

William L. Holland and the IPR in Historical Perspective

John K. Fairbank

HISTORICAL EVALUATION of one's contemporaries is always very difficult. The acknowledged giants in any field are usually deceased. One sometimes doubts if they could have seemed so gigantic in real life. Nevertheless individuals play historical roles, not always by their own choice, but rather by meeting the needs and opportunities of time and place.

The Institute of Pacific Relations played an easily identifiable historic role in the second quarter of the century, precisely from its founding in 1925 until the McCarran Committee's campaign against it in 1951 and after. This was the period mainly between the wars and then through World War II, an era when both the necessities of warfare and then the effort to ensure the peace served to advance the integration of the international society. The third quarter of the century since World War II has seen continued efforts along these lines, both to pursue warfare in the alleged interest of international stability or justice and at the same time to avoid nuclear holocaust. No doubt the fourth quarter of the 20th century will see greater achievements in world integration, made necessary by the harsh realities of future disasters.

In this worldwide process the IPR in its day stood almost alone as the protagonist of international integration in the Pacific area. The term "Pacific" was loosely used, inasmuch as the west coast of South America did not really participate—but then, it hardly does so today. The Pacific, in the IPR sense, was not much different from the Far East in the terminology of the time—in other words, East Asia, where the interests of the United States and Canada looked westward across the Pacific just as those of the colonial powers of Western Europe, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal, looked eastward to their last outposts. Similarly, British India, Australia and New Zealand impinged on the area from the south, while the Soviet Union did so from the north. Today this region is becoming the economic and industrial center of the world community, with the prospect of

Pacific Affairs

displacing Europe in that role; but fifty years ago it was the locus of Japan's imperial military expansion and the Chinese domestic revolution. By addressing itself to the problems of this "Pacific" area the IPR was putting into practice the assumption that had been made by so many visionaries in the West—that the modern world would find a new center in the Far East.

The IPR success story began with the fact that the Atlantic community remained profoundly culture-bound in spite of its imperial and colonial connections with the Far East. The Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House, at the center of the British empire, was naturally capable of encompassing the Pacific within its horizon of research and discussion, and the similar Institutes of International Affairs in the British commonwealth—Canada, Australia, New Zealand—were able to do the same. In the United States, however, the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, though it was the counterpart of Chatham House, was so absorbed in the aftermath of World War I and so Eurocentric in the tradition of the American eastern seaboard, that it proved quite incapable of lifting its sights to the far Pacific. The vision of the IPR founders was to rectify this imbalance, and when E. C. Carter moved the IPR headquarters from Honolulu to New York City and put together the international organization, he was moving into a waiting vacuum.

The joint efforts of Carter and William L. Holland will have to be unscrambled by study of the record. Their differences in age and background made them a natural combination—an older man with experience in the YMCA in India and a genius for proselytizing among men and women of affairs, combined with a younger man from New Zealand with a degree in economics who proved a genius at operating one of the first multinational intellectual enterprises to be founded on a non-religious basis.

The first operating principle of the IPR was that the world was round, as has since been proved. There was also an assumption that imperialism might be a fact and colonialism at least did exist, along with nationalisms that might well lead to conflict and rebellion.

Another and very basic operating principle was that democratic policy formulation required the input not only of leaders of opinion (and after 1941 of government officials) but also of businessmen and scholars, two groups of people who did not usually know each other. The notion that these three types of people could gather as individuals and have free discussions of national policy problems was a tremendously exciting innovation in the 1920s. The present multiplicity

William L. Holland and the IPR

of think-tanks, university-based research centers, and conferences housed in ancient homes no longer privately supportable, no doubt makes us all very blasé about meetings of scholars and others from various countries to discuss common international questions. In the 1920s, however, this formula ushered in a new view of the world and created a new type of institution. The triennial IPR conferences were important events, peopled with leading personalities and charged with excitement. Foreign offices, corporations, and the press took them seriously, and participants were often profoundly influenced by the experience. Unlike the usually specialized and narrowly focussed conferences of today, the IPR meetings ranged all across the human scene to include the basic factors in welfare, war, and peace.

The conferences required careful planning far ahead, a representation of national interests in the agenda, research papers to provide a common body of information, astute selection of persons to invite, and a great deal more than can be imagined, nearly all of which had to be first negotiated and then financed. The enterprise was a great deal more complex and delicate than organizing the program for a learned society's annual meeting. There was no captive audience, and no avoidance of responsibility for stupid papers of the sort by which importunate members of a learned society are entitled to destroy themselves. The whole conference was an event to be created, and Bill Holland was chiefly responsible not only for the logistics but also for ensuring that the discussions made sense and would be worth reporting.

Before the Pacific War, as the Japanese called it, the safest starting point for multinational policy discussions was economics rather than politics. But economics led on from trade flows to living standards, balance of payments and foreign policy. A country's delegation could get its points across, both on the record and in private conversations. Most important was the opportunity for individuals to put forward minority or unpopular views. Many responsible people were usually present, but the occasion was private and unofficial, so no one had to take umbrage, denounce or counterattack—though some did.

Bill Holland and the IPR kept the conference spirit of free discussion alive in the pages of *Pacific Affairs*. When the McCarran Committee witch hunt in 1951-52 found the IPR files a bonanza for evidence of "guilt by association" (we all knew each other in the China field in those days), it is noteworthy that they did not list Bill Holland among the "hard inner core" (of what, unspecified) that had "lost" China. I think the reason lay not in their recognition of honest virtue,

Pacific Affairs

of which they were poor judges, but rather in the fact that Bill stands forth in the IPR correspondence as a truly devoted facilitator of free international discussion, never grinding an axe himself but getting others on all sides to sharpen their instruments.

His greatest contribution was in publication, by which I mean the whole process of conceiving and defining the subject for a book or article, finding a researcher-writer, getting him financed, editing his product and getting it into print. In the 1930s and '40s a great part of the literature available in English on contemporary East Asia was produced in this way under Bill's inspiration and supervision.

In short, the IPR in its day must be seen as an institutional forerunner not only of the many conferences now regularly held by conference centers, learned societies, and other institutes and groups, but also of the many research centers, university presses, and publishing houses which are putting out the modern flow of scholarly and analytic literature on East Asia and East-West relations. I do not mean to suggest that Bill Holland invented the modern world, merely that he helped its intellectual integration. For this he had qualities of imagination, humility, evenhanded administration, critical appreciation of scholarship, and devotion to the task that all contributed to his effectiveness. We are all indebted to him accordingly.

Harvard University, U.S.A., August 1979