

## Editorial

# Think Globally, Act Locally

In 1988, Ken Coates published a book under the same title as this editorial, in which he argued, with characteristic democratic emphasis, for a UN popular consultative assembly (see excerpt below). The timing was significant. The year before, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty had been signed by General Secretary Gorbachev and President Reagan, outlawing a whole class of nuclear weapons. This landmark agreement represented the high water mark of European Nuclear Disarmament, to which Ken had dedicated much of his life and work during the preceding decade. The following year, 1989, he was elected to the European Parliament for the first time, and quickly became the President of its Human Rights Sub-committee.

We revisit END through Ken's audacious proposal for a 'joint session' of the European Parliament and the Supreme Soviet. This is a record of dead hopes but far-from-dead fears, as the bloody confrontation currently centred on Ukraine reminds us. Richard Sakwa provides much needed insight and objectivity in the otherwise slanted public commentary on Russia-Ukraine-NATO-European Union relations. His conclusions echo earlier concerns:

'If Europe is not once again to be divided, there need to be new ideas about what an inclusive and equitable political and security order encompassing the whole continent would look like. In other words, the idea of Greater Europe needs to be endowed with substance and institutional form.'

The collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, rendered futile any plans for joint sessions between the Supreme Soviet and the European Parliament. But, decades later, enduring peace on the Eurasian landmass requires a change of direction away from treating Russia as the 'enemy', towards building our 'common European home'.

We also reprint the transcript of Ken Coates' address to trade unionists, entitled 'From a mob to a movement'. Different from his written style, Ken's fluency in speaking to such audiences is evident from the text. The occasion was a study day at Nottingham University in June 1991, the year the first part of the official *History of the Transport and General Workers' Union* was published to critical acclaim. Co-authored with Tony Topham, Ken regarded the *History* as a high point in his long list of publications. Regrettably, the second part of the *History*, post 1922, was never completed, as work in the European Parliament made increasingly heavy

demands. Nevertheless, the totality of Ken's work is considerable, and Tom Unterrainer is compiling a comprehensive bibliography to supplement the archive in Nottingham University's Special Collections.

So it is fitting that the inaugural Ken Coates Memorial Lecture should be given by Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, at Nottingham University on 3 June 2015, some five years after Ken died, and shortly after the UK's General Election. Her theme is 'The Future of the Left: Where Next for Britain's Labour Movement?' We print Frances's comments on the implications for Europe of Syriza's anti-austerity campaign and the need for European policies which promote growth and employment, which were made in anticipation of Syriza's election victory in January, together with the TUC's considered support for Greek workers.

Ken's consistently 'global' outlook he shared with Bertrand Russell, with whom he worked closely for the last years of Russell's long and eventful life. Russell had come to Ken's aid when he was being expelled from the Labour Party for the first time, in the mid-1960s, mainly because of his outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War. *The Week*, 'a news analysis for socialists', was edited by Ken from Greenfield Street, next to the Nottingham University campus, and duplicated on machines elsewhere in the City. Its global perspective is immediately apparent, but so is its local grounding. There was extensive coverage of a long strike at Raleigh Cycles, for example, as well as disputes at hosiery factories in Long Eaton. It is in that spirit that this issue of *The Spokesman*, dedicated to Ken Coates and his political legacy, includes some local news of current attacks on the National Health Service in Nottingham, and the campaigns against them.

*Tony Simpson*

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*Ken Coates wrote:*

'... supposing in the modern age that every six million adults in the world were to be invited to choose a representative for such a world forum, this could imply a process of election in which all the key issues would be extensively discussed. Parties would gell to express the different options, and many concealed options would be opened up. The press and television services would shift their attention, for a vital if brief period, to a global agenda ... national democratic forces would quickly discover their most appropriate international partners in dialogue and joint action. Linkages would emerge quickly and by rational choice rather than haphazardly and in the light of restricted and sometimes false information ...'

*Think Globally, Act Locally, Spokesman Books, 1988*