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## The CND

*Bertrand Russell*

*For decades, Bertrand Russell had been worrying about nuclear weapons, and organising to alert the world to the threat. This excerpt from his Autobiography recounts the founding of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1958. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 1957-1959, edited by Carl Spadoni, will be published by Routledge. It is Volume 30 of the Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell, produced at McMaster University, Canada, which holds the Russell Archives.*

...By November [1957], however, my concern with international affairs had boiled up. I felt that I must again do something to urge at least a modicum of common sense to break into the policies of the two Great Powers, Russian and America. They seemed to be blindly, but with determination, careering down a not very primrose-strewn path to destruction, a destruction that might – probably would – engulf us all. I wrote an open letter, to President Eisenhower and Premier Khrushchev, addressing them as ‘Most Potent Sirs’. In it I tried to make clear the fact that things which they held in common were far more numerous and far more important than their differences, and that they had much more to gain than to lose by co-operation. I believed then, as I still believe, in the necessity of co-operation between nations as the sole method of avoiding war; and avoidance of war is the only means of avoiding disaster. This, of course, involves rather disagreeable concessions by all nations. A decade later, Russian seemed to have recognised the need of co-operation – except, possibly, in relations to her co-Marxist State, China. The United States continued to confound co-operation with domination. But, in 1958, I had hope, though slight hope, of both Great Powers coming to their senses, and in this letter I tried to lay my case before them.

Almost at once a reply came from Premier Khrushchev. No answer came from President Eisenhower. Two months later John Foster Dulles replied for him. This reply stung Premier Khrushchev into writing to me again answering various points made by Mr Dulles. All these letters

appeared in the *New Statesman*. They were soon published in book form with an introduction by that paper's editor, Kingsley Martin, and a final reply from me to Mr Dulles and Mr Khrushchev. The letters speak for themselves and my final reply gives my point of view on them. The righteously adamant surface of Mr Dulles's mind as shown in his letter filled me with greater foreboding than did the fulminations and, sometimes, contradictions of Mr Khrushchev. The letter seemed to me to show some underlying understanding of alternatives and realities; the former, none.

During that autumn, George Kennan had been giving the Reith Lectures over the BBC and saying some excellent things drawn with acumen from his wide and first-hand knowledge of American and Russian policies. Early in December a group of us met with Kingsley Martin at his invitation to talk things over. As far as I remember it was at this meeting that the first glimmerings flickered of what was to become the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. A meeting of sponsors of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests was held at the house of Canon John Collins in Amen Court and the CND was formally started early in January, 1958. The officers were to be: Canon Collins, the Chairman; Mrs Peggy Duff, the Secretary; and myself, the President. An Executive Committee was formed comprising some of those leaders already established in anti-nuclear movements and a certain number of other interested notables. There had been for some time various associations working to overcome the dangers with which the international scene was fraught. The CND proposed to take them all in – or at least almost all.

The CND was publicly launched at a large meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster, on February 17, 1958. So many people attended this meeting that there had to be overflow meetings. It seems now to many people as if the CND has been part of the national scene from the beginning of time, and it had lost its lustre and energy through familiarity. But in its early days its information and reasoning were not only sincere but were fresh and commanded considerable attention among a variety of individuals and circles important in the nation. And the first meeting went off with great éclat and success. Moreover, interest in the CND quickly spread. Soon there were committees formed in different parts of the country and then Regional Committees. Many meetings were held, at some of which I spoke. I remember, in particular, one at Manchester in 1959 at which Lord Simon of Wythenshawe was in the chair.

I saw much of Lord Simon in those days until his death in October 1960, as he was greatly concerned by the nuclear peril and worked hard to make

the dangers known. He arranged a debate on the subject in the House of Lords and held a great number of meetings and press conferences at his London flat. He was a member of the executive committee of the CND and we saw eye to eye on most matters to do with it. He became, as I already was, an upholder of the activities of the Direct Action Committee. We both believed that the dangers must be called to the attention of the public in as many ways as possible and that if we stuck to merely meetings and even marches, no matter how admirable they might be, we should end by preaching only to the converted. The chairman of the CND did not approve of civil disobedience and so, though nominally the Direct Action Committee was to be tolerated, it could not be aided openly by the CND. The latter did not, for instance, take part in the Aldermaston March, as it was staged by the Direct Action Committee in 1958. The march proved a success, and the CND took it over lock, stock and barrel the following year and made, of course, a much larger and more important thing of it. I was not able to attend the 1959 march or the subsequent meeting in Trafalgar Square, but the following year I spoke in the Square at the end of the march. I wished, in these years, that I had been young enough to take part in the marches. Later, they seemed to me to be degenerating into something of a yearly picnic. Though individual marchers were as sincere as ever in their endeavours and as admirable, the march was quite ineffective in achieving their aim, which was to call serious attention to and spread the movement. For the most part, the march became a subject of boredom or distress or hilarity, and converted very few of those hitherto unconverted. It was useful, nevertheless, as I think it still is, in continuing, if not enlarging, the movement. New and fresh forms of opposition to dangerous nuclear policies must be sought constantly in order to obtain converts and to catch and hold the interest of people of very diverse outlook.

Shortly after this 1960 Aldermaston March, the Summit Meeting between Eisenhower and Khrushchev took place – and crashed. We had all had high hopes of it and its break-up following the U2 incident was a blow to us. The more we learned of the skulduggery behind it the greater its foreboding quality became. It augured ill for progress towards co-operation, let alone towards disarmament. It seemed more than ever as if new methods must be sought to impress upon the public the increasingly precarious state of international affairs before people relapsed into frustrated apathy. But what this new means could be I did not see.

The CND had been working for unilateral disarmament, believing that if Great Britain gave up her part in the nuclear race and even demanded the



departure of United States bases from her soil, other nations might follow suit. It was a slim hope, and still is, but none-the-less it was, and is, a hope. As such, it seemed worth following up. The Campaign also hoped to persuade not only the general public to this way of thinking but also the Government. As most of its upholders were drawn from the Labour Party, it went to work upon the Parliamentary Labour Party. My own view was that the matter was one that transcends Party politics and even national boundaries. As this reasonable view, it seemed to me, failed to grip the public imagination, I was willing to uphold the Campaign in its efforts. The means towards the end that we both desired mattered less than its achievement. Perhaps, I thought, if the Labour Party could be persuaded to support the Campaign, we might be a short step towards the goal.

I had put my point of view clearly in the introduction to my book *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare* which I wrote during the summer of 1958, and published in 1959. I had been encouraged during 1958 by receiving the Kalinga Prize, at Unesco in Paris as I could not travel to India. (To be sure the French physicist who was deputed to bear-lead me on that occasion remarked comfortingly to his wife after I had been expounding my views: 'Never mind, my dear, by next year France will be able to explode her own bomb.') And the continued and growing success of the Pugwash movement, as well as the interest shown in the open correspondence with Khrushchev and Eisenhower (Dulles) were encouraging. I continued my search, as I have done since, to find fresh approaches through which to try to sway public opinion, including governmental opinion. All that I had succeeded in doing in 1959 touched only this or that relatively small circle of people. The CND at that time gave hope that a more general public could be reached. It seemed to me then as it does today that governmental policies must be regarded in the light of common sense. They must be shorn of red tape and 'tradition' and general mystique. They would be seen then to be leading, as they are, only to probable general destruction.

The policies that were needed were those dictated by common sense. If the public could be shown this clearly, I had a faint hope that they might insist upon governmental policies being brought into accord with common sense. I wrote my *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare* in this hope. The book was fairly widely read, I believe, and commended. But it did not tackle the question as to exactly how each individual could make his opinion known and influence policy-making, a fact that left some readers dissatisfied. I had one moment of high hope when the Minister for Defence, Duncan Sandys, wrote commending the book and saying that he

would like to talk to me about it. He was a conservative, and a policy-maker in a national government, and had collaborated in a pamphlet on the subject himself. But when I went to see him, he said, 'It is such a good book, but what is needed is not only nuclear disarmament but the banning of war itself'. In vain I pointed out the passage in my book in which I had said that the only way to ensure the world against nuclear war was to end war. He continued to believe that I could not have said anything so intelligent. He cast my other arguments aside. I came away discouraged. I realised that most of the already informed people who read my book would read it with a bias so strong that they would take in only what they wished to take in. For the following months, therefore, I returned to the piecemeal business of speaking at meetings, CND and other, and broadcasting, and of the pleasures of my own life...

### **Preface to *Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare*, 1959**

The aim of this book is to show possible means of achieving peace in ways which should be equally acceptable to Communist Nations, to NATO and to uncommitted Nations. It is my hope that there is no word in the following pages suggesting a bias towards either side. What my opinions are concerning the merits of Eastern and Western political and economic systems, I have often stated, but opinions on these issues are not relevant in discussion of the dangers of nuclear warfare. What is needed is not an appeal to this or that -ism, but only to common sense. I do not see any reason why the kind of arguments which are put forward by those who think as I do should appeal more to one side than to the other or to Left-Wing opinion more than to that of men of conservative outlook. The appeal is to human beings, as such, and is made equally to all who hope for human survival.

*Bertrand Russell*