

ESHS, 7th International Conference, Prague, September 2016

Panel: *Pugwash and the communism question: Perceptions and Realities*

Convenors: Drs. Alison Kraft/Geoffrey Roberts

Abstract

Into the present the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs ('Pugwash'; founded in 1955/57) are based on the idea that the language of science would be the ideal medium to overcome political antagonisms. Arising from the Russell-Einstein Manifesto of July 1955, Pugwash sought to bring together scientists from across the east-west divide, and from the non-aligned countries, to confront the dangers of nuclear weapons. Seeking to become a 'strong force for peace', its stated aims were: to influence governments, to form a channel of communication between scientists, and to educate public opinion. By the 1960s, it was serving as an unofficial 'back channel' for east-west communication and valued as a site for 'second track' diplomacy. However, from the outset, Pugwash was perceived by governments in the west as a 'communist front', while Eastern governments, especially Moscow, saw in Pugwash opportunities to further their claims to leadership in the Cold War choreography of peace initiatives. This panel seeks to consider the different and shifting components of Western perceptions of Pugwash as communism's fifth column, to examine how and why this view came about, and to explore its consequences for the development of Pugwash in different national settings. To what extent can the charges of communist leanings and sympathies levelled at Pugwash be seen as anti-communist propaganda? Alternatively, the reality that many senior figures involved in creating and leading Pugwash had connections to leftist and communist organizations, begs questions about the extent and nature of its political character, salience and agenda. Was there any basis for the criticisms of Pugwash as another strategy of communist infiltration? Surviving beyond difficult and tentative beginnings, Pugwash forged a novel role as a channel of communication between east and west during the Cold War. By the mid-1960s it had become a nodal point in second track diplomacy as well as in transnational networks of scientists, each of whom stood in different relation to political power in very different national settings. As such, Pugwash affords a rich site in which to explore the experience of scientists operating at the interface between science and politics, and for analysing the problems of science and power, and science as power. [366]

Panelists/Papers

Dr. Gordon Barrett

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'Simple Scholars or State Agents? Scientists and Chinese Relations with the Pugwash Conferences, 1960-1985.'

Abstract

Mao-era Chinese foreign policymakers were never fully sold on the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. Theoretical physicist Zhou Peiyuan had their blessing to attend four conferences between 1957 and 1960, but for the following twenty-five years policymakers in Beijing articulated official positions on Pugwash ranging from ambivalence to outright hostility. This shift emerged out of discussions between science and foreign affairs officials, focusing on the issue question of weighing the effectiveness of participation in Pugwash as a means to increase the reputation and widen the influence of the People's Republic of China. After abandoning the conferences, Chinese scientists' international

activities instead centred on alternative forums for reaching out to foreign activist scientists, such as through participation in the World Federation of Scientific Workers. Nevertheless, this was far from the end of Chinese relations with Pugwash. Through their other international activities, PRC-based scientists continued to maintain contact with foreign scientists still involved in the conferences. Pugwash networks proved remarkably durable in the intervening years, resulting in China's formal reengagement with the conferences by 1985. This paper deconstructs the underlying factors for this trajectory of relations, situating Chinese scientists as actors in both structures of power, both domestic and international. Chinese Communist Party officials sought to use these scientists as proxies and propagandists to recruit 'foreign friends' and conduct international 'united front' work in order to circumvent the country's diplomatic isolation and improve its international position. In doing so, these officials empowered a small cohort of prominent, foreign-trained, and cosmopolitan scientists to act as high-level interlocutors linking the PRC's political elite with transnational epistemic communities. Through examining the Chinese case, this paper therefore also situates the Pugwash Conferences within this wider context of organisations and networks involving activist scientists from across the Cold War blocs.

Michaela Kůželová and Doubravka Olšáková

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'East-European Scientists for Peace: Scientists and mass media campaign for peace.'

Abstract

The Soviet Union and the countries of the Eastern bloc saw their fight against non-Communist countries as a "struggle for peace" and consequently appropriated notions of themselves as being "fighters for peace," which became an integral part of their Cold War rhetoric until 1989. At an international level, the new regime's ideological ambitions were promoted by the Cominform and resulted in the creation of the World Peace Council. The organisation was born in Poland as a child of the Cominform. The idea took hold at a September 1947 meeting in Szklarska Poreba. The creation of the World Peace Council was a result of an expansive international policy of the Cominform. During the 1950s, the WPC gained wide support all across Europe. More than 273,000,000 persons signed the Stockholm Appeal initiated by Frédéric Joliot-Curie and realised by the World Peace Council in March 1950. An important element that later contributed to the decline of the WPC was also the fact that the WPC and its leaders acting under the supervision of the Soviet Union did not sufficiently appreciate the threat their movement faced in 1955 when the Pugwash movement was born. Some communist countries even went on to promote the Pugwash initiative and disseminated information about it through their mass media. For example Czechoslovak Communist leaders found it necessary to present the Pugwash movement to the citizens and to explain it in more detail, and that is where the mass media played a crucial role. And yet, though it may seem that the origins of the Pugwash movement are well-known and there is no space there for any alternative interpretation, the Czechoslovak media managed just that. The official history of the Pugwash movement significantly differs from its history as it was presented in Czechoslovakia. So for example, in 1964 an article linked the origins of the Pugwash movement mainly with Professor Joliot-Curie, who was better known to the Czechoslovak society than other founders. Also in other texts, and they are not few in number, Frédéric Joliot-Curie is referred to as the main initiator and founder of the movement, and only later there appears some remark on Bertrand Russell's and Albert Einstein's contribution. In Poland, on the other hand, one would look for any note of Joliot-Curie's role in vain; there, credit was given mainly to Bertrand Russell. This shift in perception reflected the confusing situation and the inability of the mass media and people to

distinguish between the two types of movement. The existing Soviet monopoly over the peace ideology led to the – erroneous – perception that the Pugwash movement joined the World Peace Council. The proposed paper traces the various modifications of their (self)-presentation in mass media and focuses on the role of East European scientists in the peace movement(s) and the extent to which they shaped its structure and character during the 1960s. Not only the leading figures of international science but even ‘local’ representatives of East European states were presented as ‘ambassadors of peace and science’, thus becoming an important part of the communist campaign.

Professor Geoffrey Roberts
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‘Frédéric Joliot-Curie, the Struggle for Peace and the Pugwash Movement’.

Abstract

The communist-led peace movement of the 1940s and 1950s was an important bridge to the Pugwash movement. The movement’s campaigns for peace, disarmament and arms control helped bring together Soviet and Western scientists. A key figure was Frédéric Joliot-Curie, a renowned scientist and scientific administrator, who was President of the World Peace Council. Joliot-Curie promoted the independence of the peace movement and warned of an existential nuclear threat to humanity that demanded common action across the cold war divide. In July 1955 Joliot-Curie signed the Russell-Einstein manifesto and it was his lobbying for an international conference of scientists to discuss the nuclear danger that eventually led to the first Pugwash meetings. Often depicted as a Soviet stooge, Joliot-Curie was, in fact, quite an independent figure, more intent on lobbying the Soviets on peace and disarmament issues than penetrating or subverting the west with communist propaganda. For Frédéric Joliot-Curie the dialogue and collaboration among scientists that became Pugwash was far more than a mere propaganda exercise. Based on Russian archives, this paper will explore the paradox of a pro-Soviet peace movement led by a prominent communist scientist that struggled to loosen its ties to Moscow and to engage with independent initiatives like Pugwash that sought to transcend the cold war and create an anti-nuclear infrastructure of science that would help avert the threat of Armageddon.

Paul Rubinson
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‘American Scientists in “Communist Conclaves”’: Pugwash and Anti-communism in the United States.’

Abstract

In the United States, the Red Scare of the early 1950s muted opposition to nuclear weapons. But during the late 1950s, fears of nuclear fallout reignited antinuclear opinion. Amid this revival, Pugwash occupied an important niche, linking antinuclear scientists with government policymakers. This influence allowed Pugwash to play a tremendous role in bringing scientific expertise to bear on the problem of nuclear tests. But although the Red Scare had ended, anticommunist politicians continued to use Red Scare tactics to smear scientists as communists and stifle efforts at arms control. Most notably, in 1960 Senator Thomas Dodd issued a report that denounced the Pugwash conferences as “communist conclaves” and U.S. Pugwash scientists as unwitting dupes of the Soviets. Dodd’s report surprisingly had little immediate effect. As the Kennedy administration entered office in 1961, Pugwash played an

even more active role and worked to help bring about the 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. But just as quickly, Pugwash fell from favor when Lyndon Johnson became president. Johnson notoriously feared domestic anticommunism and criticism from Senator Dodd, and quickly cut off connections between scientists and the government with the result that Pugwash increasingly struggled to influence U.S. policy. Having marginalized Pugwash in the United States, government officials even encouraged their British counterparts to do the same. This hostility from western governments weakened Pugwash at a time when the group's existence was already tenuous. The U.S. government's efforts to distance itself from Pugwash was never about actual communist influence among scientists, but rather reflected a desire to silence opponents of the arms race. This analysis of U.S. Pugwash shows how scientists maneuvered in the power dynamic between science and the state, as well as the suppression of dissent in an ostensibly democratic nation.

Dr. Carola Sachse

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'Sustained Ambivalence: The Max Planck Society and Pugwash 1955-1989.'

Abstract

When the Federation of German Scientists (VDW) was founded as the West German section of Pugwash in the late 1950s, several high-profile scientists from the Max Planck Society (MPS), especially nuclear physicists, were involved. Well into the 1980s, institutional links existed between the MPS, the Federal Republic's most distinguished scientific research institution, and Pugwash, the transnational peace activist network that was set up in 1957 in the eponymous Nova Scotia village following the Russell-Einstein Manifesto. In the beginning, the two organisations' relationship was maintained primarily by the physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker. However, it was difficult right from the start, and the distance between them grew during the rise of détente in the 1970s, when the scientific flagship MPS was deployed more and more frequently in matters of foreign cultural policy, not only for the FRG but for the western alliance as a whole. This contribution explores the resources and the risks of transnational political engagement – not only as the individual strategies of top-ranking researchers, but also in terms of policy deliberations within a leading scientific organization at one of the Cold War's sharpest divisions: the front line between two Germanies.