



CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

Introduction by The Rt Hon the Lord Howe of Aberavon,
CH, KT, PC, QC

Reverend Phillip Jun Buck

2007

The names of those, who have been selected for this unique award, do indeed create a distinguished Roll of Honour — and none more so than tonight's outstanding honoree, The Reverend Phillip Buck. So too it is a great privilege to have been invited to speak at this, the eighth, Civil Courage Prize Day. For me, I have to confess, it is a slightly daunting distinction. For it is, I think, the first time you have chosen a speaker, who has himself been a member of one of the governments under whose jurisdiction one of your honorees has suffered. I have in mind, of course, one of your early Award winners, recognised posthumously, Dr Rosemary Nelson, a Roman Catholic lawyer, who did indeed display outstanding bravery — simply doing her job of defending accused persons in Northern Ireland. She was killed, alas, by a Protestant para-military car bomb outside her own home.

The most distinctive feature of this Award — for civil not military courage — is that that courage should have been sustained *steadfastly and over time*. Bravery displayed — in other words — in challenging a long-standing, ongoing evil. So, as Justice Richard Goldstone pointed out in his address (some five years ago), your Award does much more than simply recognise the individual's outstanding bravery. For it also draws attention not only to the suffering and injustice, which the honoree has striven to avert, but also makes very clear the principles at stake.

Against that background and as you approach the end of your first decade, I hope I may be forgiven for considering one aspect of what some might call your track record — namely the extent to which the courage of your award winners may have played a part in quelling the conflict, in course of which they won your recognition?

The first example that springs immediately to mind — strictly before *your* beginning of time — is South Africa, which I regard as one of yours in a way, because Nelson Mandela so often features in your analysis, and rightly so — almost indeed as one of your patron saints.

Then, very evidently, Sierra Leone — where one of your own honorees, Paul Kamara, would recently have been witnessing, with some satisfaction no doubt, a free and fair election in a stable society. And, of course, Northern Ireland itself — where Rosemary Nelson (had she been allowed to survive) would surely have rubbed her eyes with disbelief — and then rejoiced — at the sight of Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness setting out to govern the Province in joint harness together.

And, perhaps most significantly of all, (at least at first sight) — though already, alas, it begins to look like ancient history — the former Soviet Union — the brutally monolithic monster state, in which Solzhenitsyn and Khodorovich (one of your first honorees) amongst so many others, had struggled for so long. And which today's Award winner, The Reverend Phillip Buck, sees as the first half of the bloc of Communist tyranny, with which he himself has struggled so tenaciously.

One cannot, of course, conceal that Russia today seems once again to be heading in the wrong direction. There could, I fear, well be a growing list of Russian candidates for the Train Civil Courage Award.

But let me leave that future aside — and ask, instead, just two broad-ranging questions. First, what and who were the institutions or individuals that may have helped to secure human headway in some of the favourably transformed societies, which I have mentioned? And what, if any, lessons can be learned from their experience, which may help us to tackle some of the continuing "conflicts" from which some of your other Award winners have been drawn?

The most important lesson, perhaps, is that in several cases it had been possible (generally, only after prolonged effort) to construct a framework — most usefully, a multinational one — for continuing contact between the combatants. And then to make good use of that framework. The Soviet example, rather surprisingly, is one of the clearest. The initial hostility of the atmosphere there was probably defined by Ronald Reagan's denunciation of "the evil empire" — and amplified by Konstantyn Chernenko's response when he asked me (during a meeting with him in July 1984) to "tell Uncle Sam to stop pointing his nuclear pistol at my head."

It was George Shultz, I am glad to say, who took the lead in moving us away from that kind of "megaphone diplomacy." By contrast, we were able to make use of the transatlantic structure, established by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Conference on Security and Confidence in Europe (CSCE), which gave us the right (and the opportunity) to raise directly with the Soviet Union questions about their total disregard for human rights. And we began, and continued, to do so regularly.

I remember all too clearly Andrei Gromyko's predictable response. The first time I sought to raise with him the question of human rights, he retorted very bluntly, "You are lowering the tone of our conversation." The next time, he deliberately ignored the topic altogether. And, finally, at the end of a not exactly fruitful working lunch (here in New York, as it happens,) when I raised the name of Sakharov (one of the most celebrated victims) just when coffee was being poured — he responded simply by snorting "Sakharov — that's the Russian for sugar. I don't take sugar in my coffee."

There was, however, one thing that even Gromyko could not do. He couldn't refuse the letter which I handed to him in Moscow in July 1984 for delivery — from the Chairman of our parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee to his then opposite number in the Soviet Duma, whom we had identified as Chernenko's most likely successor — none other than the then little-known Mikhail Gorbachev. And so we learn the second fundamental lesson — the crucial importance of personality and leadership.

For there can be no doubt about the decisive, impact of Gorbachev's leadership upon the duration of the long-running Cold War.

Within six months of receiving that invitation and just three months before he did succeed Chernenko at the Kremlin, Gorbachev was making his first visit to Britain — and at an after-lunch Sunday meeting at

Chequers, our Prime Minister's country residence. I remember well the sparkling chemistry of that first meeting, which led Margaret Thatcher to conclude that she had indeed encountered "a man with whom we could do business." And the rest is history.

So, we see the importance of that second conclusion — that if any framework for negotiation is to lead to success (and the framework itself is an essential), it requires the inspiration and input of personalities, who are determined to make it succeed. The final irony is that — in virtually every case one can think of — the simultaneous availability of the necessary personalities is — almost by definition — a matter of luck.

So too it was, for example, in South Africa. Could Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and others on the non-violent side of the African National Congress have achieved anything had it not been for the emergence, as P W Botha's successor, of President F W de Klerk — with his huge matching instinct for conciliation and courageous leadership?

Likewise in Ireland. I would not dream of wearying you by trying to recall all the milestones and personalities involved on both sides of the Anglo-Irish peace process, through no less than six successive British Prime Ministers from Edward Heath to Tony Blair (along with almost as many Taoiseachs) — and more than forty years of my own political lifetime. It was only in 1981 that the necessary framework, the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, was set up, by Garret FitzGerald and Margaret Thatcher, (with room for crucial third party assistance — for example, most notably, by Senator George Mitchell). Beyond that, I feel that I have to emphasise the high degree of real courage displayed — certainly not just on one side alone — by those leaders, who had to face the risks involved in exploring the possibility of negotiation — with partners of people, who were, even at that very moment, deploying violence or terrorism in support of their cause.

It is worth recalling that my wife, Elspeth, and I were both in the Grand Hotel, Brighton (attending the Conservative Party Conference in October 1984), when the IRA bomb exploded which killed a number of our colleagues, narrowly missing both our bedroom and that of Margaret Thatcher. That was at three o'clock in the morning. But it wasn't allowed to stop the Conference reconvening, under Margaret Thatcher's leadership, just six and a half hours later, to commence our planned debate on continuing the process of negotiation in search of an agreement in Ireland.

It is just as difficult for those, who must be accurately described as "on the same side as" the terrorists, people who were struggling — as, for example, Oliver Tambo was for South Africa or as John Hume was in Northern Ireland — who were, nevertheless, striving their hardest to bring such violence to an end. By their very act of pressing the case for negotiation rather than for violence, they ran the risk, and sometimes paid the price, of themselves being victimised.

This is indeed all too sharply illustrated by the tragic story of Rosemary Nelson herself. And, with coincidental irony, I have to tell you that the Tribunal of Inquiry, appointed long ago to investigate all the circumstances surrounding her death, only this very morning held its first day's public hearing on the case.

Let me mention just one other (mercifully less ill-fated) example of courage on the part of a non-militant supporter of a fiercely militant cause. I have in mind the case of John Hume — Catholic, Irish nationalist, life-long leader of the Social Democratic Labour Party — who, nevertheless, consistently deplored

violence. At a time, in 1981, when ten IRA activists — themselves then serving sentences for crimes of violence — starved themselves to death (the so-called "H-block hunger strikers"). John Hume bravely condemned their action ("A hunger strike," he said, "is violence directed at the self"). And subsequently, at a small, politically inclusive event at which I was present, John Hume was himself again brave enough to commend the matching courage of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (and Minister in charge of the Province), Humphrey Atkins, for refusing to be moved by these suicidal protests.

I hope I have not strayed too far from the kind of good cause, which has been promoted, or the kind of challenge that has been resisted, with such tenacious bravery by tonight's Award winner. Nothing could be further from my mind. Of course, I have, like everybody else here tonight, huge respect for his courage as well as his cause. I seek only — and I close on this note — to promote the view that the successful management (and still more the settlement) of any sustained conflict — whether conflict between nations, conflict between cultures, conflict between communities, whether between oppressor and oppressed, between insurgent and establishment, between belligerents of any kind — is as likely to call (as much from one side as from the other) for tenacity and courage as well as insight. As the late President Kennedy said in his book, *Profiles in Courage*: "Some demonstrated courage through their unyielding devotion to absolute principle. Others demonstrated courage through their acceptance of compromise, through their advocacy of conciliation, through their willingness to replace conflict with co-operation. Surely their courage was of equal quality, though of different calibre."

The Civil Courage Prize, which we are here to celebrate tonight, has the distinction of requiring and honouring courage not just of one but of all those kinds, along with a willingness to suffer — and this is the most exceptional feature of the Train Award — to suffer "at great personal risk, steadfastly and over time." It is a great privilege for all of us to be able now to recognise and pay tribute to the outstanding courage of that quality, so manifestly displayed by this year's Award winner, The Reverend Phillip Buck.