveals is how the most powerful country in the world in military terms actually makes up its mind on critical international issues. The United Nations is a distant sideshow, as are the rest of us. NATO, an arm of US policy, is simply a means of disguising the reality.

The book has, too, a sad taste of tragedy. A decent man, suddenly given great world power, who knows where he wants to go, is impeded, but not yet brought to a halt, by forces, military and political, which are more powerful than he is.

The Spokesman 111, 2011

Not Using the Bomb

T.V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-use of Nuclear Weapons*, Stanford University Press, 336 pages, paperback ISBN 9780804761321, £26.95

This book will be of great historical interest to anyone who needs a handy reminder about the various nuclear weapon crises which have threatened the world since 1945. It is primarily written for the academic defence world, so will not be at all points entirely intelligible to those outside that world. What is 'an eclectic framework which gives importance to rational and normative considerations' etc, etc? Nevertheless, there are an excellent series of page notes, an extensive index and a lengthy bibliography.

The book is exactly about what its title says. The author suggests that an international norm has developed since 1945 about the non-use of nuclear weapons, even in extreme circumstances. He does not, of course, deny that by their very deployment they are anything other than an ongoing threat. That is what they are for. Nevertheless, despite crisis after crisis, they have not been exploded during hostilities, despite their massive cost, since the fateful days of August 1945.

Why, since then, have all the nuclear weapon states refrained from using nuclear weapons? This question needs an answer. The most militarised country in the world, the United States of America, submitted itself to the most humiliating defeat possible in Vietnam with its last minute rush from Saigon. Not quite as humiliating, perhaps, but the Soviets can hardly have been proud of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. Why did the United States allow their allies, the French, to be defeated by their one time colonial subjects in Vietnam? Was Mrs Thatcher really ready to use nuclear weapons in the case of a looming conventional defeat in the Falklands?

Tracking the history of all this cannot have been easy. What exactly American Presidents said they would do, and what they did do, were often different things. What was said for sabre-rattling purposes and what was an actual intention? Perhaps the world has been fortunate in the leaders it has had. There were certainly those in the Oval Office during the Cuba crisis who, had they been in charge, would have uncorked the nuclear bottle.

If non-use is now a norm, that is not the greatest comfort. We have experienced too many nuclear weapon accidents in the last decades for comfort. I still think we owe our survival to the brave common sense of a Soviet Officer, Colonel Petrov, who, in 1983, refused to report what he thought he had seen – an incoming flight of nuclear-armed missiles from the West.

Why has a non-use norm developed, if indeed it has? The answers are complex but they have plenty to do with reputation, personal liability and law. It took until 1996 before the International Court of Justice gave its somewhat elastic ruling on the illegality of the use of nuclear weapons. If using nuclear weapons involved committing wars crimes, then someone in a leadership role might have realised that international disgrace and even criminal charges might be the consequence. Certainly, the longer the time elapsed since August 1945, and the nuclear bombing of Japan, the more difficult it would have been to use such barbaric weapons once more.

Yet, despite growing commitment to non-use, the Western side of the Cold War built a whole nuclear strategy on the possibility of winning wars actually fought with nuclear weapons. ‘First use’ was a deeply entrenched strategy, underpinned with weapons labelled ‘tactical’ that were designed for first use.

In 1984, General Chalupa, Commander in Chief in Europe, said ‘Nato’s strategy of first use is founded on the principles of flexible response – threatening an aggressor with direct defence and deliberate escalation to include the first use of nuclear weapons’.

I hope T.V. Paul is right and that we have permanently moved to a world of nuclear non-use. I do not, however, hold my breath. The major nuclear powers continue to frustrate progress towards a nuclear-weapon-abolition Convention. The consequence will be that nuclear weapons will, sooner or later, fall into the hands of state or non-state actors who may not be panicked by threats of mass destruction or fear of suicide. Accidents will continue to happen. Abolition is the only genuine security available.

The Spokesman 112, 2011

Hammered

Shannon D. Beebe and Mary Kaldor, *The Ultimate Weapon Is No Weapon: Human Security and the New Rules of War and Peace*, Public Affairs, 2010, 288 pages, ISBN 9781586488239 £15.99

When I first saw *The Ultimate Weapon Is No Weapon* – the title of this book – my heart lifted. It’s going, I thought, to be about the uselessness of nuclear weapons and the ongoing insecurity which they ensure. I was wrong. The ‘ultimate weapon’ of the title is war itself. The message, coming from two very different authors, is the same. We cannot today, if ever we could, achieve security just by military means. Yet we annually spend globally

some \$1,630,000,000,000 attempting to do so. By far the largest slice of this enormous expenditure is the responsibility of the United States alone.

Real human security today means freedom from ‘poverty, disease, violence and tyranny’. To achieve such goals, in the view of the authors, there has to be some kind of partnership between the civilian and the military world. In making her case Mary Kaldor, in particular, has shown great courage in visiting war zones in many places, some certainly very dangerous. How well I remember the kidnapping of Norman Kember [in Iraq] and the long wait and many vigils before he was released.

Mary is, of course, an academic, and Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics. She played an influential part in the Helsinki process and the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign in the 1980s.

Shannon Beebe is a United States Lieutenant Colonel who was attached to the US Embassy in Angola when the book was written. He played a major role in the establishment of the US Unified Command for Africa (AFRICOM) – which I don’t like the sound of at all. It exists apparently ‘to support US Government objectives’.

I am not sure that their new redefinition of security as human security is quite as new as they suggest. Some have travelled before on that road. Pope Paul VI in his letter *Populorum Progressio* of 1967 deserves a bit of credit. The 4th Section of that document is even headed ‘Development is the new name for Peace’.

No matter. The lesson has still to be learnt by politicians and military alike. Influential people still behave as if they can bomb people into peace. ‘The man who is equipped only with a hammer sees every problem as a nail’ still describes the illusions under which most of the military suffer.

What is new about this book is the recommendation that there ought to be some sort of partnership between the military and the many nongovernmental organisations who flock to war zones bringing with them zeal and compassion certainly, but often also competition for publicity and funds.

The authors both agree that there is a ‘role for force in human security operations’ – but this is not quite the same as waging war for peace. Far more important is to try to make sure that any military action is aimed at the establishment of human rights and the basic standards of human life – food, education, medical provision and political rights – which we take for granted. Indeed, military action is only legitimate, according to Article 42 of the UN Charter, when the Security Council is satisfied that all peaceful means of resolving conflict have been exhausted.

Condoleezza Rice has yet to learn such lessons. In an interview for the New York Times in 2000, quoted in this book, she said of such a new approach ‘Carrying out civil administration and police functions is simply going to degrade the American capability to do the things America has to do. We don’t need to have the 82 Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten’. Perhaps America does not have to do the things that some Americans think they have to do.

This is a stimulating and even optimistic book, which humanitarian NGOs as well as the military ought to read. Its focus is clearly on the recent overseas wars in which, unhappily, we have been involved. If we are moving away from a world of war to one of global policing and community building, so much the better.

I would have liked, however, to have heard more about the current global culture of war which so dominates today in education and the media. We cannot export a culture of peace and a respect for human rights unless they also flourish in the world of wealth and power.

The Spokesman 115, 2012

The Art of Peace

John Gittings, *The Glorious Art of Peace: From the Iliad to Iraq*, Oxford University Press 2012, 316 pages illustrated, hardback ISBN 9780199575763, £18.99

This is an impressive book of scholarship and personal conviction. It comes with a substantial list of notes and a useful general index. All who are working for world peace will find it a great source of information and encouragement. The final sentence, a quotation from Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling, about our ‘unique epoch’ sums it all up:

‘We are privileged to have the opportunity of contributing to the achievement of the goal of the abolition of war and its replacement by world law.’

Gittings takes us from ancient Greek history right up to Afghanistan and Iraq. Ignorance prevents me from commenting on Chinese and Greek peace and war history, about which Gittings clearly knows a great deal. Such history evidently was not always bloody and violent. There is a picture of quaint Chinese stone carvings of domestic calm to prove it. More at home with Shakespeare’s dramas, I regret that in so much school literature we

concentrated on single set books rather than on the range of an author's work. Gittings seems to know all Shakespeare's plays by heart. There is, as he makes clear, so much more to Shakespeare than Laurence Olivier in Henry V telling his countrymen that they would regret missing out on the chance to bump off Frenchmen.

Other names which have a place in the tradition of peacemaking will be familiar to many readers: Augustine, Erasmus, More, Kant, de Sellon, Czar Nicholas II, Bertha von Suttner and Jane Adams. At home in Britain we have Cobden, Henry Richard, Lord Cecil of League of Nations Union fame, Vera Brittain and Joseph Rotblat. These are only a few of those who have worked over the centuries, in various parts of the world, towards a time when differences will be settled by law and arbitration and not by war and violence.

There has been much progress, as Gittings makes clear, but some sad near misses as well. I did not know how close we came, with the Hoover Plan, to having a successful League of Nations Disarmament Conference, in 1932, or how largely Britain was responsible for its failure. No wonder Sylvia Pankhurst put up her ironic 'Bomb' statue outside her house in Epping.

Some of the numbers and achievements in terms of grassroots organising are, by today's standards, astonishing. The League of Nations Union had, in its heyday, some 400,000 members, and was able to organise, in 1934, with the help of other organisations, a national ballot in support of the League which collected personal replies from over 10 million citizens. Far from being a pacifist ballot, well over half of those responding wanted the League to be able to take military action against aggressors.

The United Nations followed the League. Its Charter was signed in June 1945, before the end of World War Two. Its first aim was 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. In that task it has arguably failed, though in many others it has succeeded beyond expectation. Like the late, and equally UN minded, Erskine Childers, Gittings is sure that in so many areas – education, human rights, health and even the environment – much has been achieved. That more could have been done is only too true, but, granted the road blocks set up by the great powers in the Security Council, the General Assembly has perhaps too often felt itself to be incapable, or scared, of independent action.

Gittings is clear that, despite the failures, we have made substantial progress towards a world of peaceful citizenship under the rule of law. The obstacles in front of us are obvious. A conformist media willing to repeat any claim coming from political power, an arms industry which needs

threats and fears to make its money, and a crude nationalism which prevents real internationalist thought.

As malign as ever is the 1947 nationalistic demand from Ernest Bevin, which took Britain down the nuclear weapon road. He had to have, he said, a nuclear weapon ‘with a bloody great Union Jack on top’. Such crudity, then and now, makes for slow progress in what Gittings calls the Art of Peace.

The Spokesman 120, 2013

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Bruce Kent

1929-2022

Like many others, I benefited from Bruce Kent’s long ministry to the peace movement. On 18 May 2022, we celebrated Bertrand Russell’s 150th birthday at Conway Hall in London. Bruce came and sat in the front row. The next day, he wrote to say ‘Well done yesterday --- that was a warm, friendly and informative afternoon’. Bruce was spontaneously humorous and encouraging, and he is greatly missed.

Bruce became general secretary of CND in 1980, about the same time I started as a volunteer with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in Nottingham. Ken Coates of the Foundation was teaching an adult education course about power and politics in Britain, which I joined. Labour had lost the 1979 general election and, in 1980, Mrs Thatcher was soon to join President elect Ronald Reagan in escalating the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, following the USSR’s ill-judged invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. US nuclear-armed cruise missiles were to be located at two redundant US airbases in England and in five other NATO member states, as well as super-fast Pershing missiles in what was then West Germany. The Soviet Union was already deploying its own mobile short and medium range nuclear weapons. The talk was of ‘limited’ nuclear war in Europe, the likely ‘theatre’ of devastating conflict.

In his autobiography, *Undiscovered ENDS*, Bruce recounts how ‘providence’ seemed to steer him towards stewardship of CND at that time. Such benevolent providence would be most welcome. Bruce exuded warmth and humanity as a priestly figurehead of the rainbow cavalcade which was the international peace movement bestirring in the early 1980s. The Russell Foundation was busy circulating the Appeal for European

Nuclear Disarmament ‘... to free the entire territory of Europe, from Poland to Portugal, from nuclear weapons, air and submarine bases, and from all institutions engaged in research into or manufacture of nuclear weapons’. The Appeal had been drafted by Edward Thompson, Ken Coates, Mary Kaldor and others, developing an idea originated by Ralph Miliband. The Appeal was launched in April 1980. There was an enthusiastic response. Signatories from many European countries endorsed the call for a representative conference of all those signing the END or ‘Russell Appeal’, as it was known in some places. In due course, the END Conventions began their annual gatherings, commencing in Brussels in 1982.

Organisationally in Britain, END’s first years were not without problems. An inaugural meeting took place at Friends House, Euston Road, on a Saturday afternoon in the early summer of 1980. Bruce was probably there. Mike Cooley and Arthur Scargill certainly were, alongside Ken Coates, Ken Fleet, Mary Kaldor and Claude Bourdet, the French writer who had fought with the Resistance. He had travelled from Paris. Dorothy and Edward Thompson were probably there. That meeting went well. The differences arose later within the END co-ordinating committee in Britain. Bruce regularly participated in meetings of the co-ordinating committee. I recall attending one meeting at the House of Commons where Stuart Holland MP hosted us. He took us past Westminster Hall where Bruce was moved to remark ‘Thomas More — right there!’, referring to the saint’s trial for treason in 1535. Stuart took us to lunch in a small canteen where Bruce demolished steaming jam roly-poly, while Peter Shore MP gawped at Edward Thompson. Peggy Duff, CND’s first and highly adventurous General Secretary, lent some fizz and experience to proceedings. Sadly, she died in April 1981. Later, the END co-ordinating committee tended to meet at the office in Endsleigh Street, where Meg Beresford, Ben Thompson and others worked. Robin Cook MP often attended and he also travelled to Nottingham to discuss matters.

Some real political differences had begun to emerge in the co-ordinating committee. For example, Edward had remarked that there was a ‘whiff of Bill Rodgers’ about the Communist Party of Italy, after the Russell Foundation, at Ken Coates’ instigation, published pertinent PCI documents in the second number of the *END Bulletin* of work in progress. For some years, the Russell Foundation had been working closely with the PCI on the rehabilitation of Nikolai Bukharin, the Bolshevik ‘darling’ of the Russian Revolution. In 1980 at the Instituto Gramsci, the PCI had organised a landmark conference about Bukharin to which leading

representatives of communist parties and others were invited. Eventually, in 1988, President Gorbachev rehabilitated Bukharin. By then END in Britain had long been sundered. The break between the Russell Foundation and the END of the Thompsons, Mary Kaldor and others, which occurred in 1983 after the second END Convention in Berlin, actually proved rather creative in the long run. Ken Coates and Ken Fleet had become joint secretaries of the international END Liaison Committee, which organised the END Conventions, while Edward, Mary and others continued developing the North Atlantic Network and related projects, reflected in a lively publishing programme in conjunction with Merlin Press and in the *END Journal*, edited by Mary.

The Berlin Convention in May 1983 was arguably END's high water mark, anticipating Germany's eventual reunification, much to the annoyance of the Soviet Peace Committee. In 1987, Gorbachev and Reagan would sign the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, which owed not a little to the pressure exerted by the END idea. As Bruce later remarked, there would never have been END without Ken Coates. Nor would the peace movement of the last 40 years have attracted so much sympathy and support without Bruce Kent.

Tony Simpson



Ken Coates, Bruce Kent and friends at sea off Greece