

A new approach to peace

Bertrand Russell

In April 1964 in Manchester, Russell set out his hopes for the new Foundation established in his name. Ralph Schoenman, then his secretary, made suggestions in response to Russell's draft, some of which Russell subsequently integrated into this text. As delivered, the paper was shortened, and we reprint an excerpt from the fullest version available, as published in Russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Archives in summer 1995.

The nuclear age in which we have the misfortune to live is one which imposes new ways of thought and action and a new character in international relations. Ever since the creation of the H-bomb, it has been obvious to thoughtful people that there is now a danger of the extermination of mankind if nuclear war between two powerful nations or blocs of nations should break out. Not only would such a war be a total disaster to human hopes, but, so long as past policies persist, a nuclear war may break out at any minute. This situation imposes upon those who desire the continuation of our species a very difficult duty. We have, first, to persuade Governments and populations of the disastrousness of nuclear war, and, when that has been achieved, we have to induce Governments to adopt such policies as will make the preservation of peace a possibility.

Of these two tasks, the first has been very largely accomplished. It has been accomplished by a combination of methods of agitation: peace marches, peace demonstrations, large public meetings, sit-downs, etc. These are conducted in Britain by the CND and the Committee of 100, and in other countries by more or less similar bodies. They have testified – and I am proud that I was amongst them – that nuclear war would be a calamity for the whole human race, and have pointed out its imminence and its dangers. They have succeeded in making very widely known, even to Governments, the dangers of nuclear war.

But now it is time for a new approach as well. The dangers must not be forgotten, but

now the next step must be taken. Ways and means of settling questions that might lead to nuclear war and other dangers to mankind must be sought and made known, and mankind must be persuaded to adopt these new and different means towards securing peace.

The Cold War went through various stages. At first, America had a monopoly of atomic weapons, which was expected by Governments and the non-scientific public to last for a long time. When it turned out that the Russians also had nuclear weapons, their success was attributed to spies. This gave rise to McCarthyism in America and to a stiffening of Russian intransigence. Stalin and Dulles, twin guardians of virtue, glared at each other across the Atlantic. Meanwhile, American tests had proved that nuclear weapons were far more destructive than had been supposed and might easily in a war exterminate the human race.

Fortunately, Stalin and Dulles both proved mortal and new policies became possible especially after Khrushchev's refusal to fight over Cuba. The culmination, so far, of the conflict between rival nuclear groups was the Cuban Crisis. In this crisis, America and Russia confronted each other while the world waited for the destruction that seemed imminent. At the last moment, the contest was avoided and it appeared that neither side was willing to put an end to the human race because of disagreement as to the politics of those who would be otherwise living in Cuba. This was a moment of great importance. It showed that neither side considered it desirable to obliterate the human race.

We may, therefore, take it that Governments of the world are prepared to avoid nuclear war. And it is not only Governments, but also vast sections, probably a majority, of the populations of most civilized countries which take this view.

The first fruits of the new more friendly relations between East and West was the Test Ban Treaty. It indicates that the first part of the work for peace has thus been achieved. But a more difficult task remains. If there is not to be a war, we have to find ways by which war will be avoided. This is no easy matter. There are many disputes which, though they may begin amicably, are likely to become more and more bitter, until at last, in a fury, they break out into open war. There is also the risk of war by accident or misinformation. Furthermore, there are difficulties caused by the one-sided character of information as it reaches one side or the other in any dispute.

It is clear that peace cannot come to the world without serious concessions, sometimes by one side, sometimes by the other, but generally by both. These difficulties in the pursuit of peace require a different

technique from that of marches and demonstrations. The questions concerned are complex, the only possible solutions are distasteful to one side or both, and negotiators who discuss such questions will need to keep a firm hold of their tempers if they are to succeed.

All this should be the work of Governments. But Governments will not adequately do the necessary work unless they are pushed on by a body or bodies which have international character and are especially concerned with a search for peaceful solutions. It is work of this kind that we hope to see performed by the new Foundations, which I hereby recommend to you.

Of the two Foundations, one is called the Atlantic Peace Foundation. Being a Foundation for purposes of research in matters of war and peace, it has been registered as a charity and is recognized as such by the British Inland Revenue. Income tax at the standard rate is, therefore, recoverable on any subscription given to it under a seven year contract, which means that such subscriptions are increased by about sixty per cent. This Foundation works in cooperation with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. The latter implements the purposes of the Atlantic Peace Foundation. For this reason, I shall refer to only a single Foundation in the rest of this discussion.

It may be said: 'But such work as that is the work of the United Nations'. I agree that it should be the work of the United Nations, and I hope that, in time, it will become so. But the United Nations has defects, some of them remediable, others essential in a body which presents an organization of States. Of the former kind of defect, the most notable is the exclusion of China, of the latter kind, the equality of States in the Assembly and the veto power of certain States in the Security Council. For such reasons, the United Nations, alone, is not adequate to work for peace.

It is our hope that the Foundation which we have created will, in time, prove adequate to deal with all obstacles to peace and to propose such solutions of difficult questions as may commend themselves to the common sense of mankind. Perhaps this hope is too ambitious. Perhaps it will be some other body with similar objects that will achieve the final victory. But, however that may be, the work of our Foundation will have ministered to a fortunate ending ...