

## Editorial

# Keep the Peace

At 3pm on Saturday 18 February 1961, ‘the quietist, most orderly, most impressive mass demonstration senior police officers could recall’ marched in silence down Whitehall and sat outside the Ministry of Defence for two-and-a-half hours. Whilst there, Bertrand Russell with others taped a declaration on the door of the Ministry demanding ‘immediate scrapping of the agreement to base Polaris-carrying submarines in Britain,’ concluding, ‘we hereby serve notice on our Government that we no longer stand aside while they prepare to destroy mankind’. ‘Reporters had to squat down beside Lord Russell and his companions to gather their stories,’ according to Christopher Driver in his informative and entertaining book, *The Disarmers*, published in 1964. ‘The press was sympathetic.’

Subsequently, US President Kennedy told British Prime Minister Macmillan that the United States would sell to Britain the Polaris nuclear missiles, armed with nuclear warheads manufactured in the UK, so long as the nuclear weapons remained, at least nominally, a NATO capacity. That deadly arrangement endures.

What happened in between? The next big sit-down was in Parliament Square on 29 April. The police removed 826 demonstrators, most of whom were fined £1 and allowed seven days to pay, so that the prisons were not overwhelmed.

Thereafter, parallel demonstrations were planned for Holy Loch in Scotland, where the Polaris submarines were to be based, and for Central London on 17 September, Battle of Britain Sunday. ‘During the first week of September, the Government did the one thing needful to ensure a good turn-out,’ according to Driver. ‘It summoned 36 of the better known members of the Committee [of 100], including Lord and Lady Russell, and invited them at Bow Street to bind themselves over under the 1361 Act to keep the peace for one year.’ The Russells were among 32 of 36 who refused to be so bound and, to cries of ‘shame’, they were sentenced to two months in prison. The Russells’ sentences were reduced to one week for medical reasons, while others were imprisoned for longer. The subsequent

turbulent Trafalgar Square sit-down on Battle of Britain Sunday marked the ‘high tide of unconstitutionality’, in Driver’s estimation. Some 4,000 police arrested 1,314 people, including Canon Collins, CND’s Chairman, and Fenner Brockway MP. At Holy Loch, 351 people were arrested.

In this issue of *The Spokesman*, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Russell’s death in February 1970, Ken Coates revisits the enduring issues of civil disobedience when reflecting on his own experience of working with Russell during the last years of Bertie’s long life. It will soon be 10 years since Ken died in 2010. Peggy Duff, CND’s first general secretary, recalls those times in discussion with Ken Blackwell, the Russell Archivist at McMaster University, Canada, where Bertie’s extensive papers are meticulously held.

What are the lessons for today? We live in tumultuous, climate changing times. In the 1930s, Russell alongside many others warned of the dangers of rising fascism. Characteristically, he sought its roots when giving the Byron Lecture in Nottingham, which we reprint here.

Bertrand Russell died on 2 February 1970, in his 98<sup>th</sup> year. Fifty years on, he sells tens of thousands of books in all formats, while new translations of his works continue to appear around the world, recently in Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish languages. His reputation as a philosopher endures and grows, with young researchers into Artificial Intelligence revisiting *Principia Mathematica* and related works. Meanwhile, Facebook pages in his name attract hundreds of thousands of followers. Russell’s life and work speak to people across the generations. The Bertrand Russell Society, founded in 1974, brings together people interested in all aspects of Russell’s life and work, and promotes the causes he championed. Its motto, following Russell, is this:

*The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge*

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### No war on Iran

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action addresses long-term tensions in the Middle East, where Israel is the sole nuclear-armed state. Signed in 2015 by China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia, UK, US and the High Representative of the European Union, it is badly undermined by the US withdrawal. We examine the context and consequences of this violation.