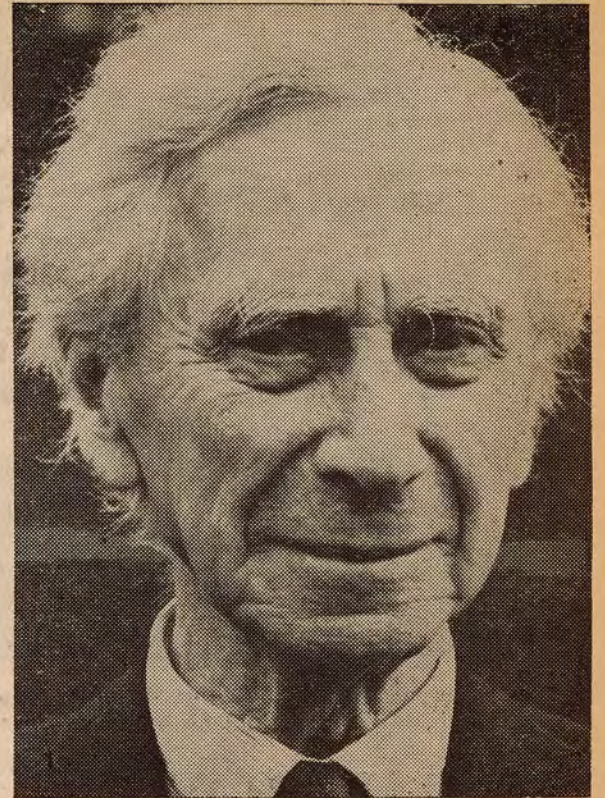


PRISON SENTENCES

By Bertrand Russell



Bertrand Russell is President of the Committee of 100. He has been in jail twice: for one week last September and for six months during World War I—for attacking the U.S. Army in a pacifist paper.

In September he told a London Court: "If you condemn us you will be helping our cause and therefore humanity. While life remains to us we will not cease to do what lies in our power to avert the greatest calamity that has ever threatened mankind."

A GREAT many among us are in prison and others soon will be. Those who are debarred by force from carrying on the work in which we all believe may, at moments, when suffering through the frustration of an immensely urgent purpose, be inclined to have doubts as to the usefulness of the almost intolerable monotony and fear which prison discipline imposes.

sians are wicked, but Western nations are good; others think that Western nations are wicked, but Russians are good. Both views are absurd, and, if strongly believed, must lead to disaster. We stand, not for this or that faction or creed or nation, but for MAN. This is not a new creed. What is new is the urgent necessity of its adoption if our species is to survive.

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It is not easy to make whole populations think in a way which, to them, is new. Only by striking and dramatic actions can we induce them to abandon ancient prejudices and present enmities. Governments do not wish us to succeed in this enterprise, and most of the forces which normally mould public opinion are against us. It is for this reason that we are compelled to act in ways which the law, at present, condemns.

Two opposite reactions, according to the temperament of the prisoner, are to be guarded against. On the one hand, he may be discouraged by the daily and hourly consciousness of a régime of force against which, at the moment, he can do nothing; or, on the other hand, he may be led into a mood of anarchic rebellion for its own sake, which would make it difficult later to co-operate in a group.

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It is not easy to judge sanely when powerful vital impulses are thwarted. Endurance of prison, like endurance of serious illness, is made easier by fixing our thoughts upon the future, and, still more, by realising what prison endurance, even though seemingly passive, is doing to further our cause.

Every prisoner and every day of his sentence helps to convince people of our sincerity, and leads a continually increasing number to examine the reasons for our actions and, as a result, to come over to our side. Some among our opponents are so deeply rooted in the belief that some nations are good and some bad that they can only explain our actions by supposing that we wish to hand our country over to the Russians. Such absurd misconceptions are rendered impossible to believe by the spectacle of the sincerity and willingness to sacrifice of those who endure all the hardships involved in a conscientious conflict with the law.

Our cause is the greatest that has ever arisen in the history of man. It is nothing less than the preservation of all human life. We have been living in a world of rival ideologies which have produced a widespread madness. Some think that Rus-

And, on another plane, we gain something very precious. We gain a great purpose which frees us from the listless bewilderment that besets many people in the modern world. We have something to live for, something that we are deeply convinced is of value. This purpose gives a kind of steadfast happiness which can survive outward misfortune. And we have the sense of community with comrades, of marching together towards a happier world, even though it may not

be reached in our lifetime. For such reasons, I think our life is preferable to that of men who have no such vision.

I have been speaking of those who go to prison, but I do not wish to suggest that they alone serve our common cause. Our common cause requires much work that cannot be done in prison. Martyrdom is not our aim, though we must accept it willingly if it comes. The importance of our movement must be the touchstone of what each one of us must do. Some are right to be bound over or to pay fines, and, if they do so, they should not suffer obloquy. There cannot be any general rule.

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And as to suffering, prison is not the only thing that is to be suffered. There is, for most people, severe economic hardship in working for our movement. There is also a not inconsiderable risk of physical injury and, from a worldly point of view, there is no compensating advantage to be hoped for. It is painful to be thought criminal and to suffer the condemnation of almost all who hold power, whether great or small. Everyone who voluntarily undergoes these hardships is doing something to turn men away from war and bloodshed and destruction to a world of peaceful co-operation for the common good and not for the harm of those whom we choose to regard as enemies.

We stand for life—not life for this man or that, of this country or that, or this creed or that, but the life of all human beings. Our opponents, often unwillingly and unconsciously, are leading the world towards death. We offer hope. Our opponents even if they were to succeed, can offer only despair and disaster. Our purpose is immense, and while hope lasts it should keep us happy through whatever adversity.

In a French jail

THERE is no right of conscientious objection in France. Men refusing military service or refusing to fight against Algeria face repeated sentences since they are recalled to the forces on leaving prison.

Jean-Bernard Moreau's determined stand in 1949 when he was re-arrested on what was described as "the irrational and ridiculous charge of desertion," sparked a major campaign in France that is still being waged today.

The re-arrest inspired World Citizen Garry Davis to camp outside the Prison du Chechi-Midi and demand imprisonment along with Moreau; Abbé Pierre launched a nation-wide petition; 300 newspapers reported the case and Paris-Match gave three pages to Moreau.

Although today 125 French COs are in jail, those who have been in prison from between six and 13 years have been released, thanks to the spotlight turned on this denial of human rights in 1949.



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