Editorial

On Palestine and Prisoners

Bertrand Russell was imprisoned twice in his long lifetime. During the First World War, which he opposed from the outset, his movements were restricted by order of the War Office. In 1916, Trinity College in Cambridge had deprived Russell of his lectureship on account of his stance against the war. In order to earn a living, Russell had to travel to lecture, and the restrictions on his movements meant he was deprived of this livelihood. He continued to speak out against the war and in support of the No Conscription Fellowship, which opposed the compulsory draft. He wrote an article in the Fellowship newspaper suggesting that American soldiers would be deployed as strike-breakers in England, ‘an occupation to which they were accustomed when in their own country’, as he later wrote in his *Autobiography*. For this he was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment, commencing in May 1918. Whilst inside, he ‘wrote a book, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, a semi-popular version of *The Principles of Mathematics*, and began the work for *The Analysis of Mind*’. He also corresponded widely.

Decades later, in 1961, Russell returned to prison, sentenced to two months for inciting the public to civil disobedience, in the cause of opposing nuclear weapons. His sentence was reduced to a week on account of recent illness and his 88 years.

In March 2013, at its final session in Brussels, the Russell Tribunal on Palestine received a long and informative letter from a serving political prisoner. Marwan Barghouti is a member of the Palestinian Parliament who has been imprisoned by Israel for more than 11 years during this latest stretch. Yet his elegant and gracious letter, which was read to the Tribunal in person by his wife, is full of hope and resolve for the future. We publish Mr Barghouti’s letter in full.

During the Second World War, Stéphane Hessel, President of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, fought with the French Resistance. He was captured by the Gestapo, imprisoned, tortured and sentenced to death. Stéphane, together with two British officers, escaped execution at Buchenwald when a sympathetic German political prisoner, Arthur Dietzsch, helped them exchange identities with inmates who had died from medical experimentation with typhus. Stéphane subsequently escaped, twice, eventually meeting up with the US Army at Hannover.

A few days before the Russell Tribunal on Tribunal convened in Brussels
for its final session, we received the shocking news that Stéphane had died. Although he was in his 97th year, he radiated enthusiasm and love of life. None of us expected that he wouldn’t be there to continue charting the way forward. In the event, just days before his untimely death, Stéphane had penned a Preface to *Justice pour la Palestine!* a beautiful little book which tells the story of the Tribunal from a variety of perspectives, including those of the esteemed jurors. We have translated Stéphane’s Preface and publish it here.

Angela Davis began her remarks to the final session by emphasising that the important work of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine is not over. She described how the Tribunal calls for the establishment of an international committee of former political prisoners to campaign for the release of all Palestinian political prisoners. She explained how, when she was imprisoned herself in the United States in 1970, a letter of solidarity and support from Palestinian prisoners had given her strength. We print the text of her powerful address.

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In the days following the Tribunal’s Brussels session, another political prisoner made a landmark statement for peace. Abdullah Öcalan, from his long and solitary confinement on the island of Imrali, close to Istanbul, chose 21 March, the Kurdish New Year or Newroz, to call for a peaceful resolution of the long struggle between Kurds and Turks, and for a new beginning. More than a million Kurds gathered in Diyarbakir, in south-east Turkey, to hear his message, which we print in full. Meanwhile, Ayse Berktay Hacimirzaoglu, a Turkish activist who has long advocated a peaceful resolution of Kurdish political demands, continues to languish in Istanbul’s Bakirkoy Women’s Prison, where she has been held since October 2011, when she was rounded up with hundreds of other activists (see *Spokesman* 119). Her trial, with more than 200 others, has again been adjourned, this time until May 2013. Yet, her life’s work for peace and justice continues to gather recognition. Recently, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, she was awarded the inaugural BRussells Award for Solidarity in recognition of her work as co-founder of the World Tribunal on Iraq. The watchtowers and walls tower over Silivri prison, Europe’s largest, where her mass trial drags on, intermittently, in the basketball court converted to a court house. We publish her address to the Court. May she, Marwan and all other political prisoners soon walk free.

*Tony Simpson*
Endorsements for the
Russell Tribunal on Palestine

Richard Falk
The contributions of the Russell Tribunal in relation to the Palestinian struggle are of the greatest significance in relation to global justice in our time. The sessions of the Tribunal devoted to Palestine are the most comprehensive and reliable accounting the world possesses of the array of crimes committed by Israel over the course of several decades, as well as of the complicity of the world of sovereign states, especially those in the West. When it comes to accountability for Crimes Against Humanity the record of international criminal law is one tarnished by double standards and shameless enclaves of impunity established by geopolitical pressures. We can be thankful to the Russell Tribunal for doing what governments and the UN fail to do, illuminate patterns of criminality without the constraints of world politics, and by doing so, creating an awareness of unpunished and continuing criminality on the part of Israel and its chief allies. No people has been more victimized by geopolitics than have the Palestinian people, and no course is more deserving of the support of world citizens than is this heroic struggle of Palestinians for their rights under international law. Above all, we can be thankful to the Russell Tribunal for reminding us so powerfully of this elemental historical truth.

Miriam Margolyes
No problem facing the world contains a closer and more frightening threat than the possibility of a Middle Eastern War. The Russell Tribunal is committed to preventing such a catastrophe. The calibre of its members attests to the seriousness of their task. They are unafraid to criticise Israel; I am confident that they tell the truth and are motivated only to end the misery, they are neither anti-Semitic nor anti-Islam. I wish them success as their final session commences.

Ahdaf Soueif
The Russell Tribunal sets an example for what people of courage and conscience need to do today. States, governments and international institutions have failed in their duty to protect the Palestinians, Palestinian land and Palestinian rights; they have failed to uphold the law – and so the citizens of the world step forward. Justice will come for Palestine, and the work of the Russell Tribunal will have been essential in achieving it.
On Palestine and Prisoners

Noam Chomsky
The Tribunal has already achieved a great deal of success in bringing the issues of the Palestinian rights to public attention. I hope and trust that this final session will pave the way to effective action to move towards a just resolution.

John Pilger
The Russell Tribunals are so important for all humanity; they help keep justice alive, and keep good people sane. The Tribunal on Palestine may well be the most important of all; for until the Palestinians receive true justice, we are all in danger. All power to the Tribunal.

Ken Loach
The Russell Tribunal has done its job very well. Congratulations to all who have worked so diligently. The Tribunal has provided a resource of authoritative evidence that documents Israel’s actions and their consequences. It establishes the nature of the Israeli state, its supporters and those whom it oppresses. No-one can claim ignorance. To say ‘we did not know what was happening’ is no longer an option. The world now knows. The question is: ‘what must be done?’

SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
For a Palestinian state alongside Israel
Matt Wrack
General Secretary
The Fire Brigades Union
Alan McLean
President