
Towards a Short War With Russia?

Russell was one of the comparatively few who quickly realized the full implications of the atomic bomb. To most, it was just an explosive of unprecedented power which had been added to the armoury. A few military men saw what it foreshadowed. A few scientists and a few bishops winced at the moral responsibilities, and were worried at the use which politicians might make of the horrific weapon which science had put into their hands. Few, however, had Russell's intuitive grasp of the difference between delivery of one 20,000-ton bomb and the delivery of 4,000 five-tonners. Few knew that the hydrogen bomb lay just over the horizon. Few, moreover, saw as clearly as he the possibility of peace through world government which nuclear weapons offered. The result was a realism that drove him into a succession of positions later swamped by the rising tide of nuclear protest. Together they make up what has been called his preventive-war phase, a phase which cannot be explained away by semantic excuses or honest disagreement as to what he really said or meant. Mention of it brings pained protest from his more woolly admirers, who prefer to brush it under the carpet, maintaining either that Russell never advocated preventive war – thus ignoring his own broadcast statement that he did: “and I don't repent of it” – or that if he did so it was merely a passing fancy not to be taken seriously, a curiously insulting conclusion when attributed to a man of Russell's calibre.

There is no doubt that the salvation of the human race from a nuclear holocaust was the last great attachment of Russell's life and at least two main questions therefore demand an answer: what policy did he actually support during the first years of the nuclear age? and what is to be made of the contradictory denials and avowals with which he spattered the 1950s? Both questions are resolved by a chronological account of events as they happened.

Russell's first public reaction to the news of Hiroshima was very different from Einstein's “Alas”, even though he agreed that “the prospect

of the human race is sombre beyond precedent". It was given a few days later in the *Glasgow Forward*, under the title "The Bomb and Civilisation". Russell first pointed out that neither the United States nor Russia was likely to agree to any pooling of armaments. He went on,

If America were more imperialistic, there would be another possibility, less Utopian and less desirable, but still preferable to the total obliteration of civilised life. It would be possible for Americans to use their position of temporary superiority to insist upon disarmament, not only in Germany and Japan, but everywhere except in the United States, or at any rate in every country not prepared to enter into a close military alliance with the United States, involving compulsory sharing of military secrets.

During the next few years this policy could be enforced; if one or two wars were necessary, they would be brief, and would soon end in decisive American victory. In this way a new League of Nations could be formed under American leadership, and the peace of the world could be securely established. But I fear that respect for international justice will prevent Washington from adopting this policy.

The last sentence was largely ironic. Russell's views were still crystallizing and as yet he had no time for big-stick diplomacy, as he made clear in a letter to Gamel Brenan in September. "There is no point in agreements not to use the atomic bomb as they would not be kept," he said.

Russia is sure to learn soon how to make it. I think Stalin has inherited Hitler's ambition for world dictatorship. One must expect a war between U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. which will begin with the total destruction of London. I think the war will last 30 years, and leave a world without civilised people, from which everything will have to be built afresh—a process taking (say) 500 years . . . There is one thing and one only which could save the world, and that is a thing which I should not dream of advocating. It is, that America should make war on Russia during the next two years, and establish a world empire by means of the atomic bomb. This will not be done.

The alternative, as he outlined it in a further article in *Forward*, later reprinted in the *Manchester Guardian*, was very similar to the policy of outlining new spheres of influence already agreed on at Yalta by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. "Russia's immense military strength, as revealed by the war, is held in check for the moment by the atomic bomb," he said, "but before long Russia, no doubt, will have as good (or bad) a bomb as that of the Americans, & as soon as this has happened it will

be possible to have a really serious war. Such madness must be prevented if possible but it is not easy to see how." His solution was that Britain should "concede a free hand to Russia in Eastern Europe (excluding Greece and Turkey) on the ground that in that region we cannot effectively intervene; but in return we should have an acknowledgement of our interest in the Mediterranean".

The first hint of change was apparently given in a letter to Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, towards the end of September. No copy of the letter appears to have survived,* but its tone can be judged from Martin's reply. "If you wish me to publish your letter on Russia as it stands, I will of course do so," it began.

There are several reasons why I should be sorry if you do wish it. Your name stands for so much – it is one of the few which is not connected with some hate campaign or other – that I feel distressed when you use these highly provocative words. They would be taken up and quoted as proving that you are opening an anti-Bolshevik armada of the old type. I am myself very unhappy about much that Russia is doing, and I am expecting this week to criticise several aspects of the Soviet policy which you have in mind. On the substance of your letter, the most important point is that by the overwhelming testimony of those who have been to, or lived in, Russia recently – and I have seen a number of reliable witnesses – Russia shows everything, wants peace. Therefore to compare Russia with Nazi Germany is to my mind exceedingly harmful.

One additional reason is that you are taking the chair at a meeting of Save Europe Now in which I and most of my friends are actively interested. The risk in any case is that this organisation will be regarded as "pro-German" and "anti-Soviet", though this is not its real intention. Your letter, appearing before the meeting, would certainly confirm these suspicions.

I thought it best to state my views bluntly in this matter, and that your letter reads like the beginning of a war, even though you say that its intention is to stop one.

Martin passed on the letter to Victor Gollancz, leader of the Save Europe Now campaign, who immediately wrote to Russell in alarm at the impression of bellicosity it gave. "And," he went on, "if the letter appears on Friday, then it and your chairmanship on Monday [of the Save Europe Now meeting] will inevitably be linked together and the meeting may be given something of the character of an 'anti-Bolshevik crusade' in the bad sense. I am told that already, as a result of the things they have seen, a lot of soldiers in Berlin are saying 'Goebbels was right': we don't want *that* sort of development." The reasoning behind Russell's

*But see References for this page.

attitude was indicated at a later meeting of the Save Europe Now executive. "But for the fact that the United States had atomic weapons," he said to one of its members, "the Russians would be at the Channel ports within a few weeks."

His views, like those of many other men, were changing quickly as Russia's attitude became clearer during the first weeks of peace, and early in October he wrote to Gamel Brenan saying he was "glad that disagreements with Russia have come into the open, and relieved to find the present Government at least as anti-Russian as Churchill. The only hope is definiteness now."

Soon afterwards he was setting out his developing views in *Cavalcade* under the title of "Humanity's Last Chance". After describing the dangers of giving Russia the information needed to make nuclear weapons, he continued, "I should, for my part, prefer all the chaos and destruction of a war conducted by means of the atomic bomb to the universal domination of a government having the evil characteristics of the Nazis." He then outlined plans for a Confederation which would monopolize nuclear weapons and pointed out that the U.S.S.R. would be powerless as long as the U.S. retained its atomic lead. "There might be a period of hesitation followed by acquiescence," he went on, "but if the U.S.S.R. did not give way and join the confederation, after there had been time for mature consideration, the conditions for a justifiable war, which I enumerated a moment ago, would all be fulfilled. A *casus belli* would not be difficult to find."

Two points should be made. The first is that hope of Russian acquiescence in the face of a nuclear threat had little foundation in reality. As P. M. S. (later Lord) Blackett, one of Britain's leading nuclear physicists, wrote in a secret report to the new Labour government in November 1945: "That the U.S.S.R. would capitulate before a threat alone can be excluded as not remotely possible." On the contrary, he pointed out, the Russian reaction would be to speed up her nuclear research, consolidate her influence in the semi-satellite countries, and strengthen her air defence. Secondly, Russell's suggestion that it would not be too difficult to pick a quarrel with the Russians at a convenient moment was made more than five months before announcement of the Baruch proposals for international control of atomic energy. Their subsequent rejection by the Russians was often cited by him as justification for threatening Russia.

His attitude at the end of 1945 was given in the two-day debate on international affairs in the House of Lords in November. The debate ranged over the situation in Germany with its torrent of starving refugees; the future of the United Nations; and, above all, the consequences of Russia's steady retreat into the psychological fortress built up as much by Western hands as by Russian suspicions. But all revolved around the barely mentionable: the threat from the atomic bomb which many

acknowledged but few understood. Lord Samuel, Lord Addison, Lord Jowitt, the Archbishop of York and Bishop Bell of Chichester all stood the problem firmly at the centre of their arguments. Would the Russians agree to international control? If not, how much of the alleged "secret" should be shared with them? And if the answer was "nothing at all", then surely the world would be set on the most disastrous of armament races.

Russell delivered the most potent of the arguments for forcing agreement on the Russians before they also had nuclear weapons. These were, he pointed out, still in their infancy. "The present atomic bomb in exploding produces temperatures which are thought to be about those in the inside of the sun," he said. "It is therefore possible that some mechanism, analogous to the present atomic bomb, could be used to set off [the] much more violent explosion which would be obtained if one could synthesize heavier elements out of hydrogen." The process would create "a very much greater release of energy than there is in the disintegration of uranium atoms"; in other words, the H-bomb, vastly more powerful than the weapons which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

His proposals contrast with much of the mythology about his beliefs. "I do not see any advantage in the proposal which is before the world of making the United Nations the repository [of nuclear weapons]," he said. "I do not think that there is very much hope in that, because the United Nations, at any rate at present, are not a strong military body, capable of waging war against a great Power; and whoever is ultimately to be the possessor of the atomic bomb will have to be strong enough to fight a great Power." Neither did he believe that the process of manufacture should be unconditionally revealed to the Russians. If they were willing to co-operate in international control, then he thought "it would be right to let them know all about it as soon as possible, partly, of course, on the grounds that the secret is a short-term one . . . it is only a question of a very short time during which we have this bargaining point, if it is one". That time should be used to manoeuvre the Russians into agreement; and if only the Western powers tackled the problem honestly, without question of national gain, then he thought the Russians would respond - "at least I hope so".

By this time the Russians had shown that they intended keeping Poland within their grasp. Eastern Europe was being digested piecemeal, Churchill had made his "Iron Curtain" speech in Fulton, Missouri, and Russian non-cooperation at the coming Foreign Ministers' Conference looked inevitable. Already, Russell's views were hardening. "I hate the Soviet Government too much for sanity," he admitted to Gamel Brenan.

Against this background, Russell stressed in "The Atomic Bomb and the Prevention of War" that what was most needed in dealing with the Russians was definiteness. "The American and British Governments

should state what issues they consider vital, and on other issues they should allow Russia a free hand," he went on.

Within this framework they should be as conciliatory as possible. They should make it clear that genuine international cooperation is what they most desire. But although peace should be their goal, they should not let it appear that they are for peace at any price. At a certain stage, when their plans for an international government are ripe, they should offer them to the world, and enlist the greatest possible amount of support; I think they should offer them through the medium of the United States. If Russia acquiesced willingly, all would be well. If not, it would be necessary to bring pressure to bear, even to the extent of risking war, for in that case it is pretty certain that Russia would agree.

These ideas, not uncommon at the time, were hardened up by Russian rejection of the Baruch proposals, an action which confirmed Russell's worst fears. "The next war will be between the Vatican and the Kremlin," he wrote despondently to Stanley Unwin; "in spite of 'The Tablet', I shall side (reluctantly) with the Vatican." To an old friend he was writing a few weeks later: "I am glad you are more anti-Russian than ever; so am I . . ." He also offered to write a foreword to "The Sign of the Hammer and Sickle", a manuscript about which the reader's report said that the author's answer to the Russian menace was "immediate war by Britain and America against Russia while we hold a monopoly of the atom bomb . . ." And to Einstein, whose pacifism had returned with the peace, he said that he saw no hope of reasonableness in the Soviet government. "I think the only hope of peace (and that a slender one) lies in frightening Russia," he went on. "I favoured appeasement before 1939, wrongly, as I now think; I do not want to repeat the same mistake . . . Generally, I think it useless to make any attempt whatsoever to conciliate Russia. The hope of achieving anything by this method seems to me 'wishful thinking'."

What he believed this meant in practice was soon revealed. Ten days after writing to Einstein, he addressed the Royal Empire Society on "The International Bearings of Atomic Warfare", a lunchtime talk in which he stated,

I should like to see as soon as possible as close a union as possible of those countries who think it worth while to avoid atomic war. I think you could get so powerful an alliance that you could turn to Russia and say, "it is open to you to join this alliance if you will agree to the terms; if you will not join us we shall go to war with you". I am inclined to think that Russia would acquiesce; if not, provided this is done soon, the world might survive the resulting war and emerge with a single government such as the world needs.

The argument was repeated in "International Government", a paper which appeared in the January 1948 issue of the *New Commonwealth*. In it Russell gave a clue to the tenacity with which he propounded his point of view throughout the later 1940s. "The argument that I have been developing", he said, "is as simple and as unescapable as a mathematical demonstration."

It was soon to be qualified. The Imperial Defence College was about to reopen after its wartime closure, and Russell was invited to give the final talk of the annual course. A philosophical look into the medium- and long-term future, it was first given six days after the Royal Empire Society meeting, and was to be repeated in varying forms for a number of years. Eventually it developed into a discourse on short-term and medium-term strategy, not exactly the subject for which the College was paying its £10. 10s. *od.* honorarium.

Just how much secret material Russell was shown is not certain. But a highly secret report on new weapons, written by scientists in 1945, noted of the nuclear development: "Duelling was a recognised method of settling quarrels between men of high social standing so long as the duellists stood 20 paces apart and fired at each other with pistols of a primitive type. If the rule had been that they should stand a yard apart with pistols at each other's hearts we doubt whether it would long have remained a recognised method of settling affairs of honour." Russell's use of the simile in the 1950s does not prove that he had seen the report; but considered in context, and with other evidence, it makes this likely.

Certainly his close contact with senior Service officers qualified his belief that Russia should be threatened without delay. His modified views were set down in May 1948 to Dr Walter Marseille, a U.S. professor who had outlined his own scheme for compulsory inspection of Russian nuclear plants:

I have read your paper with great interest. I agree entirely with all the underlying assumptions. As soon as Russia rejected the Baruch proposals, I urged that all nations favouring international control of atomic energy should form an Alliance, and threaten Russia with war unless Russia agreed to come in and permit inspection. Your proposal is, in effect, the same, for the compulsory inspection you advocate would be, legally, an act of war, and would be so viewed by the Soviet government.

During the past year, conversations with professional strategists have slightly modified my views. They say that in a few years we shall be in a better position, and that Russia will not yet have atomic bombs; that the economic recovery and military integration of Western Europe should be carried further before war begins; that at present neither air power nor atomic bombs could prevent Russia

from over-running all Western Europe up to the Straits of Dover; and that the most dangerous period for us is the next two years. These views may or may not be correct, but at any rate they are those of the best experts.

There are some things of which Europeans are more vividly conscious than Americans. If Russia overruns W. Europe, the destruction will be such as no subsequent re-conquest can undo. Practically the whole educated population will be sent to Labour camps in N.E. Siberia or on the shores of the White Sea, where most will die of hardships and the survivors will be turned into animals. (Cf. what happened to Polish intellectuals). Atomic bombs, if used, will at first have to be dropped on W. Europe, since Russia will be out of reach. The Russians, even without atomic bombs, will be able to destroy all big towns in England, as the Germans would have done if the war had lasted a few months longer. I have no doubt that America would win in the end, but unless W. Europe can be preserved from invasion, it will be lost to civilisation for centuries.

Even at such a price, I think war would be worth while. Communism must be wiped out, and world government must be established. But if, by waiting, we could defend our present lines in Germany and Italy, it would be an immeasurable boon.

I do not think the Russians will yield without war. I think all (including Stalin) are fatuous and ignorant. But I hope I am wrong about this.

There is no doubt that Russell held these opinions strongly and sincerely. Just how much he was willing to admit openly is confused by his later evidence. A decade afterwards, writing to Eugene Rabinovitch, editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, he said that the letter to Dr Marseille "was one which even at that time I should not have been prepared to see published". Yet a month after writing it he was calling in the *Dagens Nyheter* for an international inspectorate of nuclear energy and adding, "But should Russia refuse, which is all too likely, what would happen? Even were a precarious peace preserved for a time, one must—recalling the earlier history of human folly—expect that sooner or later war would break out. If it did, we should have a truly great cause to fight for: that of world government . . ."

Nevertheless, in 1948 Russell was not too willing that the views he was expressing in private to Americans or in public to the Swedes should then be known to the British public: therefore the furore over "Atomic Energy and the Problem of Europe", an address which he gave in November to four hundred London students and schoolteachers at a New Commonwealth Schools Conference at Westminster School. Most of the address

was no more than strongly anti-Communist. However, there was one key paragraph:

The question is whether there is to be war or whether there is not; and there is only one course of action open to us. That is to strengthen the Western Alliance morally and physically as much and as quickly as possible, and hope it may become obvious to the Russians that they can't make war successfully. If there *is* war, it should be won as quickly as possible. That is the line of policy which the Western Nations are now pursuing. They are preparing for whatever the Russians may have in store. The time is not unlimited. Sooner or later the Russians will have atom bombs and when they have them, it will be a much tougher proposition. Everything must be done in a hurry, with the utmost celerity.

The paragraph—quoted here from what Russell later described as a verbatim transcript published in the *Nineteenth Century and After*—was taken up by questioners. His reply is given, third-person, in the same issue:

As he saw it there were three alternatives *if the present aggressive Russian policy was persisted in*: (a) War with Russia before she has the atomic bombs, ending fairly swiftly and inevitably in a Western victory; (b) war with Russia after she has the atomic bombs, ending again in Western victory, but after frightful carnage, destruction and suffering; (c) submission. We could say to the Russians "Come in and govern us, establish your concentration camps, do what you like". This third alternative seemed to him so unutterably unthinkable that it could be dismissed; and as between the other two the choice to him, at least, seemed clear.

Nowhere in all this did Russell urge, in so many words, the starting of preventive war, while the qualifying "if" about Russian intentions added a conditional that many reports ignored; nevertheless, emphasis on the obvious fact that a war before Russia had nuclear weapons would be less disastrous than war afterwards was perilously close to it. Nevertheless, Russell was surprised by the reaction in the next day's papers. Typical was *Reynolds News*: "The distilled essence of all the wisdom he has accumulated in a long life is this message of death and despair," said a leading article. "Give up all faith in human reason, he tells us in effect. Resign yourselves to an endless orgy of killing, to the destruction of cities, to the poisoning of the fruitful earth by atomic radiation. Lord Russell, the famous philosopher, advances the oldest and most blood-drenched fallacy in History: 'the war to end wars'."

Not until the next week, back at Cambridge, did he feel that something should be done to counteract the reports of what he had said. Between

lectures he telephoned Peter in London and asked her to tell the Prime Minister how sorry Lord Russell was if the current misrepresentations of his views had caused any embarrassment to him. Meanwhile, he wrote to *The Times*, denying that he had urged immediate war with Russia. "I did urge", he said,

that the democracies should be *prepared* to use force if necessary, and that their readiness to do so should be made perfectly clear to Russia, for it has become obvious that the Communists, like the Nazis, can only be halted in their attempts to dominate Europe and Asia by determined and combined resistance by every means in our power, not excluding military means if Russia continues to refuse all compromise.

It was a clever letter, glossing over the meaning of "if necessary" and leaving unanswered the question of what should be considered a *casus belli*.

So far, Russell's statements had been all of a piece, simply summed up in an explanation in *How Near Is War?*

I thought that while our side still had the monopoly of the bomb we could perhaps say to the Russians: "Now look here. Here is a proposal entirely in your interests. A proposal to internationalise the atom bomb. And if you really won't accept this proposal – well, we're almost compelled to draw the most sinister inferences from your refusal." I thought, at the time, there was something to be said for trying to bully the Russians into accepting the Baruch report.

The statement – which overlooked Russell's advocacy of finding a *casus belli* long before the Baruch proposals – was not formally a plea for preventive war; but complete dissociation from the policy demanded a considerable semantic wriggle.

When the acquisition by Russia of her own nuclear weapons made intimidation less attractive, Russell's views began to change. But they did not change quickly. In his article "Is a Third World War Inevitable?" published in *World Horizon* in 1950, he says,

I do not agree with those who object to the manufacture of the hydrogen bomb. All arguments for a unilateral limitation of weapons of war are only logically defensible if carried to the length of absolute pacifism, for a war cannot be worth fighting unless it is worth winning. I think also, for the reasons given above, that every increase of Western strength makes war less likely. I do not think that, in the present temper of the world, an agreement to limit atomic warfare would do anything but harm, because each side would think that the other was evading it.

The next war, if it comes, will be the greatest disaster that will have befallen the human race up to that moment. I can think of only one greater disaster: the extension of the Kremlin's power over the whole world.

Questioned in New York later in the year, he said that he approved America's decision to make the hydrogen bomb. He thought the West should undertake not to use this aggressively, but that the same undertaking should not be given about the atomic bomb, which might be the West's only chance of survival. He felt that two policies should be aimed at: "Rearmament as quickly as possible, including German rearmament, because the West cannot otherwise be defended." Secondly, the precise definition of an act by Russia that the West would consider a *casus belli*. This he offered as, "If they invaded Siam or Burma or West Berlin or re-imposed the blockade, or promoted a revolution as they had done in Czechoslovakia." Then, asked whether there was any circumstance in which the West might have to use the hydrogen bomb before the Russians did, he replied, "Yes, if the circumstances were clear about Russian intentions, whether the Russians used it first or not." And at the end of December 1950, he wrote, "When I compare the home Government of England and France with the home Government of Russia and when I reflect that the Russian system could easily spread over the whole world, I cannot but feel that a war would do less harm than world-wide tyranny."

As a result of this passage a resolution was passed by the Cambridge University Labour Club condemning the statement and considering it as incompatible with Russell's presidency of the club. Faced with the accusation, Russell replied, "I have never advocated a preventive war, as your members would know if they took any trouble to ascertain facts."

It was not only the Cambridge University Labour Club that was troubled. In the columns of the *New Statesman*, Kingsley Martin, no doubt remembering the letter he had decided not to print in 1945, reminded his readers, "After the last war, even more deeply troubled by the spread of Communism than he was by the power of Rome, which he had often denounced, [Russell] decided that it would be both good morals and good politics to start dropping bombs on Moscow." The outcome was that Russell compelled Martin to print what he described as "a long letter of refutation". The phrase is hardly accurate. At the end of the letter he admitted that he had once "thought it possible that the Russians might be induced by threats" to agree to the Baruch proposals; and, as he was later to say on exactly the same subject, "you can't threaten unless you're prepared to have your bluff called".

But he stuck to his denial for quite a while and in October 1953 embroidered it in a letter to the *New York Nation*. "The story that I

supported a preventive war against Russia is a Communist invention." he protested.

I once spoke at a meeting at which only one reporter was present and he was a Communist, though reporting for orthodox newspapers. He seized on his opportunity, and in spite of my utmost efforts I have never been able to undo the harm. Krishna Menon, with whom I had collaborated for years on Indian affairs, turned against me. "The New Statesman" in London wrote assuming the truth of the report, and it was only by visiting the editor in company with my lawyer that I induced "The New Statesman" to publish a long letter of refutation from me. You are at liberty to make any use you like of this letter, and I shall be glad if you can make its contents known to anybody who still believes the slanderous report.

The letter to the *Nation* was remarkable in two ways. It conveniently ignored his articles in *Cavalcade* and the *Dagens Nyheter*, his letter to Dr Marseille, his talks to the Royal Empire Society and the Imperial Defence College, and the private letters in which he had clarified his position.

In March 1959 he was interviewed by John Freeman on the B.B.C. After a detailed questioning about Russell's life, what he believed in, and the contemporary campaign for nuclear disarmament, Freeman asked, "Is it true or untrue that in recent years you advocated that a preventive war might be made against communism, against Soviet Russia?" Russell's reply was unequivocal. "It's entirely true, and I don't repent of it," he said.

It was not inconsistent with what I think now. What I thought all along was that a nuclear war in which both sides had nuclear weapons would be an utter and absolute disaster. There was a time, just after the last war, when the Americans had a monopoly of nuclear weapons and offered to internationalize nuclear weapons by the Baruch proposal, and I thought this an extremely generous proposal on their part, one which it would be very desirable that the world should accept; not that I advocated a nuclear war, but I did think that great pressure should be put upon Russia to accept the Baruch proposal, and I did think that if they continued to refuse it might be necessary actually to go to war. At that time nuclear weapons existed only on one side, and therefore the odds were the Russians would have given way. I thought they would, and I think still that that could have prevented the existence of two equal powers with these means of destruction, which is what is causing the terrible risk now.

Russell was finally asked whether, if the Russians had not given way, he would have been prepared to face the consequences of using nuclear weapons on the Russians. "I should," he replied. "They were not, of

course, nearly as bad as these modern weapons are. They hadn't yet got the hydrogen bomb, they had only the atom bomb (and that's bad enough, but it isn't anything like the hydrogen bomb). I thought then, and hoped, that the Russians would give way, but of course you can't threaten unless you're prepared to have your bluff called."

The discrepancy with Russell's earlier denials was soon pointed out. He blandly replied that his advocacy of nuclear war had slipped his memory. "I had, in fact", he confessed, "completely forgotten that I had ever thought a policy of threat involving possible war desirable."

Kingsley Martin, who in 1950 had written, "Bertrand Russell publicly advocated dropping atom bombs on Russia as a way of preventing another world war, both on the wireless and in a number of newspaper articles," has an explanation of this elephantine amnesia which does Russell less than justice. "I have no doubt that this lapse of memory was due to the intensity with which he now favoured the Soviet case," he wrote, a statement which side-steps Russell's undeviating detestation of the Soviet system.

Up to the date of the Freeman interview it is plausible, if barely so, to claim that in the new situation of the later 1950s, where mutual nuclear annihilation was at least a possibility, Russell had simply forgotten what he had been preaching a decade or more earlier. After all, he was by now well into his eighties and the forgetfulness of old age could well have been taking its toll. Yet this explanation will hardly do. In 1962, three years after being driven into an admission that his earlier denials had been completely unjustified, he wrote to a correspondent, "I should be in your debt if you could contribute towards putting the lie to the fiction that I have advocated war against the Soviet Union." But in 1969, a few years on, he is once again agreeing that he had suggested that an arms race might be avoided by the threat of immediate war.

The criticism often made against Russell in this episode, and one which was to prove a millstone round his neck in later and equally genuine efforts to avert a nuclear holocaust, is not that of inconsistency—a red herring with which he sometimes drew off his attackers. It is not, necessarily, the assertion that a policy of bullying Russia with the bomb before she had her own was a policy of gargantuan immorality: a case could perhaps be made for defending a war for world government as "a truly great cause to fight for". The real point is simply that Russell denied making certain statements he had certainly made, and accused his accusers of lies and distortions.

His explanation that he had simply forgotten what he had said, given in the *Listener* after the Freeman interview, and later in his autobiography, would be more acceptable if applied to one speech rather than to a long series of articles and statements, the first made months before the appearance of the Baruch proposals. It might be possible to argue that his

disavowal of advocating preventive war was based on the most academic interpretation of the term: that advocating the threat of war unless a potential enemy submitted, even though being prepared to have your bluff called, was not advocacy of preventive war. But even this questionable escape-route is blocked by Russell's own statement to Freeman and by his earlier suggestion that "a *casus belli* would not be difficult to find".

The truth seems simpler. By the middle 1950s, when the forces on both sides of the Iron Curtain had deployed thermo-nuclear weapons, Russell believed that he could help keep the peace of the world. If his earlier statements had to be brushed under the carpet, the risk to his reputation was justifiable for such high stakes.

But one danger of such jiggery-pokery was that even his colleagues and advisers might begin to believe the truth of the cover-up, as is shown by an undated eight-page summary of "Bertrand Russell's Work for Peace, 1945-50", among his papers. "When Russia refused to adhere to [the Baruch] Plan," it says, "he thought that the United States could compel adherence, if necessary by the threat of war (this was never urged publicly, but only stated in private correspondence—since published—and conversation)."

There were times when a diligent questioner such as Freeman might squeeze the truth from him. At others he had, for the good of the cause, to tell another story. If the suggestion that he deliberately tried to conceal his earlier views is repugnant, the record does not really allow any other conclusion to be drawn.