

The Unabashed Apologist

Norman says that he remembers me as an unabashed apologist for the Soviet Union, and someone who could start an argument in an empty room. I recognise the truth of the second charge, but the first seems misplaced, although I can see how it arose. In a more recent letter he has been more specific. He says that I defended the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia on the grounds that Dubcek and his associates were 'bourgeois' (which he rightly says was a favourite swear-word in those days); that I claimed, perhaps not altogether seriously, that Soviet elections were 'fair'; and that I was a CND sympathiser, which he interprets as meaning that I was 'relaxed about the possibility of a Soviet invasion', believing that we should abandon our nuclear deterrent without requiring the Russians to do so. Prompted by this allegation I want to recall or reconstruct my political opinions of those days. It's one of the most difficult aspects of reminiscence, because of the temptation to re-align our position in the light of subsequent events, to demonstrate that we were correct all along and to rewrite the incoherent slogans of our youth as mature and well-modulated arguments. Norman, of course, is referring to student days in the late 1960s, but I'll go back a little further.

I have vague memories of Guibal Road¹, when the Fabians would meet at our house. The girls were more conscious of these meetings, but for me they were just a matter of opening and closing doors and a buzz of voices from the blue room. It was through this connection, of course, that we met the Callaghans. The friendship between our families was an important fact in my young life, and because Michael was always so good to me it was a happy fact. Jennifer, who never got on with Margaret, found it less agreeable. Tiggy and Julia always seemed to hit it off. My mother had, I think, a vague feeling that Jim thought highly of me and that one day he might in some undefined way help me get a start in life. This made me uncomfortable. When Jim emerged as one of the three leading figures in the 1964 government it amused me to think that we had all known each other so intimately. I used to tell people about it, in the same way as I used to tell jokes at my own expense. Over the years there was an unspoken understanding between the two families that we would steer clear of politics, because we were further to the left than Jim. I agreed with him over capital punishment, and when in 1970 he secured the ratification of the abolition of hanging I wrote to him.

A growing awareness of politics through my childhood is marked by my recollections of successive elections. I think I was dimly aware of the activity surrounding the elections of 1950 and 1951. I remember Tony taking me out in my pushchair when he was on some errand connected with the Labour Party, and that may well have been during those campaigns. I was reminded of this when we were with Jessy and Jules and Imogen for the recent general election. From Guibal Road days I also remember hearing the word *inflation* on the News and asking what it meant, but I don't remember what answer if any I received. Inflation didn't make as much impression on me as the first news-story that captured my imagination, the wreck of the *Flying Enterprise* in early 1952.

After we moved to Shooters Hill Road I recall seeing posters in people's windows during council elections. We would pass them on the way to and from school, and

¹ My parents lived in Guibal Road, Lee, from just after the war until early 1953 when we moved to Shooters Hill Road, Blackheath. I was five and a half when we moved.

this would raise questions of affiliation, make me conscious of being, as a family, red Labour and not blue Conservative. My parents' close friends were almost all Labour; those who weren't tended to be what Tony called 'apolitical'. The exception was Philip Barnes who once told me, I think in order to shut me up, that he was a Conservative, and that was that. Mummy got to know a family called Bourne who lived nearby and were Conservatives.² They invited Tiggy and me to the Conservative Christmas fancy dress party, where Tiggy went as Mozart and won a prize. I was only vaguely conscious of our parents commenting dubiously on our attending something put on by the enemy, and of course they must have helped us with the costumes. I was a soldier with an unconvincing sword made with Daddy's assistance. Martin Colley's mother was Liberal. Their posters were coloured green in those days and were rare as certain stamps were rare, and this may have confirmed the impression that Martin's background was a bit different, less because he was black than because his parents were separated. In council elections you could vote for up to three candidates for the three council seats. I recall when Nana was living with us there was a discussion about whether your ballot would be rejected as spoiled if you voted for only one.

The 1955 general election was an event I was conscious of, but at eight years old I didn't think much about it. I daresay my parents were involved. I certainly recall them grumbling about the Labour Party at about this time. This is where I got the idea that activists are bound, almost as a duty, to grumble about the party, but must still persevere with it. I remember Michael teaching me the rhyme:

Vote, vote, vote for dear old Labour!
Kick old Eden out the door!
Turn him round and round,
And kick him up the bum,
And vote for dear old Labour ever more!

I remember the strikes from that time – I think there was a bus strike which mildly inconvenienced us – but I don't think any of these things made much of an impression. I didn't think that the strikers were against the Conservatives so they must be on our side.

A year or so after Eden's election came the Hungarian uprising and the invasion of Suez. We visited Granny and Grandpa that autumn (1956) and I remember first of all the horror at the news from Hungary and then a fierce argument about Suez, with Granny and Aunt Suzanne supporting the invasion, and Kay and Tony indignantly against it. This is a measure of the strength of feeling, because usually everyone was on their best behaviour for visits to Willingdon. I didn't understand what either event was about, but I could tell they were significant. People were being killed. The same year saw the beginning of my interest in cricket, a more manageable opening onto the world outside the family. Laker's test was the first occasion on

² They lived in Merriman Road, which consisted of post-war, or just pre-war, semi-detached houses. Their eldest child, a girl called Lesley, was in my class, and there were two younger children, Gail and Duncan; the names make me think that they might have been Scottish. Mrs Bourne used to look after Rowwy for a time when Mummy was working in the mornings. I would take Rowwy round there and then go on to school with Lesley. I must have enjoyed that, because I remember being interested in Lesley's thighs. The family emigrated to Australia, but were unhappy and came back after a few years. Mrs Bourne's mother worked in the local sweet-shop, which we continued to call 'Granny's shop' long after we had lost contact with the family.

which I bought up lots of newspapers, not yet with a view to comparing accounts, but in order to read about the glorious events over and over again.

In the next two years I became aware that my parents, and Jennifer too, were getting involved in the campaign against nuclear weapons, taking part in demonstrations and civil disobedience. At first I was shocked that they were breaking the law, but before long I began to feel differently, attracted both by their arguments and by the romance of the struggle. In 1959 the start of our holiday in the Lake District was postponed by Rowwy's illness which meant that some of us were able to go on the Sunday and Monday of the Aldermaston march from Slough to Turnham Green and from Turnham Green to Trafalgar Square. This experience won me over to the cause. The first reason was the same reason that still seems to me to be decisive: dropping a nuclear bomb on people is simply too horrible to contemplate, and decent people can have no part of it. I sensed that the march was a natural expression of ordinary decent feelings. Other things played a part, including a priggish pleasure in doing something approved of by the grown-ups, and a hope that I was putting aside childish things. I was desperately tired of being a child. I could tell that my parents felt deeply on the issue, and somehow I must have hoped that by sharing it with them I would come close to them. I responded to the atmosphere. The marchers were nice people, gentle, amused to find a child like me among them, kind, quiet, united both in dedication to the cause and in putting up with the discomfort of the march. Tony liked them – there were art school types and old soldiers, both groups that he felt at home with. On a later march he commented that the atmosphere of co-operation seemed to promise a better world. From now on I identified myself and my family not as 'Labour' but as 'CND'.

By the time the 1959 election came (a glorious Indian summer, when the ground was too hard for ruggie) I don't think Kay and Tony were particularly active in the Labour Party, although they were still members. They knew that the Greenwich candidate, Richard Marsh, had presented himself at his selection meeting as a supporter of CND, a position he abandoned as soon as he had been selected. I don't recall any discussion at home about the election, and I got my ideas about it from the Manchester Guardian, the Observer and Punch. There was in one of these a cartoon showing the three party leaders galloping on horseback, with lines from Browning's 'How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix'. At school on election day we watched light aircraft writing 'Back Mac' in the blue sky.

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The early sixties were a good time to be discovering an interest in British politics, with the series of scandals culminating in Profumo, the false dawn of Orpington for the Liberals under Jo Grimond, and the development of political reporting on the television. There was a former General and defence correspondent of the Times called Alun Gwynne Jones who used to present a weekly political programme called 'Gallery' which I enjoyed, because it gave me the feeling of being addressed as an adult.³ I used to watch the party conferences on television, and remember Gaitskell's 'Fight, fight and fight again' speech. For a while I took *Time and Tide*, which was then owned by a Liberal supporter, and I used to enjoy Jo Grimond's column. By the

³ I seem to recall that he proved his skill as a television journalist and pundit during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He subsequently was made a peer, Lord Chalfont, by Harold Wilson. As Wilson's minister for disarmament he came to speak at St Andrews, where Anna asked him a question – *the* question, why, if the government was serious about disarmament, it went on selling arms to unsavoury régimes all over the world.

time of the 1964 election I was definitely a Liberal supporter. My parents were tolerant. They thought, with some justification, that I was doing it to rebel against the family tradition. If they had themselves been less disenchanted with Labour they might have argued with me more strongly. The disappointment of Bevan's rejection of unilateralism, and then the deaths of Bevan and Gaitskell, marked for my parents the end of an era, corresponding, perhaps, with changes in their own lives: their older children were growing up and their horizons were broadening with the expansion of ACE and their year in America. The Labour Party of Harold Wilson and George Brown had little charm for them.⁴ They remained loyal to Unilateralism, which was a strong minority position in the Party, but I daresay they became lukewarm towards the idea of nationalisation and I doubt very much whether they ever had any strong opinion on the Common Market.

For my first four years at Dulwich support for CND made me the butt of mockery and abuse. My friend Derek Ansell was attacked for the same reason, but he seemed to take it more philosophically, and even went out of his way to stir things up. He also was much quicker than I was at devising ways of getting on better with the boys; I was always too desperate to conciliate the masters. I didn't think of this as politics in action – unlike Derek, who told me later that observation of the power-play at Dulwich provided him with his first grounding in communism. As time went on and the political atmosphere changed there was more tolerance for what was regarded as my extreme left-wing views. Among the many opportunities that I unaccountably failed to take at Dulwich was the opportunity to develop debating and dialectical skills in the defence of my minority position. It wasn't that I didn't want to win the arguments, but I never acquired the knack of focussing the mind and thinking quickly. I may have been too afraid of being disliked, and sometimes my imagination led me towards the more distant reaches of the subject, away from what was essential to the particular argument at the moment.

The changes in political sentiment that were apparent even at Dulwich were having their effect on CND itself. The marches in 1962 and 1963 were larger than in earlier years, with two new groups making themselves increasingly felt. First there were raucous elements who went in for more organized slogan-shouting and singing and were more openly antagonistic towards both the lookers-on and the police. Some of these may have had a sharp political focus (what were later to be known as the hard left) but most were simply boisterous and high-spirited. Secondly there were those who were following fashion and wanted to experience the march and to be seen taking part. Naturally this second group were more in evidence during the short final lap on Easter Monday. Rumour had it that even Margaret Callaghan was present in Trafalgar Square, presumably covering herself just in case unilateralism won the day in the Party. Both groups contributed to a marked change in the atmosphere and feel of the march. They tended to be impatient and intolerant of the delays and misunderstandings that are inevitable in such an undertaking, and were, I suppose, responsible for an increasingly bureaucratic and professionalising trend in the organization. At the same time some of the original elements, the dedicated anarchists and pacifists, were beginning to look beyond the march as a vehicle for protest, towards civil disobedience and peaceful subversion, as for example in the

⁴ Arguably Bevan and Gaitskell, along with Iain Macleod, all born in the twenty years before 1914, were the most talented British politicians of their generation, and all died early. Those who believe in leaders might wonder whether this has anything to do with Britain's dreary post-war history.

exposure of the Regional Seats of Government in 1963. Through Peggy Denny (whose house was a second home to me for much of the 1960s) I came much into contact with this element of the campaign.

One of the accusations levelled at CND was that it was dominated by Communists, a front for Communists, perhaps financed by the Soviet Union. Some people thought that one was necessarily a Communist just by virtue of being a CND sympathiser. It is undoubtedly true that some of those on the march were Communists, whether in the precise sense of being a member of the Communist Party (or of a Communist Party) or as sympathisers and fellow-travellers. I knew two definite Party members at that time, Joe Finch and Donald Brown, neither of whom I ever saw on an Aldermaston March, though this is not to say that they weren't there. There was another man, whose name I have forgotten, who was some sort of Union activist, and I think probably a Communist. One day when Arthur Bennett, the local CND secretary⁵, left me responsible for collecting the fares on a coach taking Greenwich members to the march, this man took it upon himself to advise me how to go about it, rebuked me for not bringing a float with me, and made sure I took a collection for the driver. This advice was very necessary and was given very kindly. I had the feeling that he saw it as a matter of training a future activist in the class struggle.

It's important to say that while I am sure there were some quite sinister people in the British Communist Party, the Communists I came across, then and later, were decent people who believed they were working for a better world. This was also true of the rank-and-file Trotskyists I met in the seventies and eighties. The chief differences between them and me was that they worked much harder than I ever did, and were more disciplined and more willing than I would have been to respect their party line.

While the nuclear issue was the most important, there were two others that preoccupied me in those days. The first was capital punishment. I first became conscious of this when I asked what would happen to the criminals at the end of *The Blue Lamp* and I was told they would be hanged. The film had made the characters seem so completely real that the idea of their being done to death came as an almost personal blow. Announcements of executions on the morning news shocked and depressed me. When I was about fourteen I began writing to the Home Secretary calling for condemned men to be reprieved. I was aware that this interest might have been regarded as a morbid obsession, and I was partly ashamed of my letters. In this connection I developed a line of argument which served me in other contexts: if you are convinced that a course of action is right, it doesn't matter if you have mixed motives for carrying it out. I was aware that the important and difficult thing was to ensure, so far as you could, that your mixed motives were not actually contaminating your judgement of right and wrong – I was aware of this danger, tried to guard against it, but probably underestimated how very difficult it was.

The other topic of the times was what was gradually becoming known as the Third World. There was an anti-colonial or anti-imperial movement in the late fifties, but it was over-shadowed by CND, and in any case had the wind taken out of its sails by the rapid retreat from empire by the Macmillan government. The anti-apartheid campaign was the only strand of this movement that I really thought about, until the question of third-world poverty came to the fore. I had been aware of Oxfam's work among the refugees of Europe, but it gradually became clear that there was a whole

⁵ I remember that Arthur, a nice but probably rather silly man, spent much of his time that day looking for Julian Symonds, the writer, and telling everyone he met that 'Mr Julian Symonds' had gone missing from the Greenwich contingent.

wider world of refugees and hunger. By the mid sixties I was intensely conscious and conscience-stricken by the difference in living standards between rich and poor countries. When people said I was only wanting to assuage some irrational post-colonial guilt (a criticism that is particularly associated with a later more self-conscious period, but which was already in use back in the sixties) I again applied my argument about motivation. There were abundant good and objective arguments for supporting third-world charities and it didn't matter if one's actual motives for doing so were partly or wholly self-regarding.⁶ Inequality of means, whether within the UK or among the countries of the world, seemed indefensible, and the only fixed view that I had about my own future was that I did not propose to earn anything more than the average British income.

Apart from Mrs Denny and my parents, there was one other influence on my political ideas – Bernard and his parents. There was always politics on the go at the Barkers' house, and Chris seemed to me then (and seems still) to have a knack of striking the right balance in difficult arguments. I put it like that because it was something akin to a craftsman's skill, the product of long experience, a good eye, sharp intelligence and humility. The great problem in politics is to find the balance between idealism and pragmatism. My father used to make the point by warning against making the best the enemy of the good. Chris walked this narrow line, not with ease (because the whole point is that it is difficult, and if you do it easily you are not doing it right) but with a sure step. He could spot those dangerous moments when idealism becomes an empty gesture, and when pragmatism becomes self-interest. For someone who is concerned about politics but who is on the outside, the party foot-soldier, there is another thing that is difficult to realise and to cope with: the knowledge that whatever one does or thinks or says will make little or no difference. Chris, who had been a real foot-soldier, understood this very well. He was good at deflating our youthful rhetoric, but he did it without undermining our ideals. He knew that most political activism was ineffective⁷, but he never drew the conclusion that one should therefore retreat into a purely private morality, turning one's back on the social and the communal.

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When I came to St Andrews I subscribed to a full slate of left-wing causes. Apart from opposition to capital punishment they were all foreign policy issues – unilateral disarmament, anti-apartheid, anti-imperialism, development assistance for the third world – which is a big difference between the left of the 60s and of the 80s. I was more conscious of poverty in Africa and Asia than of the inequalities at home. If pressed on this I would have said that surely the excesses of working-class poverty had been swept away by the war, the Attlee government and the prosperity of the 1950s. It came as a bit of a surprise to find how many significant home reforms the parliaments of 1964-1970 found to carry out: divorce, abortion, homosexuality, censorship. In my ignorance, it seemed to me that these were the tying of a last few ends, the finishing touches to the reform of British society that had been going on since the nineteenth century. All that remained for socialism to accomplish was to

⁶ It was not until the late sixties that I first heard the claim that 'aid' tends to do the recipients more harm than good.

⁷ This was where my father differed from Chris. Tony would use the word *ineffectual* with something approaching contempt. His solution was to withdraw from political activism and await a public issue on which he would be in a position to make a difference. He found this eventually in his contribution to the conservation work of the Farnham Society.

export to the rest of the world the benefits that we enjoyed in Britain. The means to this end were pacifism and massive transfers of wealth to poorer countries. How could it fail?

I knew full well that the reason it would fail was that it would never be attempted. I continued to be interested in politics as they were actually practised, but always with a slightly detached view, because what I really believed in, the programme that everyone dismissed as utopian, was never going to get a look in.

There was another reason for the detachment, the lack of focus, that characterised my politics. This was that alongside my socialist, progressive, Whiggish views there ran a different current. In my early teens I had read Buchan, Belloc and Chesterton, backward looking writers who made reaction seem attractive and gave it a human face. I nursed romantic ideas about Englishness, the English countryside, the English temperament, moderation, toleration, kindness. When I came to read contemporary authors it was perhaps unfortunate that the two I responded to most immediately were CP Snow and Colin MacInnes. Snow's novels are hymns to the virtues of English institutions: Cambridge, the Law, the civil service – men who know the ropes and who do things the right way – all with a progressive twist and much superficial questioning which disguise the deeply conservative message. MacInnes, too, for all the cynicism and realism of his novels, comes round in the end to an endorsement of traditional Englishness. Disgust with the contemporary and a rosy view of the traditional were re-inforced by the novelists I came to next, Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell. Thus a utopianism of the past came to balance my utopianism of the future. It is hardly surprising that whoever I was with I could always find grounds for disagreement, nor that I gave up the attempt to frame a coherent set of opinions for myself.

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Not long after I arrived in St Andrews in 1966 the New Picture House announced a screening of *The War Game*.⁸ Anna and I, coming from a summer spent with Peggy Denny, felt that we ought to distribute leaflets, but it turned out that this was all taken care of by the local United Nations Association. St Andrews being what it was, and is, radical ideas could only get about under respectable cover, and the UNA was the main home for those in the town and University who favoured internationalism, anti-racism and an open debate about defence policy. It was run by Margo Waterston, a remarkable woman, a doctor's widow, apparently quite well off, with sons of student age. She devoted her considerable energies to running the UNA and was always generous to like-minded students. We got to know her slightly through the Quaker meeting, where she was an Attender. The UNA was, quite rightly, a broad-based organization, and Margo had to tread carefully not to alienate the members. She was assisted in this by a woman called Jessie Moir, a long-standing St Andrews figure, a JP, a big woman with a red face and round glasses and sensible shoes, usually dressed in green tweed. The story was that Jessie Moir invariably supported Margo in the committee, and that she once said something like, 'I think the Africans should all get back up their trees, but I know I'm wrong and Mrs

⁸ This was a documentary film describing the effects of nuclear war. It was made for the BBC but they were persuaded not to show it. I had seen it in Haslemere. It spelled out things which I was familiar with from CND literature. As I recall, one of the things that may have shocked people was the use it made of accounts of firestorms in Dresden and other German cities bombed by the allies late in the war.

Waterston is right, and we should do as she says.⁹ This story made a great impression on me, and it has always been my model for how progressive ideas and civilisation spread, through personal influence and generational shifts rather than propaganda and ideology. Anyway, Margo organized a public meeting to discuss the implications of the film, and we helped to distribute leaflets publicising it. I don't remember much about the meeting, which was held in Hope Park Church hall. There was a panel which included a doctor and Professor Dover, who we gathered was regarded as the local sage. The doctor spoke with feeling in favour of unilateral disarmament. Kenneth Dover said that the lesson he took from the film was that preparations should be made for national survival in the event of a nuclear war, and that he proposed to join the Civil Defence. Cedric Collyer made a contribution from the floor.

During our student days the great cause was the Vietnam War. The test ban treaty seemed to take some of the urgency away from the nuclear issue, whereas Vietnam was frighteningly urgent. We knew Americans who would have to consider the draft, and when it looked as though Wilson might commit British forces to the war we had to consider what we would do if we were called up. There was never any realistic chance of Wilson doing this, but such was our distrust of him that we suspected it. We were undoubtedly encouraged in this view by a wish to put ourselves closer to the centre of the drama. We thought about the war all the time, and it coloured all our thoughts about the contemporary world. Anna and I took part in three activities connected with the campaign against the war. The first was a study-group led by Jonathan Dale which met through most of my first academic year at St Andrews. The second grew out of this; it was a public opinion survey which involved us in knocking on randomly chosen doors to ask people's attitude to the war, which was how we came to meet Jessie Ireland in Marine Place. The third was an anti-war march from St Andrews to Cupar, in November 1967.¹⁰

Jonathan was good at getting us to think of the events in Vietnam as part of a longer struggle, and also to see them from different points of view. I chose to write about the American point of view as my contribution to the study-group. Others, better than me at separating the private from the public, might have been able to live with an American family like the Killoughs while still holding to a crude anti-Americanism, but I couldn't. It seemed to me, and still seems, that the Vietnam mess resulted from the idealism which, in other contexts, is the great virtue of America. In private morality I tended to think that wrongdoing was a matter of making a mistake, and this was how I judged America, not as evil but as wrong-headed. I found it difficult to shuffle off all the blame onto the Americans, being conscious that we, the British, were bundled up with them. Wilson might try to distance himself from America's Vietnam policy, but the fact remained that whatever political, strategic or economic advantage the Americans hoped to gain from the war was inevitably shared with their allies and clients, and if the advantage was shared, so was the guilt. Furthermore, as you traced the origins of the war you found that they lay in the French colonial occupation of Indo-China, and although the British were not implicated there, we belonged to the same Imperialist system.

⁹ I only met Jessie Moir once. I can well believe the substance of this story, but I can't remember the exact form in which it came down to me. So I can't be certain that she would have referred to Margo as Mrs Waterston, but I think it is likely.

¹⁰ Or possibly 1968.

The march to Cupar illustrates my feelings at the time. Anna and I were not the original organizers of the march, but some of the arrangements were left to us and we had undertaken to provide the banner for the vanguard. We painted a sheet in purple paint – ‘Peace in Vietnam’ – and mounted it on two window poles from our flat. We were sure in our own minds that it was a march for peace, not an anti-American demonstration, nor a pro-Vietcong demonstration. In our quakerly way we hoped there would be no shouting of slogans, which would in any case be pretty futile as we walked through the Fife countryside in the November twilight. There was a group on the march who, I think, regarded themselves as Maoists¹¹, and they saw fit to call for Victory for the Vietcong, with chants of ‘Dien Bien Phu’.

Two points occur to me about this. The first is that although in theory I reduced wrong-doing to misjudgement and misunderstanding, which should have had the effect of weakening any idea of sin, I retained a strong and primitive sense of guilt, which increased in strength as it came closer to home. When it came to the other side, to the Vietcong, North Vietnam and Red China¹², it never occurred to me (and this is my second point) to attach any blame to them, because they were too far removed. It therefore must have appeared that I placed all the blame on the West and exonerated the Communists. What in fact was happening was slightly different. What I aspired to do was to understand the mistakes that all sides were making, not to lay blame anywhere, but to try to sort out the tangled mess that the world had got into, essentially an intellectual challenge. Running counter to this impulse was my strong emotional inclination to feel guilt, to labour under a burden of individual and national sin.

As well as students and a handful of University staff such as Jonathan¹³, there was one other notable participant in the march. This was Mr Lorimer, Robert Lorimer, brother of the one-time professor of Greek. He was an old man who lived in a one-room flat, I think somewhere down Bridge Street. He felt passionately about the war, and was to be seen most days in the streets sitting with little hand-written notices handing out leaflets and expostulating with anyone who would stop to listen, tears in his eyes both from the cold and from the emotion that seemed too strong for his frail body. The writer of a biographical note about the work of his sister Florence as assistant to the Orientalist Sir Aurel Stein has left the following brief account of our

¹¹ A surprising number of people in those days admired Mao and the Cultural Revolution. I remember a sweet-voiced lady at a Quaker meeting advocating continual revolution (surely of a peaceful sort) and praising Mao’s measures to send the young back to the soil and mobilise them for a common purpose. Because the little Red Book was a book, and because it contained ‘Thoughts’ it was easy to see Maoism as an example of the power of the book, the power of the intellect to guide events. There were plenty of people to tell us that this was so. It struck me that the thoughts were pretty banal, and there were plenty of reports of the violence with which the Cultural Revolution was prosecuted, but it was easy to feel that the Little Red Book’s profundity may have been lost in translation, and that in the matter of the violence, we were too far away to know what was really going on. I never warmed towards Mao, but I certainly tended to give him the benefit of the doubt, and like many in the West regarded him as one of the giants of the century. I was not entirely sure what it was that our fellow-marchers understood by Maoism in the context of the British Left.

¹² A common misconception about the war was that Communist China was one of the combatants. Although this was not true, the Peiping government, with a justifiable interest as the major regional power and the ideological ally of Hanoi, must have played a part in the origins and prosecution of the war.

¹³ I don’t remember any other particular members of staff, but have a feeling that there were one or two.

Mr Lorimer, based on information from his nephew: 'The youngest of the family was Bertie (Robert Campbell Lorimer [1886-1975]), who is said to have resigned from the Indian police outraged by the imprisonment of an Indian princess, yet later returned to India to teach mathematics. His ardent campaigning continued (against the Vietnam War, vivisection, nuclear weapons) and he was being arrested even in his early eighties.'¹⁴

By an unfortunate piece of mismanagement the march had been scheduled for the same day as a United Nations Association jumble sale and coffee morning, and so we did not set off until after lunch, which meant we were unlikely to reach our destination until well after dark. This naturally made people keen to keep up as brisk a pace as possible. Soon the front of the march was far in advance of the main body, and eventually we were strung out in small groups with the gaps ever widening. Because the banner was mounted on our landlord's window poles, we didn't want to let it out of our hands, which caused a bit of dissension as other people wanted to carry it. We felt that we should not get too far ahead of the back of the march, which consisted of Mr Lorimer and one or two who had undertaken to keep an eye on him. Inevitably, we satisfied no-one. The banner, while well in advance of the stragglers, lagged far behind the front of the march until some of those who were more impatient took it and hurried forward with it. The next day at the Quaker meeting Jonathan spoke about the march and commented on the good atmosphere that had prevailed and the tolerant way in which the more vigorous marchers had behaved towards the older and slower ones. I remember feeling that this was only partly true. The slogan-shouting, the affair of the banner and the general absurdity of turning up in Cupar just as the last of the shoppers were hurrying home in the dark to their tea, all combined to make the march a disagreeable experience. Still, what else could one do?

Partly as a result of the experience of the march, but probably more because we were married and so somewhat removed from general student life, and also quite taken up with the Quakers, Anna and I didn't have much to do with the small band of left-wing students in St Andrews. We took part in the discussions on reforming the examination system. Some of the more percipient members of staff saw that the old ways in the University were bound to change, although the form of the changes that eventually came in the following decades may not have been foreseen. Talk of 'student power' was in the air, with demands for 'consultation' about governance and 'relevance' in the curriculum. Having a very high-minded idea of what a University should be all about, I always felt that the students' arguments rather missed the point.

Anna and I did not take part in the demonstrations against a South African rugby team that played in St Andrews, nor the vociferous opposition to Enoch Powell when he was invited to speak to a group of right-wing students.¹⁵ The only time I ever

¹⁴ Mr Lorimer was one of a remarkable family of eight children of Rev Robert Lorimer of Strathmartine and his wife Isabella. Four of his siblings, including Hilda Lorimer the classical archaeologist (1873-1954) and Professor William Lorimer (1885-1967) who translated the New Testament into Scots, were scholars of sufficient note to be included in the *DNB*. See Helen Wang (1998). *Stein's Recording Angel - Miss F. M. G. Lorimer. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland (Third Series)*, 8, pp 207-228

¹⁵ I think they called themselves the Monday Club, after a right-wing grouping of Tory MPs. The story was that Mrs Gash, wife of the professor of Modern History, was instrumental in bringing Powell to St Andrews. This may have had some truth. Mrs Gash was somewhat

went to a mass meeting of students was to vote against the proposal to remove Learie Constantine from the post of Rector. It was said that since his inauguration in 1967 he had spent no time in St Andrews and that he was living in the Caribbean, and that it was time to appoint a Rector who would be more active on the side of the students. This was not long after the resignation of Malcolm Muggeridge from the rectorship in Edinburgh over the sale of contraceptives, and of course there had been student demonstrations throughout the western world. It was very hard for St Andrews radicals to find a local cause, and this always seemed to me to be a manufactured fuss. The fact that Lord Constantine was in poor health was used against him, but most students seem to have felt that it was a reason for leaving things alone, and letting his term of office run out in peace. I also suspected that there was an undercurrent of racism in some of the attacks, although I'm sure this did not apply to the only person we knew in the anti-Constantine camp, Mike's friend Norman Sturrock.

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The word *racism* or *racialism* was one of a number which we tended to over-use. Others were *fascist*, *imperialist* and, as Norman recalls, *bourgeois*. We were sloganising, of course, and thinking sloppily, and our use of all these words was ill-defined, I'm sure, but there were reasons for our use of them.

I certainly, at that time, had attitudes and habits of mind which would nowadays be regarded as deplorably racist. One of my earliest friends had a Gambian father and Dulwich had a large number of Jewish boys, but I was so blind to the differences that it never struck me that I was in anything but a purely anglo-saxon environment. I had never had to question my attitudes to people from other cultures. I had been sheltered from all the grosser forms of prejudice. The jokes that passed back and forth about other nationalities, the Welsh, the French, the Irish, all seemed harmless because, I thought, I would happily have said the same about the English. In a rather condescending way I considered it bad form to make jokes about African people, much as it would have been to mock the disabled, but you heard such jokes frequently and it was common to hear jokes derived from Peter Sellers about Indians, which I came to find distasteful. English society and literature were saturated with such attitudes.¹⁶ Because I assumed (wrongly, I now think) that my own racial attitudes were harmless, I turned a blind eye to the more vicious turn that racism took in some of the writers I most admired. Belloc, Waugh, Anthony Powell, were all infected with racial prejudice. Powell for example might claim, in a casual aside, that black men tended to take up with the blondest of white girls.

We seldom needed to discuss the most obvious forms of racism, attacks on immigrants, lynch-law in America and Apartheid in South Africa. These were all beyond question. The issue was not whether they were wrong but what to do about them. One of the things that needed to be done, we thought, was to raise awareness of the dangers, and this meant looking at our own attitudes. Following the Smethwick election and Enoch Powell's rivers of blood, left-wing circles were

demonised at the time, and as friends of Cedric Collyer we were certainly antagonistic towards her and her husband.

¹⁶ In my childhood it was thought quite normal to mock the accents of those who spoke differently, whether because English was not their first language or because they belonged to a different class or region of the country. At some point during my student days I began to dislike hearing others indulging in this mockery, although it has taken almost a lifetime to rid myself of the habit.

increasingly aware of this requirement. We would listen carefully to ourselves and our friends, tripping each other up by detecting remarks that betrayed some residual prejudice or racist tinge.

People at that time used the word *fascism* freely and thoughtlessly to refer to any dictatorial régime, person or group. Shouts of *fascists* were often directed at the police. Teachers who imposed strict discipline might be called fascist. This was not just silly, it was offensive to those (including, no doubt, many of the police and other authority figures who were denounced as fascist) who had spent six years fighting real fascists in the war – or, like Chris Barker, had stood up to Moseleyites in the thirties. I was almost certainly guilty of this. The authoritarian régimes propped up by the Americans, in South Vietnam for example, were often described inaccurately as fascist. Fascism, it seems to me now, is a particular flavour of authoritarianism, and it developed and flourished between the end of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth century. It was a particular stage in political evolution. Modern dictatorships may be as bad as the pre-war dictatorships, but they are not specifically nazi or fascist, any more than modern western democracies are really the same sort of thing as the pre-war democracies of Weimar, Baldwin, the third Republic or Republican Spain. Our continued use of the term *fascist* in the sixties was the result of our obsession with the war and what led up to it. People still, after 75 years, invoke the word *appeasement* to make the case for wars, but in other respects the thirties have loosened their grip on our minds. In the sixties this grip was still very tight, and the dramas of Spain, Munich and the fall of France still seemed to express eternal truths, and the political groupings of the time seemed like eternal categories.

There was another way in which I used the term, and while this may have been just as muddled, it was more thoughtful and considered. I remember once saying to Tom Torrance that I was conscious myself of having fascist tendencies, as well as far-left tendencies. He asked why I didn't find the centre-point and become a Conservative, like him.¹⁷ He objected to the way I and those like me mis-used the word *fascist*. I was accused of using it for anyone whose politics I didn't like, but that wasn't fair – I disliked lots of people's politics, and reserved the word for those I disliked in one of a number of particular ways. It's true that I was caught by the inescapable lure of the catch-word, and repeated it automatically and too often, but usually I meant something fairly specific, even if not the same thing on every occasion. When I referred to my own fascist tendencies I meant the nostalgic patriotic vein which I found so attractive in someone like Belloc or the evocation of 'Old England' in Buchan and Kipling. I don't say that Belloc, Buchan or Kipling would, for a moment, have gone along with any actual manifestation of fascism – they would have seen through it as unerringly as PG Wodehouse saw through Roderick Spode – but in other countries quiet, nostalgic, anti-capitalist, anti-commercial idealists *were* lured into fascism. The beer-fuelled march of the 'men who were boys when I was a boy'

¹⁷ Tom, who came from an extended family of philosophers and theologians, was in my Logic & Metaphysics class. He always seemed amused and surprised to find that I shared the class medal with him – he was right to be surprised, because he had a genuinely philosophical mind, and worked hard. He went on to teach philosophy in Aberdeen, and then in the Economics department at Heriot Watt. I once met him over lunch when I was attending a meeting at Heriot Watt where I got into conversation with a woman who turned out to be his sister-in-law.

could transmute into the woodland hikes of the Hitler youth. That sort of thing had happened elsewhere and it could happen again.¹⁸

Imperialism was another word much bandied around. There was more justification for this because it is a more general term than *fascist*. Manifestations of Empire and imperialism have changed over the centuries. When we used the term we had in mind first the European empires that developed in the nineteenth century and were in retreat in the nineteen-sixties, and secondly the new and very different rule of Imperial America. So far as the British Empire was concerned, it was by the mid-sixties a dead duck, and no serious politician thought of preserving it. Of course Britain still threw its weight around, occupied some corners of the world, and used its army to prop up client states, but this didn't amount to imperialism; there was no programme for long-term occupation and control of territory as there had been in the days of the imperial dream. If we still described British policies as imperialism it was because, again, we were stuck in the past. What kept me stuck in the past was the guilt of empire. Many people believed that the British Empire was uniquely wicked and the source of all the ills in the post-Imperial world, an exaggeration which could easily be refuted. The refutation of this straw-man often passed for a conclusive defence of the Empire, and people who thought like me were told that we should feel no guilt. We were also told that even if the Empire did some bad things they were all in the past and there was no point in feeling guilty about it. It seemed to me then and it still seems to me, that there is every reason to feel guilty, not for the sins of past British people in the Empire, but for the perpetuation of the cruelties and inequalities that the Empire once represented and which now continue in other forms.

I'm not sure now how often or how seriously I referred to the Americans as imperialists and to the war in Vietnam as an imperialist war. This would often provoke those on the other side of the argument to repeat the word in a mock-Russian accent. The popular caricature of the Soviet and Chinese leaders certainly had them throwing the word about as an insult pretty freely, but in fact they are likely to have assigned it a fairly precise meaning. Serious communist ideologues didn't use labels of this sort indiscriminately. For example, they would have been quite clear about the distinction between *imperialist* and *colonialist*, terms which we would have used pretty well interchangeably. Both words, and their corresponding *isms*, referred to theories or systems for organizing the world or regions of the world. Whether or not the Americans had a serious imperialist policy in Vietnam, I don't know, and I didn't know then.

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Now we come to the word that Norman remembers as peppering my conversation in those days: *bourgeois*, a notoriously slippery term with all the confusion, ambivalence and evasion that inevitably follow once you start talking about class. The multiple ambiguities were made more confusing by the fact that in most of the senses of the word, I was myself a bourgeois, whereas I was not a racist, fascist or imperialist. On the surface at least, being a bourgeois is not a matter of holding particular views or acting in particular ways. It's not even altogether a matter of choice, but a caste you are born into. Before I ever knew about Marxist theory and the historic role of the

¹⁸ There was a good precedent for using the word in a scatter-gun sort of way: Orwell, somewhere, remarked that tobacconists tended to be fascists.

bourgeoisie, I was familiar with the term from family conversations. We were an intensely class-conscious family, in a class-conscious age.

I should explain what I mean by saying we were a class-conscious family. Kay was anxious and uncertain about class. Like the mothers of most of our friends she worried about our accents and about who we played with. Her first concern with all of us was that we should get a good education. It would be unjust to pretend that all she cared about was that we should avoid slipping backwards into the lower-middle class from which she felt she had herself emerged. She had mixed feelings about her own schooldays at Blackheath High School. The other girls tended to look down on her because her parents were poor; on the other had she had enjoyed studying and had developed her life-long love of literature under the influence of her teachers. She wanted the best education for her children both for its own sake, because she believed in its liberating and humanising powers, and also because it would put the seal on her own and the family's rise. Jennifer and particularly Imogen felt the strain of this at the time of the eleven-plus exam. They knew what was at stake, that failure spelled disaster, ruin, descent in the social scale. In our childhood we mixed at infants and junior school with working-class children. I knew that there were some children who were dirty, didn't have handkerchiefs, spoke in a different way, were much better than me at football but less good at sums and English, but it didn't occur to me that these things all tended to go together and that there might be some sort of systematic explanation. I'm sure the girls were much more aware than I ever was that these differences marked a boundary between us and them. I don't know whether this was because I was more influenced by Tony or, more probably, because I went around in a self-absorbed daze.

Tony was not free of class prejudice but he was more relaxed about it. As a communist before the war he had probably had a romantic view of the working-class, which had been modified but not destroyed by his experience in the army; while he no longer saw the workers as in the vanguard of revolution, he certainly believed that they embodied virtues of tolerance, stoicism and humour which he valued highly. Until he started working at Woolwich Poly, some time in the early or mid fifties, Tony taught at Hither Green Secondary Modern School. I can see him brushing his unruly hair smooth before setting off, and when he got home we would sit down to high-tea, but I don't recall ever hearing anything about his work. I sensed a relief when he changed job, but in later life he would look back quite fondly on Hither Green, as though it were an extension of his time in the Army Education Corps. All his life, if he ever came into contact with a member of the working-class or if any aspect of mass culture came to his attention, he would relate the occurrence back to his Army experience. But these occurrences were rare. At Woolwich Poly or Farnham School of Art he would have some working-class students, but by definition they would be non-typical, and they had every incentive to deal with him on his terms. It was his job to win them over to his terms, and he was good at it, an inspiring teacher. The values and skills he taught were what might in recent decades have been stigmatized as middle-class, a judgement with which, I think, Tony would have partly agreed, partly disagreed. With the remnants of his marxist training he would have seen that the Art School as an institution was intended to produce manufacturers of commodified art for a market. But he also believed, I am sure, that what he taught – intellectual honesty and rigourousness, tolerance, wide-reading, close-reading, clarity of style – were the characteristic virtues of the intellectual, irrespective of class origins. And this probably explains why he was more relaxed about class, happier to describe himself as lower-middle class (the class of clerks,

shopkeepers and schoolteachers) than Kay would every have been: as a member of the intelligentsia, he had his niche and so felt less need to compete for a rung on the social ladder. It was a sort of wild-card.

Tony was not without some little snobberies of his own, things he had brought down from Oxford with him, a pre-occupation with certain forms, but he didn't share Kay's anxieties about class. Nonetheless, he always backed her up, so it was her feelings on the matter which determined our family pre-occupations. Like most people we knew, therefore, we were concerned to maintain our place in the social scale. We would, however, have been ashamed to admit it. Because of the intellectual wildcard, we didn't regard our material acquisitions (fridge, television, car, foreign holiday) as our sole, or main, claim to status. In our family view, in fact, the pursuit of status through material acquisitions was most frightfully lower-middle class. As was the pursuit of status through genteel language. When marxism spoke of the bourgeoisie, referring perhaps to the captains of industry in their magnificent houses in Leeds or Bradford, I thought of them living in a suburban semi, disapproving of long hair and sex before marriage and talking about serviettes when they meant napkins. I knew what Nancy Mitford meant by *bourgeois* long before I knew what Marx meant by it.¹⁹

I don't remember when and how I first acquired my smattering of marxist theory, but the time I reached St Andrews I knew that the bourgeoisie was a more significant force than I had ever supposed – that they were the enemy, not because they were snobbish and boring, but because in our society they held all the levers of power. Some people I knew in those days would speak casually about putting class-enemies up against the wall when the revolution came. Nobody that I knew meant this seriously, because no-one I knew seriously believed that the revolution would ever come. It was a figurative way of indicating one's irreconcilable opponents. I daresay I talked this way from time to time, if only to try it out, to see how it sounded. It didn't sound good, I wasn't comfortable with it, but I didn't see anything very wrong with it, just as a way of talking. I'd have felt differently if I had allowed myself to think seriously about the many many times, in the course of the previous half-century, the words had been put into action. To a much greater degree than we liked to admit the whole thing was a matter of language. At the time I resisted this charge. Now I would accept it, and I'd say that it was not altogether a bad thing. Use of language is a skill that needs practice. By experiment one learns to detect the illogical and inconsistent, crudities and vulgarity, the pretentious novelty and the received idea. We would play games (for that is what they were) of detecting bourgeois assumptions in each other's arguments, much as we would trip each other up over casual and unintentional racism. We could do this with impunity, of course, because we were far removed from power. Our cocoa-fuelled discussions were never going to make a difference on the stage of history. This felt frustrating, but how appalling it would have been if it had been otherwise, if our careless words could have had an effect. But while this bubble of impotence gave me valuable room to feel my way with political ideas, it had its disadvantages, in that it tended to deaden the impact of facts, and was one of the reasons why I was slow to accept the evidence of just how bad the Soviet regime really was. I saw the events of the

¹⁹ My friend Bernard, as a historian, was much clearer than me on matters like this. He once picked me up sharply for referring to small farmers and farmworkers as peasants; he reminded me that in Britain there was no peasantry, since the term implied a particular system of land tenure.

previous half-century through a film of gauze, and so I could talk unblinkingly of class-enemies.

It was clear that by *class-enemies* I meant not the monocled lords of popular imagination, but business interests, exclusive professions, newspaper-owners, civil servants, public schools – the bourgeoisie, people like me. Before I came to St Andrews my main political interest was CND. In the strict sense, CND was a largely bourgeois or middle-class movement. In the other sense, being an unconventional and un-respectable movement it was the antithesis of bourgeois. This apparent contradiction didn't bother me until as a student I came into contact with a wider left-wing agenda. At that point my being middle-class began to bother me.

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Now I come to Norman's recollections, and I'll start with the one which the one which Anna and I found most disturbing: the suggestion that I defended the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. It is quite untrue. We were strongly opposed to the invasion., disgusted by it, puzzled by it. Anna wrote a poem, which we published in *College Echoes*, in memory of Jan Palach, the first of the students who committed suicide in protest. I don't remember meeting anyone who defended it. Jonathan Dale, who was actively involved in a Quaker project for promoting dialogue with the Soviet Union, was appalled. In an article we asked him to write for *College Echoes* he discussed the doctrine of 'Socialist Internationalism' which was used by the Soviet Union to justify their action. The doctrine depended, he said, on the idea that 'class is more fundamental than nation'. He quoted an East German lawyer: 'The protection of the essential bases of socialism ... is the common responsibility of all states of the socialist community. ... Further, amongst the essential elements of socialist sovereignty is the education of the masses in the spirit of scientific socialism, against any and every bourgeois ideology.' Jonathan's intention was to analyse the doctrine, not to defend it. His condemnation – that 'it is a false internationalism because it is the internationalism of the jungle, not of agreed institutions' – could hardly have been clearer.²⁰

I remember finding Jonathan's article quite hard to follow, and I have no doubt that in reproducing it in conversations with friends I probably garbled the argument, and this may well account for Norman's recollection that I defended the overthrow of the 'bourgeois' Dubcek. Attempts to explain someone's actions can often sound like a wish to justify them.²¹ In any case, most people, including Norman I expect, regarded the doctrine of socialist internationalism as irrelevant. The Soviet Union, in most people's eyes, was motivated by nothing more than political expediency and national self-interest, and the theoretical argument was just humbug. According to this reductionist view, even to suggest that a theory, even a pernicious and misguided theory, might have played some part in the Soviet thinking, amounted to an attempted defence. Western propaganda demonised the Soviet régime as unprincipled and aggressive, and its leaders as power-hungry for themselves and for Russia. These assumptions may well have been partly right, but I think Jonathan's point was that we would only understand the Russians if we also looked at the complex interaction between these motives of *realpolitik* and socialist ideology.

²⁰ *College Echoes*, vol 79 no 1, March 1969.

²¹ I still get myself into trouble by my preference for explaining rather than blaming. I often think people are sometimes wrong in what they do or say, but I prefer to skip the moralising and get to the more interesting issue of why they do it or say it. This is a habit that frequently causes annoyance.

Insofar as I understood him, I am sure I agreed with him then. From my current perspective, I must say that I find the idea that it was for the sake of a theory that the Soviet leaders committed their atrocities even more chilling than if I thought of them as just another bunch of opportunist aggressors.

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I don't think I called myself a communist. I was never a member of the Communist Party. If I had been I would not now be ashamed to admit it. Joining the Party then would have been a stupid thing to do, but not the most stupid thing I did in my student days. It would have involved submitting my individual conscience to the needs of the collective struggle. I now think that this would have been wrong, but in those days I was not so sure. It still seems to me a point of view which, while I strongly disagree with it, is something that a decent person might come to accept. The fact is, whether such a position is right or wrong, it is something that no-one as undisciplined as me could ever adopt.

We were all marxists then, or nearly all, in the very general sense of accepting that people's actions and ideology and consciousness were fashioned by their material circumstances. Of course all the key terms in that proposition were up for argument, so one person's marxism might be very different from the next person's. I went further. I was an egalitarian. What made me unpromising material for the Communist Party can be summed up in the fact that my egalitarianism did not make me think seriously about how a more equal society could be brought about, but resulted in little more than a strong disinclination to earn more than the average wage. These views soon led me to worry less about the inequalities within Britain and more about the inequality between the affluent countries of the world and the rest. In years to come this was to be my chief political concern, but back in the sixties it seemed to me a matter of personal morality rather than politics.

I didn't accept, or really understand, the marxist analysis that was supposed to prove the inevitability of revolution, but I did believe in the possibility of revolution, a peaceful transition to a fair and equal and humane society. It had never happened, and the societies that called themselves socialist were a poor advertisement for the cause. You would often hear right-wing people declaring that they too were communists—they believed in equal distribution of wealth or the holding of goods in common. You knew from their knowing smirk that there was a catch. 'There's just one little problem,' they would say, 'human nature.' Communism, though highly desirable, they said, couldn't possibly work because the strong and the cunning would always end up with more than the weak and gullible, and in any case, without the incentives provided by inequality nobody would ever strive to excel, and civilisation would stagnate. Human nature. I hated this trick. I hated being called an idealist by these people. It was a mean put-down.

So far as my political beliefs went, I believed, if I believed in anything, in pacifism and anarchism, which were ideals that to me seemed attainable.²² The danger of

²² Mrs Denny always made her pacifist solutions seem beautifully practical. For example she suggested that if I was ever forced to answer the legendary question from the conscientious objectors' tribunals—what would you do if someone was raping your sister?—I should reply that I would burst out laughing, because, she said, no rapist could continue in the face of mockery. I always found this sort of thing unanswerable, although I had doubts at the back of my mind. On the feasibility of anarchism I used to quote the anarchist communities that were briefly operative during the Spanish Civil War. (*Anarchy* 5, London, July 1961)

tying yourself to extreme positions is that you leave yourself without an answer to many immediate political questions. The pacifist's and anarchist's answer is not usually on the table, nor is the egalitarian answer. When confronted with a problem (such as what would I have done about Hitler, a question which was widely regarded as a knock-down refutation of pacifism) I was always in the position of the countryman in the cartoon who answered a tourist with the words, 'You shouldn't start from here.' In retrospect I can see that this left me unable to discriminate between the options that were on offer, and uninterested in the moral differences between them. This resulted in what now seems to be an alarming cynicism about the actual conduct of affairs. It's all very well to say, as the anarchist might say, a plague on all your houses, provided it doesn't anaesthetize you to the fact that some houses are better than others – even if by better we mean only less bad.

Norman's recollections suggest that I was not even-handed in bidding a plague on all the houses, that I was more inclined to denounce the West than the Soviets. I think this was true. My bias was wrong, not because I was failing in my duty to support 'my own side', but because the accumulated atrocities of the Soviets were far worse than those perpetrated by the west. There are some things that can be said in defence of my younger self. I didn't know half of what I now know about the Soviet régime. Perhaps I should have known, but I distrusted the information that came my way – and not without reason, given what came to light about CIA funding of *Encounter* for example. We were very conscious of the possibility of being manipulated. Of course manipulation was practised by both sides, and I have to wonder why I felt obliged to be more suspicious of my own side than of the other side. My experience at Dulwich had re-inforced the distrust of authority which was so much the spirit of the age. Anything that sounded like an appeal to patriotism was associated in my mind with exhortations to play up and support the House and the School.²³

Another point was that in our society, even then, manipulation of opinion was carried out primarily by commercial interests, the press, the entertainment industry, advertisers and public relations firms. The persuasive efforts of the government and political parties were feeble in comparison, so the suggestion that the Russian government controlled opinion successfully was counter-intuitive. That it was done by terror didn't occur to me, clearly a failure of imagination and understanding on my part. I remember a conversation with Kenneth Dover on the subject of Yugoslavia, when I said that Tito must be a remarkable leader to have kept the country together despite the internal divisions, and Dover replied that it was not so hard if you were able to imprison and shoot those who disagreed with you. The implications of this didn't sink in. I think the conversation was prompted by leaflets that were being distributed in St Andrews by Croatian exiles, and my willingness to discount what they (and Kenneth Dover) were saying about Tito was probably due to allegations that the Croatian partisans collaborated with the Nazis. This was only one of the ways in which the war affected my thinking. With the example of Nazi Germany always before us, we should have understood the power of a totalitarian régime to control opinion, and the power of political lies to gain a hold in people's minds. We had been brought up to believe that Hitler was a leader of exceptional

²³ Like all my complaints about Dulwich, this has to be balanced by observing that I left on year before I should have, and therefore did not receive the full dose. It is possible that the upper sixth might have enabled me to put the whole experience into better perspective. Also, if I had taken a different subject, such as History, I might have acquired better tools for engaging with the contemporary world.

demonic powers, that the Germans were uniquely susceptible to the hysteria of totalitarianism, and that the war had been fought against forces of exceptional evil. We were so persuaded of this that it was very hard to accept that there could be another demonic leader, another nation susceptible to totalitarianism and another force of exceptional evil. We didn't understand then what came to be referred to as 'the banality of evil'.²⁴ Our mental picture of totalitarianism was of a society constantly on the boil. We saw, perhaps, a French village in the grip of the Gestapo, with jack-booted automatons rampaging, searching out and destroying the Resistance; we didn't see a society in which totalitarianism had installed itself in every corner of every day life. I never met any Russians in those days but I knew people who had, and they testified credibly that for 'many ordinary Russians' life was better than before the Revolution; they had homes in the city, had worthwhile jobs, could buy some luxury goods, and lived in a society that valued education and culture. Even when, a little later, I read Solzhenitsyn I still didn't really understand. Failure of imagination on my part, again, a failure to engage with what I was reading. In fact, it is only much more recently that I've begun to have some inkling of how it was. Two books I've read recently have approached the problem from two sides. First *Zhivoago's Children* gave me an idea of how the Russian intelligentsia accommodated themselves to life in a totalitarian state while retaining, some of them, their integrity and decency. This showed me how people like me, by making the sort of step-by-step compromises that I recognise in my own life, came to create a state in which terror had bedded down quietly as part of everyone's lives. Then Simon Sebag Montefiore's book about Stalin's court brought home to me the full horror of the purges, which is that they can't be comfortably assigned to a box marked madness and monster, but were the product of a complex human being whose character and actions were shaped by conditions produced by other human beings.

If, back in the sixties, I didn't grasp the full evil of the soviet system it was not because I was exceptionally stupid or callous but because it was very difficult to understand. When people said Communism was evil, and cited the purges and show trials and prison camps, I couldn't make sense of it, and therefore assumed it was exaggerated propaganda and so discounted it. But that that wasn't the most important reason why I failed to attack Russian misdeeds and concentrated my venom on those of the West. One reason was my sense that what I thought about these things didn't count for much. If I'd imagined that anything hung on my opinion I might have taken more pains to get to the bottom of the things I couldn't understand in the stories one heard about the Soviet system. Secondly, there was no shortage of people prepared to criticise Russia. Most of the press, most MPs, most people one met and talked to, were anti-communist. It didn't need me to add to that particular cry. I think that that was the chief reason for the anti-Western bias of my arguments.

I have no recollection of ever saying, as Norman recalls, that Soviet elections were 'fair'. Norman thinks I may not have been entirely serious, but says no more about the context. I seem to remember that I supported PR, and so I presumably believed that in some senses British elections were not fair, and there was, indeed, one unfairness that affected British elections but did not apply in Russia – the power of

²⁴ I believe the phrase is from Hannah Arendt's account of the Eichmann trial. As a boy, I followed the Eichmann trial day by day in the newspapers, but while I might have repeated the testimony and given the statistics of the dead, I was aware of being completely out of my depth, not understanding at all what was going on.

the capitalist press to influence voters. I doubt if I ever suggested that Russian elections were therefore in most respects fairer than ours, but I may have been saying that there were many different criteria of fairness. But I'm only guessing that this was the point I was trying to make.

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Over the years I have recognised the impracticability of anarchism, and have wavered in my pacifism because there seem to be so many cases in which it doesn't seem to be an option. I am still firmly egalitarian, not simply in relation to income, but more generally in the matter of consumption and use of energy, although it is a hard doctrine to follow scrupulously. But there is one issue on which my views have not changed, and that is unilateral nuclear disarmament. Of course the situation is very different now from what it was in the sixties. Nowadays the most compelling reason for getting rid of our independent deterrent, so-called, is that it is a waste of money. In the days when CND was a significant force, in the fifties and sixties, there were other arguments.²⁵ The main point was that nuclear weapons were uniquely dangerous and the fewer there were around the better. I never really believed that Britain's example, if we unilaterally abandoned nuclear weapons, would have a magical effect on other countries, make them give up their bomb or stop them trying to acquire one, but it was clear that our demonstration that nuclear weapons enabled us to 'punch above our weight' or, as the phrase then was, 'sit at the top table', was a standing encouragement to other nations to try to do the same. It was never going to be possible to un-invent the bomb, and it is genuinely hard to know how America and Russia might have dismantled their arsenals, but I'm sure that Britain's determination to hang onto its independent deterrent was utterly irresponsible and a contributing factor in creating the nightmare of proliferation that we now live with. As for the claim that the bomb 'kept the peace' between the super-powers, that seemed pretty thin in the age of Korea and Vietnam. At best the existence of nuclear weapons prevented the use of nuclear weapons, and anyway in relation to the superpowers Britain's deterrent was an irrelevance.

Some might think that, seeing that we still haven't got rid of Trident, the years of campaigning against the bomb were wasted, but I'm not sure. One cannot prove it, but I doubt if, without the agitation, there would have been a test-ban treaty. National governments, left unchecked, have an insatiable appetite for weapons – impossible to stop them, but perhaps the peace movement managed to apply some sort of brake, slowing down the arms-race, forcing governments to justify their new toys. One might put this more charitably, since on the whole I think most of our politicians are benevolent in intention, and share my distaste for horrific weapons. As the arms race gathered momentum, governments felt a compulsion to build up ever bigger arsenals, and the role of the peace movement was to offer an alternative road and so loosen the grip of this mad logic. Even if all CND's policies were flawed we have reason to be grateful that there was this alternative voice. If no-one had protested against the nuclear arms race, the world would be a still more dangerous place than it is to-day.

I come now to the last of Norman's recollections, and the one which, if true, would be the most damning, his belief that I was 'relaxed about the possibility of a Soviet invasion'. I'm quite confident that this allegation is false, although because Norman

²⁵ CND again became significant in the Thatcher/Reagan years, when the issues were different again.

did not have access to my thoughts at the time I can quite see why he might have supposed it to be true. It was a point on which I differed from those of my fellow-pacifists and nuclear disarmers who believed in the power of non-violence. They seemed to think either that Gandhian resistance would thwart an invasion, or that the influence of our good example would persuade our Soviet antagonists to give up their aggressive ways. In this way, they felt, we could duck the choice between keeping the bomb and laying ourselves open to invasion.²⁶ I was sure that pacifists and nuclear disarmers had to face the choice squarely. Giving up weapons would leave us vulnerable to invasion and unilateralists like me should be clear, I thought, that they accepted this only as the lesser evil. I therefore thought long and hard about the prospect of an invasion. I don't suppose my thinking was particularly profound, nor even realistic – I was a romantic, and I thought in terms of Russian troops goose-stepping through loved and familiar London streets or swarming over the South Downs – but I certainly agonized over the prospect, and was far from relaxed about it.

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After the march to Cupar, the only other political activity I recall from my student days was helping Ursula Hall to deliver Labour leaflets in the 1970 election – the only time in four years that I crossed the Kinnesburn into the council housing. Perhaps it was a pity that I cut myself off from student politics. I developed my ideas in isolation, without being challenged to defend them and refine them and see how they worked out in practice, which meant that they may have become a little eccentric. I held what seemed to some to be extreme opinions, but I didn't defend them robustly. I was poorly equipped to stand up for myself later when I came into contact with political hard-liners; I was too easily confounded by the knuckle-duster arguments with which they were always supplied. Left-wing politics changed in the early seventies, becoming less internationalist, more obsessed with the class-struggle in Britain. This was true of both the Labour Party and the Trotskyists I met up with while I was on the dole in Oxford. The Trots, like my condescending right-wing friends, dismissed me as an idealist, finding a ready explanation in my bourgeois upbringing. Their attitude was repellent but unanswerable. I lost confidence in myself and in my own opinions. I had little taste for politics in the seventies, but in the two years before the 1979 election I was drawn into the Labour Party in the East Neuk. The candidate Henry MacLeish and his agent Mark Lazerowicz both went on to distinguished careers in the Party. I just did the basic administrative work as branch secretary, edged out of decisions on policy and tactics. Mark had the impatient, intolerant edge that I remembered from the Oxford Trotskyites, and I am pretty sure he tried to sell me copies of *Militant*.

Nonetheless, I still stand by the main political position that I took up in my student days, unilateral nuclear disarmament. Dropping the bomb is still too horrible to contemplate.²⁷ CND became quiescent as progressive politics moved on to protests about Vietnam and then to the domestic issues of the seventies. Many people felt that the test-ban treaty meant that the most urgent aim of the campaign had been

²⁶ The phrase one heard often in those days was, 'better dead than red'. Just as some pacifists tried to evade the choice by wishful thinking, so many of our opponents claimed that with the deterrent we could avoid being red without paying the cost of war.

²⁷ I heard recently that various ex-prime ministers have been asked whether, in the event of a nuclear attack, they would actually have ordered a retaliatory strike. Some said yes and some said no.

achieved. But in the Thatcher and Reagan years all the old arguments came back, with all their old force. Aldermaston memories were revived when I went to Greenham with my parents. We were right in the fifties and sixties, and again in the eighties. The Cold War was not ended by our campaigns against Cruise and Trident, but we should not allow Reagan's apologists to claim that the actual sequence of events was the only possible scenario. And I am sure that our post-Cold War world would be a safer place if there were fewer rusting nuclear missiles lying around the place, and fewer middle-sized powers trying to build up their body weight by hanging onto, or acquiring, weapons of mass destruction.

So, was I, am I, an apologist for the Soviet Union or, if it comes to that, for Ahmadinejad's Iran? No, of course not. But I do want to understand those countries better – not their horrible leaders, but the decent, intelligent people who live there, trying to keep things going. The ideals that I learned from my parents and from Peggy Denny and Chris Barker are generosity, tolerance, kindness, rationality. They are difficult virtues to cultivate, but they are worth the effort. Nor are they for private life only. The real trick is to make them work in the wider world too.