

53rd Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs
Advancing Human Security: The Role of Technology and Politics

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Reunion in Pugwash, 2003
By Joseph Rotblat

It was almost exactly 46 years ago, in July 1957, when I came for the first time to this unique place on the Northumberland Straits, a visit that was to have an enormous influence on me, in the second half of my life.

We came here then because the world situation was entering a dangerous phase, with a looming nuclear holocaust; and extraordinary efforts were required to prevent a catastrophe. Now, two generations later, these perils are facing us again. There is again a need for scientists to take steps to avert the danger.

Is there a chance that we will succeed? In my opinion, and based on past history, the answer is yes, there is a chance. The main fact is that we are still here; that we managed to avoid a catastrophic nuclear war, even though we came perilously close to it on several occasions. Many factors have contributed to this outcome, but I am sure that the Movement of Scientists that was started here in 1957, played a role in it. We were told this by a reliable source, the Committee in Oslo that awarded us the Nobel Prize in 1995. So it is in a mood of anticipation rather than dejection that I want to recall some of the events relating to the First Conference, held here, in Pugwash, in July 1957.

Before talking about the Conference, I have to recall the background to that event, the political climate that prevailed in the world at that time. It is quite possible that without the invitation by Cyrus Eaton to come to Nova Scotia, there would have been no international movement of scientists.

Actually, the story began two years earlier, with a Manifesto issued in London, in July, 1955. It was drafted by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell and was endorsed by Albert Einstein in one of the last acts of his life; he signed it just before he died in April 1955. It was subsequently signed by nine other scientists, nearly all Nobel Laureates, from all over the world, but it has become generally known as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto.

It is a powerful appeal to scientists, to governments, and the general public to take cognizance of the dangerous situation that has arisen from the development of thermonuclear weapons (the hydrogen-bomb), and to make an effort to prevent a catastrophe.

Let me quote two paragraphs from the Manifesto:

"We are speaking on this occasion, not as members of this or that nation, continent, or creed, but as human beings, members of the species Man, whose continued existence is in doubt."

"Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful, and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?"

I am now the last survivor of the signatories, and I consider it my duty to keep on reminding people of the message in the Manifesto.

The Manifesto ended with a call to scientists to get together in a Conference to seek ways to avert the danger. One of the first responses was the famous letter from Cyrus Eaton, offering to pay all the expenses of the proposed Conference, if it were held in Pugwash, Nova Scotia.

But it took two years before we actually came here. You have to recall that we were at that time at the height of the Cold War, with all its mistrust and fears, and hostile propaganda. In the United States, the malodorous McCarthy witch hunt was still in the air. Anybody ready to sit down with Soviet scientists, and talk about nuclear weapons and disarmament, was immediately branded as a fellow traveller, if not an actual member of the Communist party. For many American scientists, participation in the Conference might have spelled the end of their professional career, let alone obtaining travel funds from their universities. There were no foundations willing to provide funds for such an enterprise. It was only a fearless person like Cyrus Eaton, who broke the taboo, and made the Conference possible.

Cyrus Eaton was a truly unique personality. He must have had a streak of the hard capitalist in him: he made a million at a young age, lost it, and made much more soon afterwards. But at the same time he was quite eager to go along with the communist system in the Soviet Union, by advocating closer relations with the Soviets at a time when this was seen as an almost treasonable offence in the United States. It was really extraordinary that, in one and the same year, he was chosen US Business Man of the Year, and awarded the Lenin Peace Prize.

And with all this, he was also a scholar. He was a voracious reader, including books on philosophy. In his famous letter to Bertrand Russell, inviting us to come to Pugwash, he said: "I have read all of your fascinating books again and again."

He had a great respect for scientists. This is why he set up an educational trust here, in the Eaton Lodge, his summer residence, for scientists to come for relaxation and to sharpen their thinking. This is why this house is also called "The Thinker's Lodge". There were some unfriendly comments suggesting that he could afford it because all the expense was tax-deductible, but I am convinced that he would have done it in any case. However, the fact that it was the US Treasury that was ultimately financing an organization that was under investigation by the US Senate for anti-American activities, adds much piquancy to the story.

I should note here that while Mr. Cyrus Eaton was a gracious host, he did not - at that stage - interfere with the actual running of the Conference. This was left entirely in the hands of Lord Russell and a few of his helpers, which included myself. All the invitations to participants were issued from my university office in London.

The primary aim was to ensure the participation of eminent scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain, who were also interested in and knowledgeable about, the issues to be discussed. Conscious of the political climate, that I have just described, Lord Russell was anxious that the participation from the West should not be overrepresented by people with left-wing views. The effect of this on the group from Britain was peculiar, to say the least. Lord Russell, unable to come to Pugwash himself for health reasons, wanted all the three people who helped him in the organization of the meeting to go to it. But two of these were well known in England for their left-wing views, Cecil Powell and Eric Burlop. Eric Burlop was by far the most militant, and Russell felt that his participation might be harmful. And so we ended up with the bizarre situation of Eric Burlop actually being in Pugwash, and taking part in the discussion, but officially only as a member of the secretariat, and thus not mentioned in the list of participants.

Of course, no such control could be exercised on the participants from the Soviet Union, and the question has often been raised whether there was any truth in the allegation that the Soviet Government tried to use the occasion of the Conference for their propaganda?

The answer is that attempts to use us for such a purpose were in fact made, but they were rather clumsy, and we could see through them easily. To me this became obvious even before the First Conference began here.

Travelling to Pugwash was not then as easy as it is now. All the participants assembled in Montreal. From there we flew by Mr. Eaton's private jet - still uncommon in those days - to Moncton, in New Brunswick. From there we travelled to Pugwash by car, a long journey because the roads were then very bad.

In the car in which I travelled there were two other passengers. One was Academician Alexander Topchiev, the leader of the Soviet Group, a very senior

figure in the Soviet Union, with great influence both on science and politics. But he did not speak any English. This is where the other passenger came in. Mr Vladimir Pavlichenko came to Pugwash as Topchiev's translator. But it did not take me more than half an hour of conversation with him to realize that he had another role, besides translating. He was in fact the KGB man, with the task to ensure that the party line was being followed.

On the first day of the Conference, Alexander Topchiev made an important statement. He spoke in Russian, and was immediately followed by Pavlichenko with the English translation. But he managed to insert into Topchiev's speech some Soviet propaganda. However, he did not reckon with the presence among the American group of Eugene Rabinowitch, who had been born in what was then, and is again now, St. Petersburg. So when Pavlichenko finished, Eugene got up and said, "Mr. Pavlichenko, this was not an exact translation": and then he gave a corrected version of the speech. After this, Pavlichenko was much more circumspect. From later meetings it became clear that the Soviet contingent included two types: genuine scientists, many of them of such eminence in science that they could afford to speak up openly at our meetings even against official Soviet policies; and a few apparatchiks, who came to toe the party line.

So, were we, from the West, naïve and prey to Soviet propaganda? Looking at it now, from the perspective of time, it seems that it actually worked the other way round. Over the years, in many discussions in Pugwash meetings, we managed to persuade our Soviet colleagues that some of the policies pursued by the Soviet Government were leading to disaster. There is good reason to believe that our Russian colleagues, many of whom carried considerable weight in their country, were instrumental in introducing the radical changes made by Mikhail Gorbachev. In particular, we can claim credit for the halting of the nuclear arms race. Gorbachev told us this himself. No mean achievement for a Movement that started here in Pugwash!

Actually, when we came here in 1957, we did not envisage the meeting as the start of a worldwide movement of scientists. We, the organizers, considered it initially as a one-off event. This was so because we feared that the Conference would not be successful. The issues we were going to discuss were so controversial, that even in the West there were strong divisions on them. We were apprehensive that these divisions would become much more exacerbated when confronted with the ideas from the other side of the Iron Curtain.

As it turned out, these fears were unwarranted. The Conference was a great success and we decided to carry on with the effort by setting up a new organization to which we gave the title: "The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs".

I ascribe this success to several factors. One was that it was a meeting of scientists. Most of the participants were physicists, who knew each other from their publications, if not from personal contacts. We trusted each other's scientific integrity, and we built on that trust when discussing political issues. This was helped by our decision to conduct the discussions in the scientific spirit of rational approach and objective analysis.

This Conference proved that scientists have a common purpose, which can transcend national frontiers without violating basic loyalties.

A very important factor also was the relaxed and congenial atmosphere of this place to which our hostess, Anne Jones, who later became Mrs. Cyrus Eaton, greatly contributed with her charm, and her *joie de vivre*, undiminished by being confined to a wheelchair.

I hope that your visit today to this serene location will enable you to capture some of that atmosphere, and that it will invigorate you to continue our efforts towards a world of peace, a goal as important today as it was 46 years ago.