

REPORT ON THE 2007 BRS ANNUAL MEETING

While much of northeastern America can be a little too warm for comfort in June, the proximity of Monmouth New Jersey to the Atlantic Ocean provides it with cool breezes and a pleasantly moderate climate in that month. With Monmouth University already closed for the summer, we had the campus to ourselves, and the availability of pleasant walks around its attractive surroundings was conducive to both solitary and social reflection. It was in this environment that the Bertrand Russell Society held its 34th annual meeting last year from June 8 to June 10, thanks to the hospitality of Alan Schwerin, President of the Bertrand Russell Society, and his wife, Helen Schwerin. (Alan and Helen also hosted annual meetings at Monmouth in 1999 and 2000.) The Turrell boardroom in Bey Hall served as the Society's home base that weekend, with dormitory space for its members available just several buildings away.

Following registration late Friday afternoon, the Society met for dinner on campus at "The Club", after which they returned to Bey Hall for a board meeting of the Society. Following the business meeting, we relaxed in the boardroom while David Blitz updated the Society on the progress the Bertrand Russell Audio-Visual Project is making. David and four of his students (Sotzing, Rutkowski, Cavallo and Notaro) then provided us with some quite interesting audio-visual samples of Russell. Friday closed with members enjoying the Greater Rochester Russell Set's hospitality suite/salon.

The first presentation Saturday morning was Marvin Kohl's "Bertrand Russell on Fear" (to be published in the next issue of the *Quarterly*). Kohl discussed Russell's idea that *all* fear, whether it be unconscious, conscious, or attitudinal, is bad and ought to be eliminated. Contra Russell, Marvin argued that the deserving target is not fear *per se*, but panic fear and those human ideas and practices that tend to produce it. Tim Madigan then gave a talk on "The Bertrand Russell Case Revisited". As all Russellians know, after being denied a position at the College of the City of New York, Russell taught for a time at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. However, Russell and Barnes had a bitter falling out a few years later, and in 1943, Barnes self-published a pamphlet entitled "The Case of Bertrand Russell *versus* Democracy and Education." In that pamphlet, Barnes argued that Russell had nothing but derision and contempt for democracy and education, and had betrayed the ideals of

Barnes' friend and associate John Dewey. In his talk, Tim critiqued Barnes's claims and arguments.

Russell archivist Kenneth Blackwell of McMaster University followed with a presentation on Russell's Electronic Texts. Ken explained that many of Russell's texts are now available electronically, some freely on the web, some at login websites, and others purchasable through e-publishers. Details of sites were offered. He then pointed out that the availability of the e-texts raises the prospect of being able to search them, perhaps altogether in a "federated" search. McMaster's Digital Commons, where the back issues of *Russell* now reside (and are accessible in their entirety to BRS members on the internet at digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/russelljournal/), may provide an approach to accomplishing this. The last presentation before lunch was by Ilmari Kortelainen on "The Compositional Method of Analysis". Kortelainen used Russell's philosophy to demonstrate the relationship between the method of analysis and contextuality by addressing the question: how can the principle according to which a sentence gets its meaning from its context be understood when one also accepts the principle of compositionality, that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of its constituent elements? From the viewpoint of contemporary theory of meaning these two semantic principles seem to be incompatible.

After lunch, there was a general meeting of the Society, followed by a panel discussion by Alan Bock, Tim Madigan, Thomas Riggins, and Peter Stone on Russell's book "*Understanding History, 50 years later*". Following the panel discussion, Phil Ebersole presented a paper for David White, who was unable to attend the meeting. David's paper was entitled "Russell and Horace Liveright" and described how the publishing firm of Boni & Liveright was founded in 1916 to bring modern and controversial literature to the American readers, and how it went out of business in 1930. The company specialized in authors whose material was considered improper, immoral and indecent. Boni & Liveright are less well remembered today, but the Modern Library series, which evolved out of their publishing program, is universally known. Russell became involved with Boni & Liveright through three books, *Education and the Good Life* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929), and *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), all published in the later years of the firm's history. White's main focus was on Russell's personal and professional

dealings with Horace Liveright (1884-1933), in particular, Russell's difficulties with the fast and loose lifestyle of drink, women and song associated with the firm. The last speaker of the day was David Blitz, on "Russell's Little Books", a series of pamphlets by Russell that were published in Girard Kansas by Emanuel Haldeman-Julius.

Dinner consisted of a banquet (from 8:30 to 10:00 pm) at a local Japanese Restaurant. The evening was then topped off again with the Greater Rochester Russell Set's hospitality suite.

Sunday's talks opened with Gregory Landini on "The Number of Numbers". Gregory argued that though Frege's later work offered a theory of numbers as objects, what is shared by Frege and Russell is a conception of numbers in terms one-one correspondence relations, and that on this view natural numbers are not objects and the infinity of the natural numbers may well not be necessary. Following this was a talk by Michael Garrall on "Russell: Between Deism and Atheism". Chad Trainer then read a paper entitled "Russell's Empiricist Propensities: Empiricism's Survival of Russell's 'Last Substantial Change'". Trainer began by pointing out that according to Nick Griffin, the years in which Russell came closest to being an "empiricist" are the years 1912 to 1914. Trainer then discussed the limits to Russell's empiricism during the same period, and concluded by proposing an alternative view that, regardless of where one places Russell on this sliding scale between rationalism and empiricism, we should see Russell as more empiricist after 1914 than during the 1912-14 period.

The final paper of the annual meeting was Chris Russell on "Kant and Russell's Logicism". Chris argued that what appears to be a change in view for Russell on the question of whether arithmetic is analytic or synthetic a priori was actually more simply due to a change in the meanings of the terms. Concluding the meeting was a fine lunch at the home of Alan and Helen Schwerin.

— Chad Trainer, RC

HUMANIST NOTE. Marc Carrier, Canadian humanist, has written on the religious agenda behind the façade of intelligent design and the Discovery Institute. Based on exclusive interviews, his essay will appear in *The American Atheist* in July.

INTERVIEW

ON THE RUSSELL TRIBUNAL AN INTERVIEW WITH NOAM CHOMSKY

BRANDON YOUNG

Last year marked the 40th Anniversary of the commencement of the International War Crimes Tribunal, initiated by Bertrand Russell and known popularly as the Russell Tribunal. It was an organization of civilians acting to hold world leaders accountable for what they viewed as grave violations of international law in the conduct of the Vietnam war. The Russell Tribunal further aimed at gathering testimony and documents showing the massive violence perpetrated by the United States against the Vietnamese people. Not an actual jurisprudential undertaking, it was rather an exclamation intended to break the silence, and an affirmation of the responsibility that people of free democracies have to be liable when international and national institutions fail.

Nearly forty years later, the legacy of the Russell Tribunal continues to be an influence in world affairs, most recently by the formation of the World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI), another citizens' tribunal set up to assert international law by making clear the disparity between world citizens' opinion and the action of international institutions regarding the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Like the Russell Tribunal, it challenges the justificationist orthodoxy of western governments and media alike by condemning preventative war as nothing more than a euphemism for a crime of aggression. But unlike the Russell Tribunal, which at least received ridicule in the press, the WTI has been ignored by the Western media where it could have its most effect. Interestingly, many of its participants and leading organizers are women, a striking contrast to the Russell Tribunal, which the WTI acknowledges as its model.

In the last chapter of *At War with Asia* (1970), Noam Chomsky addresses the subject of war crimes and the Russell Tribunal. Prompted by a discussion in the Russell studies group, russell-I, of a purported account of his views, I recently asked Chomsky about his thoughts on the Russell Tribunal, its legacy, and the new WTI. The following is an edited transcript of that correspondence.