ANTI-NAZI POLITICS IN RUSSELL'S HEARST COLUMNS

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To Ray Monk, who lists Bertrand Russell's second profession as that of journalist and before political campaigner,¹ the Hearst essays are his worst: “These slight and ephemeral pieces represent the nadir in Russell's writing career”, he claims, adding that “they rarely contained … any serious attempt to grapple with the topic under discussion”.²

Most, but not all, of the columns Russell wrote for the Hearst press in the early 1930s are gathered, under the editorship of former BRS board chairman Harry Ruja, in Mortals and Others: American Essays 1931 - 1935; Volumes I and II (Routledge, 2009). John G. Slater introduced the first volume, and Russell has published a lengthy index to this edition.³ Russell the essayist is a personal writer, and personal information and anecdotes disclosed by Russell are indexed thus: boyhood; and bag of rats; career(s); his Christmases at sea; and cigars; consolation in bits of knowledge; education; illness; in labourer's cottage; letters received; his personality; and politeness; his politics; in prison; his reading; and shame; and shyness; on Sierra Nevada, Andalusia; his Spanish; and sport; his title; his train stuck in a snowdrift; “without a sense of humour”; and his writing style.

The Hearst period, from July 1931 to April 1935, spans at least two volumes of the Collected Papers. The volume boundaries might be drawn at other points and spread the Hearst articles over three volumes, as their chronological context would may require. However, that is for their eventual volume editors to sort out.

How many Hearst columns are there? 156 actually appeared in the newspaper chain, Ruja printed 160 in his two volumes, and there are ten others whose text we have for a total of 170. How do we know there are ten others? Ruja omitted one, Patricia Spence lists⁴ seven more (although she deleted two that read just like the others), two appeared in another periodical and a tenth was published by Feinberg and Kasrils.⁵ There could be three more—they appear on Patricia Spence's list—but they are lost.⁶

The form of a typical Hearst article involves first grabbing the reader's attention by a homely example, and then using that to reflect on the disappointments and indeed

⁴ Russell Archives, box 3.45, file 220.015590.
⁶ Two of the three titles were “On Sociability” and “The Benefits of Persecution”. A probable third lost column is “The Minor Troubles of Feminists”. The published column “Dangers of Feminism” is concerned with switching the roles of address and masculine/feminine expectation.
misery of the age. But that's not all, if, unlike Monk, you read to the end to find what Clark called “the propaganda contained in the articles”. The favourite column of the denigrators is “Who May Use Lipstick?”. If women mustn't wear lipstick, they are pretending to be asexual and therefore don't reflect the real world. The real topic of this column is the kind of moral role that schoolteachers should have. As Slater states of this essay in his Introduction to Volume I, “No one will doubt that he has reached important matters here, although hardly anyone would have expected it when they read the title” (2009, p. 4). What else does Russell do in the Hearst columns to warrant Clark's statement?

We know a lot about the writing of the Hearst columns. We have dates of composition and manuscript variants; even a rejected copy-edited typescript of one is in the Russell Archives. (This is “On Marriage”, one of two that have never been printed. The other is “The Steel Age”. Both were obviously too radical for the Hearst chain.) We even know that Russell met with the Hearst representative, the publisher George H. Doran, on 12 and 19 June 1931, and then his own literary agent, Nancy Pearn of Curtis Brown, and that by 15 June Russell had written the first four columns. We also know about when his compensation per column was halved from a munificent $100 to $50, and that although he wouldn't accept William Randolph Hearst's invitation to stay in his California castle, he would go to see him when he was on the west coast.8

How can these short papers, so dismissed by Monk (despite his spending three pages on them), be relevant to other papers in 1931-35? Because the same author who was ending his teaching at Beacon Hill was all of a piece. His thinking was interconnected. He was going through the personal crisis evidenced in addenda pieces for the 1931 autobiography, the breakup of his marriage to Dora, and his liaison with Peter Spence with its ensuing bitter divorce proceedings. He had complex views on sexual relations; British politics; race and anti-semitism; the rise of Hitler; economics and the depression; a new interest in writing history; the rise of President F. D. Roosevelt; India; pacifism; and his analysis of the “revolt against reason”.

To challenge Monk's thesis I chose a test period of undoubted international political importance, the first weeks of Hitler's chancellorship of Germany in 1933. Hunting for Russell's initial response to the rise of Fascism has always interested me, for he did not write a book on the subject.9 Here's a little chronological detail:

30 January – Hitler is made chancellor in the Nazis' coalition with von Papen.
2 February – Political demonstrations are banned.
12 February – Bloody Sunday.
27 February – The Reichstag fire.
28 February – A Presidential decree gives Hitler emergency powers; he arrests 81 (or 100) Communist deputies.
5 March – New national elections: Nazis get a bare majority.
22 March – The Dachau concentration camp is established.

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8 Letter to Dora Russell, 3 Nov. 1931, Russell Archives.
23 March – The Enabling Act: the government may issue decrees.
3 May – Trade unions are suppressed.

In the midst of all this, 4 March 1933, was Roosevelt's inaugural address.

During 28 February to 18 April 1933, Russell wrote seven non-Hearst articles, of which one was a philosophical review. One of the remaining six is on the League of Nations, and one is concerned with the Moscow trials, just under way. A third, “This Way to Chaos”, refers to “the Nazi victory in Germany, secured by threats of wholesale pogroms and designed to prove that oratory is as satisfying as food.” The only extended treatment of the German situation in these non-Hearst articles is “Moral Indignation and the Nazis”. It is mainly concerned with a response that will be least injurious to the Nazis' victims, being mindful that the British and French treatment of Germany at Versailles and then of the Weimar Republic led directly to the Nazis.

There were also from Russell, at this time, letters to the editor on India and a BBC debate on public schools. Of the six articles, four were published in The Sunday Referee. Their style is very different from that of the Hearst articles. Two facts account for this: the Sunday Referee was semi-socialist and the Hearst chain conservative; and there was a delay of only two to twelve days for the publication of the Sunday Referee articles, whereas it then took eight weeks for the Hearst columns to appear. The latter had to be written so that they were less dependent upon the immediate news than articles published in Britain.

During the same period, 28 February to 14 April 1933, Russell wrote eight Hearst articles, an average of one per week. They were published from 26 April to 14 June, and all are in Mortals and Others, Volume II. I have applied a rating scheme to all of the Hearst articles:

- non-political and non-economic;
- political or economic;
- very political or economic.

Some 92 of the 170 articles are political, economic, educational or on marriage. Of the eight from 1933, four were not political (although we do find minor references to “friends of peace” and “dread of the future”), three were political, and one was very political.

Of the four political articles, one (written 28 February) concerns itself with the problems of minorities in a democracy; one (7 March) with the worship of strength ranging from Carlyle, Nietzsche and Lawrence to the “law-breaking” German chancellor; and one (28 March) on racial problems of Jews, Negroes, recent events in Germany, and economics as the basis of racial fear. This sequence of articles is unusual for not including an extended discussion of economics, contrary to Russell's interests at the time.

The fourth, very political paper, written on 14 March 1933 and after the German elections, was titled by Russell “The Triumph of Stupidity”. He begins: “What has been happening in Germany is a matter of the gravest portent for the whole civilized world”
The “brutal” and “stupid” sectors of Germany have subjugated the “intelligent” and “humane” parts of the nation. This could happen elsewhere, e.g. in Britain with the British fascists—and Britain, Russell maintained, was already fascistic in India. These are his particulars. True to his form, he swings now to the general. He remarks on the world since 1914, in the now famous quotation, that “the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt”, unlike the time of the Philosophical Radicals’ reflection that comes from his current research for Freedom and Organization. Intelligence needs moral fervour. Finally he brings it home to his audience of Americans, who form the “brightest spot” in the world and whose democracy may be “destined once more to save Europe from its excesses”.

This is why I conclude that Monk, who spends most of his Hearst pages attacking Ruja’s praise of Russell, is exactly wrong about the nature of these perfect little papers, whose artistry in 700 words shows itself on a thorough reading. The ideal way to study them, however, is in the context of the other political, economic, educational and marriage papers of 1931–35. Russell once remarked to me about another publication: “It’s good to have had one in against the Nazis.” He had plenty in his role of political advocate in the Hearst newspapers.

Russell at an Anti-Nuclear Demonstration