

In Memoriam: John Erickson (1929-2002)

by Mark Burdman

In October and December of last year, my colleague Michael Liebig and I had the honor of meeting Prof. John Erickson in Edinburgh, for two extended discussions. The density and intensity of these discussions was, for both of us, awesome. The range of themes was enormous.

Among those, was his constant stress, conveyed to us as an impassioned plea, that informed people in the West, have got to take the ideas of Russian military planners seriously, and reject the opportunism and linear thinking so characteristic of “Kremlinology.” Another theme that was striking, was his view of the events of Sept. 11. He was one of those rare individuals who had a real comprehension of what had happened on that date. He would frequently shake his head and say, “Someone shut down the system; they just down the system!” He was sure that an “inside job” was involved, that the “Osama bin Laden did it” line was a crude myth concocted to draw attention away from reality, and that the events of Sept. 11 were a decisive moment, in a “vast geostrategic re-configuration” that was taking place in the world.

Perhaps most startling, were his insights into the famous telephone discussion on Sept. 11, between Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and George W. Bush of the United States. Erickson was one of the few people in the world with intimate knowledge of the nuclear command-and-control systems in both the United States and Russia, and was intimately aware of how sensitive and intricate such matters are, of how close the world could have been, that day, to an unimaginable strategic disaster, had the coup-in-process succeeded, and had such an unusual phone discussion not taken place.

I now grasp what an extraordinary privilege it was to have had such discussions with him. They were among the last in-depth discussions that he would have. On Feb. 12, we learned with immense sadness that on Feb. 10, Professor Erickson died in Edinburgh.

When meeting him, we were aware that he was struggling against monstrous health problems; he had nearly died over the 1999-2000 New Year.

We were also aware to what an extent, he was driven by a sense of *mission*: He would not “abandon the ship,” at his office at the Department of Defense Studies, at the University of Edinburgh. He knew that he was indispensable for making correct judgments and estimates on sensitive matters pertaining to Russia, and on other issues which are of great relevance to the future of humanity.

Making his sense of mission more urgent, was his justifi-

able alarm, that the generation of experts coming after him and others of the “World War II veteran generation,” is, to a very significant extent, *systemically incapable of thinking*.

One of his latter-day activities, he told us proudly, was an initiative to reactivate older academics and others who were languishing in retirement. His conviction was that these are the people who are now indispensable, for regenerating our corrupted society.

A Commitment To Truth

I think of John Erickson’s life and work on two levels. Most important, to me, was his ruthless integrity and commitment to *truth*, his refusal to compromise with cheap-shot fads. His student Christopher Bellamy summed up it in his Feb. 12 tribute to Erickson in the London *Guardian*: “John had little time for performance criteria, men in suits, political correctness, spin, or form over substance. . . . He once said that ‘good scholarship is good morality.’ ”

Having spoken to Erickson at least 200 times over more than two decades, I remember many occasions in which he lashed out at the recklessness, foolishness, and ignorance in much of what passes for “strategic thinking” in the Anglo-American realm, and in the policy of governments, particularly the British and American governments, today.

The other reality, is that over an academic career of close to 50 years, John Erickson became the leading Western expert on Soviet, and later, Russian military strategy. But his was not just an academic interest. With his in-depth knowledge of the Russian language and history, Erickson had, as Bellamy writes, “a unique insight into the heart, mind, and soul” of both Soviet Russia, and the nation of Russia that has succeeded it. He interpreted the Russians not only for the West, but most interestingly, often for the Russians themselves!

As several among the Feb. 12 obituaries document, and as various people, including Erickson himself, confirmed to me, he was perhaps the only Western academic/strategic interlocutor whom the Soviet military command *trusted*. The reason was not only his expertise in military engineering and his preference for seeing reality through the eyes of an engineer rather than, as he sneered, “a Kremlinologist.” More than this, they saw in him an honesty and integrity, and a commitment to tell the truth—even if that meant, on occasion, telling the Russians what mistakes they had made, or were making. They also knew Erickson to be somebody who absolutely rejected the nostrums of simplistic Cold War



Professor John Erickson of Edinburgh, Scotland passed away on Feb. 10. He was an internationally known authority on East-West military affairs, and an intellectual collaborator, in recent years, of Lyndon LaRouche.

thinking, and who hated the easily bandied-about stereotypes.

The ‘Edinburgh Conversations’

Hence, in the 1980s, when Western institutions, virtually across-the-board, cut ties to the Soviets, in reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (which, itself, was in large part provoked by U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and his Anglo-American cohorts), he established his “Edinburgh Conversations,” as a meeting point between the Soviets and Western interlocutors. There were many in the Pentagon who seized the opportunity to meet their Soviet counterparts there.

Erickson trained many individuals who went on to assume senior posts in the U.S. military structure. Bellamy writes that Erickson “was more valued abroad, particularly by the two superpowers, than in his native Britain—a prophet with less honor than he deserved in his own country.”

It is only a slight exaggeration, to say that Erickson’s efforts were significantly responsible for preventing U.S.-Soviet relations from “going over the edge” at various points in the 1980s. As he told Michael Liebig and myself, he was very pleased with the manner in which Lyndon LaRouche conceived of the development of ballistic missile defense in the 1980s, *as a cooperative U.S.-Soviet venture*, because this helped outflank those maniacs in the United States, Britain, and elsewhere, who were using the Strategic Defense Initiative as a war measure against the Soviet Union. This helped calm down a Soviet mood that, he assured us from inside knowledge, was often “paranoid and unpredictable.”

Because they knew they could trust him, and because he was honest, frank, and candid with them, some dozen Soviet marshals who were still alive in the 1960s and 1970s, had long discussions with him. These included Marshals Rokossovsky, Sokolovsky, and Zhukov. Such talks provided many of the insights for two of Erickson’s books—*The Road to Stalingrad* (1975) and *The Road to Berlin* (1983), accounts of the courage and sacrifice of the Soviet armed forces in their combats with the German armies—that have become classics about World War II.

Erickson also knew German, was fully versed in German-language sources, had fruitful discussions with individuals who had been involved in planning and directing the war against the Soviet Union, and had respect and compassion for the courage, dedication, and patriotism of many who fought on the German side, even if he detested Adolf Hitler and Nazi brutality, and had an intense opposition to fascism, in all its forms.

The passion with which Erickson took to heart the awesomeness of the combats and horrors of the Second World War, and his special approach on such matters, is evident in his contribution to the 1994 book that he co-edited, *Barbarossa: The Axis and the Allies*, a series of essays on the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union (“Operation Barbarossa”) that began in June 1941. His essay, “Soviet War Losses: Calculations and Controversies,” is a painstaking review of primarily Russian-language, and secondarily German-language studies, of exactly how many Soviet citizens died in the Second World War.

In the essay, Erickson frequently reminded his readers,

On the Passing of John Erickson

by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.

February 12, 2002

I never actually met John Erickson, but I had good reason to consider him a personal friend, and a strategic thinker of distinction. Most important, I miss him very much.

The news of his passing, on February 10th, was relayed to me, in documentation sent by a fax transmitted, from my collaborator, Mark Burdman, who had become a frequent conversation-partner of John Erickson's. The fax was sent from Germany, at 11:00 h Central European Time. I happened to have been awake, working through my overnight communications received, when the fax was delivered to me here in the U.S.A.

I thought it appropriate to react immediately, while the first impressions of the moment were fresh.

The John Erickson I came to know during recent years, typifies a certain array of what I distinguish from ordinary acquaintances, as conceptual thinkers, persons who approach strategic and related matters of political life, with the same tone of mental voice as civilization's best Classical artists and scientists of past and present. My life is enriched by those who think in such tones; these are persons, whether from ancient past or present, who express

what the poet Shelley identified as the power of imparting and receiving profound and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. We prefer to share the delight of simply doing good, for its own sake, with persons of like commitment to that quality of experience. We act accordingly.

Such persons are, for us, immortal. Whether they are great minds from past history, or contemporaries, they live within us, as Raphael Sanzio depicted the figures, including himself, of his "The School of Athens." The ongoing dialogue of such figures, within my memory, is the convention of my conscience, a body dwelling in the simultaneity of eternity, before whose supernal eyes I must make no act of commission or omission of which I need be ashamed before eternity past, or yet to come.

This more durable quality of social relationship, corresponds to the nature of my relationship with John Erickson. Our communications were primarily conceptual, shared ideas respecting the currently ongoing turn in a moment of a continuing historical process. Over the years we were in frequent contact on such matters, it became clear that the intended ideas got across. Now, John reposes in my conscience, and is for me, as much a living person still as he ever was before. My memory of him, is a vivid one, as our mutual associates can attest.

Under the circumstances in which we both lived, I came to have some sense of John's wife as an active factor in my relationship to him; their children, unfortunately, I never knew, but I shall not forget them now that I know of them from the circumstances of the present awesome moment.

that he was hardly engaging in an exercise in dry numerical analysis and disputations, but that the calculations, adding up to the conclusion that probably *48 million* Soviet individuals died in World War II, dramatically underscore the grim reality of what the Soviet-German combats were about. In classical Erickson fashion, his concluding words read: "The compilation of loss can be made to mean everything and nothing. It should above all commemorate the memory of the individual as well as the scale of the national sacrifice. It is for these reasons that the proposed Russian national Book of Remembrance, *Kniga pamyati*, should be properly conceived and scrupulously, generously executed, vast and reverential in its embrace."

A Poet

I don't know if John Erickson would be embarrassed or pleased to know, that he often struck me more as a poet in the way he metaphorically shaped ideas and concepts, than as the engineering-minded military strategist that he was "profes-

sionally."

There were certain things that aroused strong emotions in him. One was the moral turpitude, corruption, and insane economic policies of officialdom in Great Britain. Another was the maneuverings and manipulations of those in Britain and the United States whom he denounced as "geopolitical madmen." On some occasions, he would state with regret, that this or that person in the latter category were former students of his. "That one went rotten," he would say, in a distraught tone of voice.

He was also distressed by the manipulations of MI6, the British foreign intelligence service, and others of the British (or American) secret services. In its Feb. 6, 1998 issue, *EIR* quoted Erickson, that the "Monica Lewinsky affair" was a "very carefully orchestrated . . . destabilization," that had been "built up and organized, systematically."

John Erickson was also a man of great humor, who enjoyed what he was doing, and had developed a poignant sense of Scottish irony (Scotland was his adopted home; he was

born of Norwegian immigrant parents, in England). One moment I recall, was in early 2000, when he told me, “Well, at least we got rid of Boris Yeltsin; not bad for two lads!” He was bubbling over with delight at Yeltsin’s fall, as he had detested the corruption and the venality of the Yeltsin years. But the “joke” was, that he had recently come out of hospital intensive care, and knowing that I had also overcome some health difficulties, he was tickled, that “we lads” had accomplished so much!

Later, in 2000, he commented that the policies of the West were like a Marx Brothers movie, and that “this current club running policy in most Western countries, reminds me of Groucho Marx’s famous comment, ‘I wouldn’t want to be a member of a club in which I was a member.’ It would all be hilarious, if the world situation weren’t becoming so tragic.”

In recent years, Erickson increasingly expressed his respect for, and agreement with, the evaluations of Lyndon LaRouche, on the global financial and economic collapse, and on the dangerous nature of the situation. He publicly endorsed the appeal for LaRouche’s exoneration, and later, signed the statement of the Ad Hoc Committee for a New Bretton Woods. Although not an economist, he was deeply troubled by the injustices of the global economic system, and shared LaRouche’s conviction that the rapidly accelerating economic crisis was the driving force behind the unstable strategic situation. On many occasions, he would say that LaRouche was one of the few statesmen alive, who had any conception of the nature of the historical conjuncture the world was living through.

There is one matter that is of the highest importance in understanding John Erickson and his accomplishments. That is his wife, Ljubica. She was, since their marriage in 1957, his most intimate collaborator, sharing in all his work, including research, correspondence, and a wide range of other matters that would take pages to describe. It was our honor to have met her as well. Our most poignant recollection, in addition to her devotion to her husband and his work, was her expression of moral outrage, as someone born in Yugoslavia of Serbian origin, at the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, and at the hypocrisy about the “humanitarian” reasons cited for doing so.

Erickson is survived also by two children, Mark and Anna-Joanna, and two grandchildren, as well as by students all over the globe who have benefitted from having learned from him. I would be honored, to be included among them.

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OIC, EU Unite vs. Clash Of Civilizations Crowd

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Faced with the prospect of a new war launched by the United States in the name of the “war against terrorism,” this time against Iraq, what can be done? How can one prevent a global “Clash of Civilizations,” which was the strategic aim of the perpetrators behind the Sept. 11 attempted coup? Growing numbers of individual political figures—in Europe, Russia, Asia, and the Arab world—are voicing their opposition.

What is required, is that an utterly contrary, positive conception of relations among states and peoples be put forward, and be pursued in concrete actions, by institutions representing those peoples and cultures, which the war-mongers would pit against one another.

Thus, it is highly significant that the foreign ministers of the European Union (EU) and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) convened a conference in Istanbul, Turkey, dedicated precisely to this proposition. It was on the initiative of the Turkish government, shortly after the events of Sept. 11, to invite the OIC and EU to a joint forum, to establish a counterpole to the drive for a Clash of Civilizations. The joint forum, on Feb. 12-13, brought together representatives, mainly at the foreign minister level, from 71 countries, plus delegations from the OIC and EU per se, as well as the Arab League, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Three issues dominated the conference: the events of Sept. 11, and the general condemnation of terrorism in all forms; the rejection of unilateral military action by the United States, especially against Iraq; and the need to establish durable, just peace in the Middle East.

No to Military Action Against Iraq

The representatives of the host country, Turkey, were outspoken. One day prior to the conference opening, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit warned the United States, saying: “We don’t want a military action against Iraq.” In his address to the conference, Ecevit struck an optimistic note, expressing his conviction that the Clash of Civilizations has been rejected by actual political developments. Ecevit cited the “famous British writer and poet Rudyard Kipling” who “claimed that the destiny of East and West was to stay apart and different.” “This prediction reflected the mentality and strategy of certain imperialist powers,” Ecevit said. “These powers tried to keep away the East, the countries of Asia and Africa, from the cultural, scientific, and economic successes