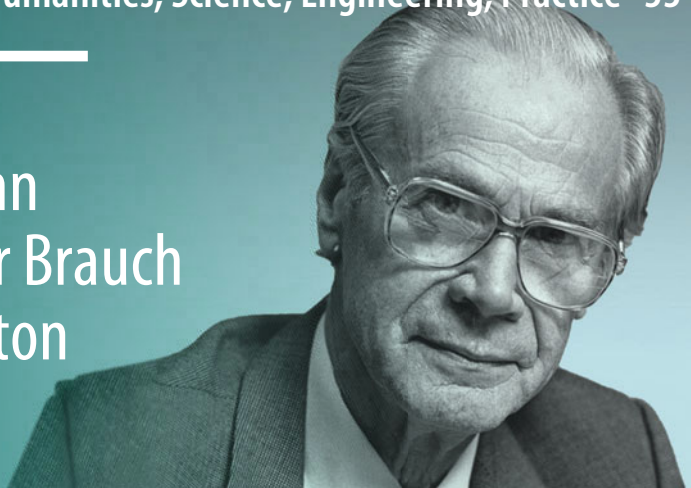


David J. Dunn
Hans Günter Brauch
Pamela Burton
Editors



John W. Burton: A Pioneer in Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Key Contributions on International
Relations, Peace Theory, World Society,
and Human Needs

Foreword by Christopher Mitchell

Pioneers in Arts, Humanities, Science, Engineering, Practice

Volume 33

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Foreword by Christopher Mitchell, George Mason
University, Carter School

 Springer

 Jimmy and Rosalynn
CARTER SCHOOL
for Peace and Conflict Resolution
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

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To my great uncle, Frank Dunn J.P.; my uncle, John Giles; and my teacher, John Burton. Each, in their own way, found a way and each – in their own way – helped me find mine. Thank you.

Most of all, to my wife Gill, again, 20 years on from the first “John Book”.

She knows why.

—David Dunn

I would like to dedicate this book to John Burton who was instrumental for the establishment of IPRA in 1964 and who inspired me as a foreign student at University College in London in the autumn term 1969 and spring term 1970 to devote my life to international relations and peace research and to Úrsula Oswald Spring who carried the torch of peace research further as President (1998–2000) and Secretary General of IPRA (2016–2018) and as Secretary General of the Latin American Council of Peace Research

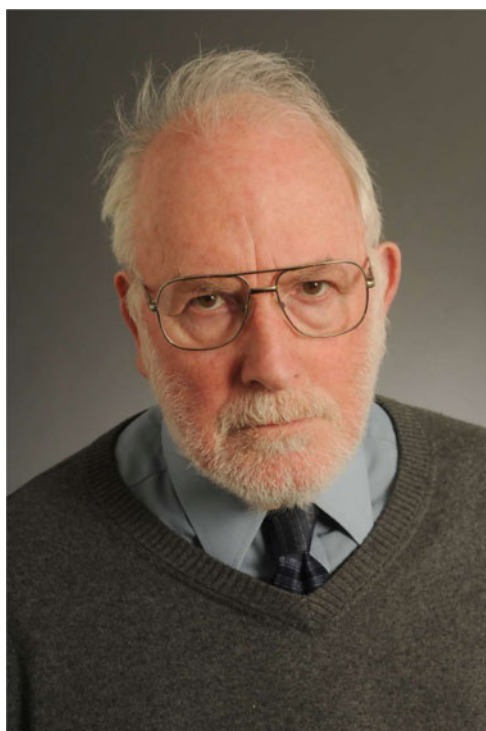
*and to her grandchildren Charlotte (2018),
Luca Kai (2018), Gianpaolo Nalu (2023) and
... (2023)*

—Hans Günter Brauch

*For my father John Burton.
I would like to dedicate this volume to his
many students and colleagues and others who
have continued his work in the field of
conflict analysis and resolution*

—Pamela Burton

Foreword



Christopher Mitchell © George Mason University

John Burton had a long and distinguished career as an academic, writing interesting and innovative books and articles on a wide range of topics, often challenging conventional wisdom in fields as diverse as international relations, political psychology, conflict resolution and more broadly, the sources of human behaviour. He came to the academy in the 1960s, just when the social sciences were experiencing what was

then known as ‘the behavioural revolution’, a movement which freed some rather hidebound disciplines from the grip of history, law and normative approaches to describing what human beings ought to do in a range of circumstances – competition, deviance and ‘crime’, collaboration, rebellion – in favour of observing and analysing what they actually did.

Before the 1960s, of course, John had experienced a stormy political career as a diplomat in charge of the newly emerging Australian Department of External Affairs. His experience as a young but very senior practising diplomat had a profound effect on his writing and this shows in many of the extracts in this collection. His first work, *The Alternative*, was written when he was in enforced retirement in the 1950s and was a warning and a blueprint for a new Australian role in a much divided world, and a recognition that Australia had to behave as an Asian country rather than an offshoot of Britain or ‘the West’. This strand of practicality runs through much of his subsequent writing, right up until his last attempt to influence the way the world was going in a new century, significantly entitled *The Mess We Are In*.

The present selection of his writing represents a sample of John’s constant challenge to think anew about the nature of ‘peace’, about the basic sources of conflict, about conventional ideas on war, power and deterrence, about possible peace-making roles for third parties, and about how the world might be better organised to cope with an increasingly complex and dangerous set of problems and conflicts. They arose from his thinking undertaken over the years in a variety of research institutions and centres, many of which John had helped to set up, from the pioneering Centre for the Analysis of Conflict established in London the mid-1960s, to the Centre for Conflict Analysis & Resolution [now the Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution] in Virginia twenty years later. The writings give a flavour of John Burton’s thought – analytical, challenging, practical – and a sense of what it was like to work with him – surprising, occasionally disturbing, but never boring.

I first got to know John Burton in the Fall of 1964 when he was just starting his career as an academic. I was a rather elderly undergraduate, fairly ignorant and thus knew nothing about his previous career as an Australian diplomat. So I experienced John just as a teacher and witnessed his genuine interest in his students – in their ideas, willingness to try out new approaches, and plans for the future, which I later realised were all part of his profound desire to be of use – to improve the world. I read the first of what turned out to be many books and articles, and found *Peace Theory* both readable and profound, another characteristic of John’s writings which continued over the next 50 years.

John, as an innovative thinker, constantly challenged accepted ideas, ‘conventional wisdom’, the ‘agreed consensus’, I observed as a junior colleague over the next decades, although he never made me feel junior. Just a colleague, whose ideas were worth considering and then – perhaps – demolishing, always courteously but usually justifiably. His invention of problem-solving workshops, his linking of human needs, observed from conflicts in the real world, to theories of behaviour developed in academia, his use of systems theory to throw light on contemporary problems, all are well illustrated in the collection of his writings in this volume.

What might be missed is the amount of thinking, analysing and testing out in real world situations – Cyprus, the Middle East, the south Atlantic, Northern Ireland – that went into the final product. The drafts were written and rewritten, revised and recast, rethought and re-examined, following critiques from friends, critics and colleagues, often after a stubborn commitment to, and vigorous defence of those original ideas. Being his colleague, starting as part of the original core faculty at his pioneering *Centre for the Analysis of Conflict* in London [CAC], was often an adventure fraught with debate and disagreement, but also much learning from one of the real innovators in the fields of International Relations and Conflict Resolution. Central to all this was John’s development of new ideas in the realm of what came to be known as ‘Track Two’ as an aid to resolving intractable conflicts.

Herb Kelman once said that his own contact with John Burton had really changed his research, his career and his life. John certainly changed mine.

Arlington, VA, USA
May 2023

Christopher Mitchell
Emeritus Professor of Conflict
Research
Center for Peacemaking Practice
George Mason University

Christopher Mitchell was born and educated in London. He has held academic positions at University College, London, the London School of Economics, and the Universities of Southampton and of Surrey. He was appointed Lecturer in the Department of Systems Science at the City University in 1973 and became Professor of International Relations there in 1983. He joined the academic exodus from Britain in the late 1980s, becoming Director of George Mason University’s *Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (ICAR) between 1991 and 1994. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Conflict Research at the Center for Peacemaking Practice at the Carter School in GMU.

He continues to work on practical and theoretical aspects of peace-making processes and has recently published articles on the theory of entrapment, and on ending asymmetric conflicts. He has co-edited four books about grassroots peacebuilding with Landon Hancock, the latest of which, *Confronting Peace: Local Peacebuilding in the Wake of a National Peace Agreement* [Palgrave/Macmillan], was published in December 2021. His retrospective text book, *The Nature of Intractable Conflict* [Palgrave/Macmillan] was recently translated into Spanish as *La Naturaleza de los Conflictos Intratables* [Edicions Bellaterra].

Acknowledgements

David Dunn acknowledges the efforts, and contributions, of Hans Günter Brauch (in Germany), Pamela Burton and Ken Mackay (in Australia) and Chris Mitchell (in the United States of America) in making sure that this work saw the light of day. Sincere thanks to you each – and all. I would also like to acknowledge the skills, care and support of surgeons and nursing staff of the Royal Stoke University Hospital, in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, Great Britain, for their efforts in making sure that I survived to see the light of day. Thank you.

Hans Günter Brauch is grateful to the small team of my co-editors, David J. Dunn (UK) and Pamela Burton (Australia) and to the author of the foreword, Chris Mitchell (USA) that we succeeded after some major delays to complete this important book. I met David only once about forty years ago and never personally met Pam Burton and Chris Mitchell but once we reached the final stage we moved ahead in multiple technical ‘problem solving’ jointly in getting free permission for the republication, locating the texts, photos and other contributions to this intellectual memorial for John W. Burton as our admired teacher at UC in London (for David and Hans Günter) and father (for Pam).

The co-editors also thank John Groom in Canterbury (UK) for granting permission to republish his text, Timothy Sandole for his permission to reproduce the unpublished text of his father Dennis Sandole (USA) who passed away in 2018 and Kevin P. Clements (New Zealand) for granting permission to include his lecture of 2015.

In addition, the co-editors would like to thank within the publisher Springer Nature Dr. Christian Witschel, the editorial director of Earth Sciences, Geography and Environment, who supported this book in this book series on *Pioneers in Arts, Humanities, Science, Engineering, Practice (PAHSEP)*, and the Springer production team in Heidelberg (Germany), represented by Ms. Birke Dalia and in Chennai, Tamil Nadu (India) to Ms. Jayanthi Krishnamoorthi and the book manager, Ms. Femina Joshi, and the team of type setters, graphic and website designers in Chennai and elsewhere. Thomas Bast (Germany) has helped with the conversion of scanned texts into MS word, redrafted several figures and produced the book website with AFES-PRESS Books.

Pamela Burton is grateful for the help she received from the team in the special collections room at the National Library of Australia. She is especially appreciative of the patient support of her partner, Ken Mackay, over the many months she was buried in the depths of this manuscript. Her special thanks go to her co-editors for their dedication to her father's work and their determination to produce this volume that illustrates the development of John Burton's thinking and provides a 'one stop shop' for source material and references to his writings.

Stafford, UK
Mosbach, Germany
Canberra, Australia
October 2023

David J. Dunn
Hans Günter Brauch
Pamela Burton

A Daughter's Overview

Pamela Burton¹

Burton has never written a dull book, although to some he has written some infuriating ones.

—John Groom (University of Kent at Canterbury).²

My father infuriated many people by challenging their views, questioning how they arrived at them, and putting alternative propositions to them with an apparent unnerving assuredness that he had the answers, and that only he was right. It was my father's provocative way of making others re-think. He admired students who argued with him. Groom obviously understood that this annoying personality trait contributed to John's innovative thinking. If you don't question you don't get answers; if you don't test alternative proposition, you don't know if they are right.

As his daughter, I can say that there was nothing dull about my multifaceted mission-driven father or his extraordinarily diverse life as an innovative farmer, entrepreneur, patron of the arts, policy influencer, author and academic. He was predictably unpredictable. My mother could not know what a new day might bring. During John's time as head of the Australian department of External Affairs, his impetuous actions put an end to his public service career and hopes of a political one, but not his influence on foreign policy. As early as 1946, he felt driven to write, concerned as he was about the threat of nuclear weapons to world peace. He told his sister, 'It is a race between me and the bomb'.³ While running a department and farming in the late 'forties, he would be thinking – 'I do my best thinking while shovelling chook dung' – he would say. At the end of the day, he would be writing. Even on our annual family holidays at a beach on the South Coast of New South Wales, he would write. Tent erected, portable dunny set up in the thicket of the casuarina trees, us kids in our swimmers ready to jump into the water, John would set up a card table in the shade of a she-oak, pull out his Olivetti typewriter and tap away. His

¹ Pamela Burton, youngest daughter of John Burton, retired lawyer, mediator and primary author of *Persons of Interest: An Intimate Account of Cecily and John Burton*, 2022 (Canberra: ANU Press).

² Groom, A. J. R., 1994, *International Affairs*, 20, 1, pp. 120–121.

³ Letter to Rewa Newman, 7 November 1946, Burton family file.

publications in the 1950s on Australian foreign policy gained traction. After circulation of his 1956 treatise, *The Light Glows Brighter*, some commentators suggested that Burton had as much influence out of the public service as he did in it. John's 'real' career in the field of conflict resolution was then yet to come. As my sister, Meredith Edwards and I say in the Prologue of our book, *Persons of Interest: An intimate account of Cecily and John Burton* (2022), John 'presented as an enigma to many, but, throughout his life, he remained intent on a quest to change lives in pursuit of world peace.'

It was an honour for me to have been invited by Drs. David Dunn and Hans Günter Brauch to join them as a co-editor of this book. You might reasonably ask, what is so important about John Burton's work to warrant this book; why now; and is the work of a last century thinker relevant today? Dr. Gregory Tillett answers the first of these questions: "Burton is widely regarded as the founder of the academic study of conflict resolution and one of the most important figures in the theoretical study of conflicts, dispute and their resolution."⁴ As to *why now*; now, more than ever, revitalised interest in conflict resolution is needed in a world in conflict and turmoil. We are in peril of the 'perfect storm': wars are still being waged under threat of nuclear weapons, global warming has morphed into global boiling and pandemics threaten to devastate us, while desperate refugees fleeing for their lives from violence or famine are too often shunned by wealthy countries. The challenge is to find new ways of dealing with these crises and the human behaviours that contribute to catastrophic events. My father's radical ideas are as relevant now as they were in the post-war cold-war era. While theories of yesterday do not necessarily hold good for the conditions of today, the genius of my father's thinking is seen in his early recognition of that fact and, more particularly, in his insistence that all theories, including his own, should be constantly questioned – questioned, tested and revised – to be effective in their application. That wisdom applies too, for adaption of ideas to today's changing circumstances. It might require scholars in the field to be bold, controversial, to think outside the box, and be prepared to be infuriating as Groom said of my father.

This volume is, then, a timely resource, which I trust will encourage and entice young scholars as well as their elders to revive interest and excitement in the field and the connection between conflict resolution theory and practice. New ideas and the potential for their application – putting theories into practice, trying them out, making discoveries – is exciting. It's akin to scientific discovery, and if successes are for the general good, that's exciting.

In 'the field' my father and his colleagues got their "hands and reputations dirty" for exciting results. They abandoned their books, and became directly involved in actual conflicts.⁵ Little has been published about the successes they achieved in resolving high level conflicts because the very success of the process is dependent upon the confidentiality of the proceedings. But each experience had an impact on John's theorising. I will give you some examples of international disputes he involved

⁴ Tillett, G, "Theory for Practice: The Work of John Burton" in "Book Notes": 2005 16 ADRJ, p. 142.

⁵ Burton, John, W., *Dear Survivors* 1982, p. 75, and for more detail, see Chap. 16 of this volume.

himself in, and to which you will see reference in some of the readings reproduced in this volume.

Ongoing hostilities in the mid-60s between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia over borders in Borneo gave John his first opportunity to put thinking into practice. His involvement in this dispute was somewhat accidental, being a bold response to a challenge by competing theorists at the London School of Economics. The intervention he initiated on behalf of the Conflict Analysis Research Centre, University College London, (which John had been pivotal in establishing) was to ask each government involved in the dispute to send representatives to London to discuss the problems *in camera* to get to the heart of the issues. They did just that and, over the many days of facilitation by a panel from the Centre, the parties started to talk to each other, and kept talking, and proved the process a success.

John also played an intervening role in the Cyprus situation, see Chaps. 22 and 26 of this book. The framework the Centre used in its facilitation process came to be known, retrospectively, as ‘track two’ diplomacy. For more detail, I highly recommend the YouTube video of what John had to say about these experiences and his take on the future of conflict resolution generally, when he was interviewed at length. See *Parents in the Field*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eax2Dzj9tXQ>.⁶

Then, John became involved in the Northern Ireland problem. At the initiative of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, he was put in contact with “the para-militaries from each side of the dispute, traditional politicians, the officers commanding the army and the Northern Ireland Office”.⁷ He made frequent visits to Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1976 but was forced to abandon his work in bringing the disputing parties together after what he perceived to be a threat to his life. It came from an unexpected source – none other than the Officer in Command of the British Army in Northern Ireland and the head of the Northern Ireland Office. It was a frightening and shocking experience, but it made John consider the mounting evidence that all was not as it appeared to be. What had he missed seeing? It was a defining moment in his thinking; he had acted on the assumption that the British Army and Government would like to have the Irish problem resolved. He had been working on a false assumption. He realised how easy it is to rationalise behaviours around an accepted set of assumptions to preserve a position – until the evidence forces you to recognise a major error that requires a paradigm shift. The assumptions John had made about the Irish problem, even as to who the disputants were, as well as their grievances, had to be reviewed. Accepted reasoning can be based on assumptions that prove to be wrong. This illustrates the importance of the connection between theory and practice, and of being open to alternative theories.

The readings in this book are intended for use, not just by academics and practitioners in the field, but others interested in conflict resolution. In fact, John dedicated two of his books, “to parents, teachers, managers, lawyers, diplomats and politicians” – all people who have an active role associated with human relationships. In

⁶ Interview of John Burton in Canberra, 2000, by Christopher Mitchell and Richard Rubenstein, George Mason University: Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

⁷ *Dear Survivors*, op. cit., pp. 75–76, and see Chaps. 16 and 22 of this volume.

one, *Conflict Resolution: Its Language and Processes*" (1996), he sets out guiding principles and important language to be used by those involved in the processes of resolving disputes. It is a useful handbook for a mediator's tool kit.

Dr. David Dunn's opening chapter, "John W. Burton: From Cold War Politics to Peace Research Pioneer" introduces John Burton to you by way of providing a survey of his life, his diverse interests and career, and the environment and events that informed my father's core values and philosophy. Chapter 2 contains an extensive Bibliography of my father's major works, including interviews with him and other useful resources. Part II of this book consists of 26 chapters of readings, being a selection of his texts on aspects of the theory and practice of conflict resolution written over a 50-year span from 1954 to 2001. Dunn selected these texts, being well-placed to choose them having authored an insightful study of John's innovative thinking in *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution* (2004).

John's early focus was on international relations and the threat of nuclear war in the post war cold war era, but this broadened over the decades to embrace the analysis and resolution of conflict of systems at all levels of society. Dunn observes that Burton "incrementally" left international relations behind, the subject of his first few books, as he travelled down the related path of conflict analysis and resolution – not losing hold of his pursuit of a general theory for world peace. Step by step, with time and effort, Dunn states, Burton "was able to say more". He highlights Burton's process of "articulating an alternative" – an alternative, initially, to the use of force to resolve international conflicts, and later, alternatives to accepted systems theories of conflict resolution generally.

To encourage you to read this book, I highlight some aspects of the readings that follow to illustrate the development over time in my father's thinking. The first reading, Chap. 3, is "The Alternative" (1954), a text from John's first book of the same name. It propounds an alternative approach to Australia's then foreign policy of alignment with the UK and the USA and the perils of colonialism in the Asia Pacific region. You will see that my father asserted what he thought 'ought to be' as an alternative. This is in contrast to the last of the readings, Chap. 28, "Where do we go from here?", the title itself being a question. This piece is about what 'Is' (namely, the 'mess we are in') rather than what we 'ought' to do about it.

Evidence of changes in John's thinking is seen in his attitude towards the United Nations. At the time he wrote *The Alternative*, he had great faith in what the UN might achieve. Overtime, he revised this view. In "Assessment" (1969), reproduced in Chap. 9 below, he criticises the UN's operational framework for dealing with international hostilities, it being more of a dispute settlement model with a flawed reliance on diplomatic and legal processes, than an effective means of conflict resolution. In Chap. 17, "The History of International Conflict Resolution" (1985), he points out that the model on which the UN was based "is falsely conceived". He mentioned three flaws: notions of majority rule take little account of the reality of human needs for 'distributive justice'; that the Charter prohibited intervention in matters within the 'domestic' jurisdiction of any State; and the limits on its peace-keeping role imposed by the 'veto power' of any one member of the Security Council.

He was proved right when Russia unhesitatingly invoked the veto power over a resolution relating to the current conflict with Ukraine and the USA vetoed a resolution concerning humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip relating to the Israeli and Hamas conflict.

The publication of *The Alternative* provoked an invitation to John to be a Fellow at the Australian National University which he said “led to an academic career which I had never contemplated.” It was there that he wrote *Peace Theory: Preconditions of Disarmament* (1962) which, he explained, “... was at least a step away from disarmament as a remedy towards analysis of the reasons for arms.”⁸ In 1963 at the University College London his first lecture notes informed his next book: *International Relations – A General Theory* (1965) in which he argues against the ‘power’ model in decision making. He discusses power and influence in decision making and moves towards steering and decision making “guiding the ship of State” in the electronic age.⁹

Chapter 5, “‘Peace Research’ and ‘International Relations’” (1964), is another early piece with a focus on international conflict. In this work, he opens the reader to an interdisciplinary approach to peace research and peace movements that look to political, social and economic preconditions for peace and disarmament. He then began to draw on industrial conflict, literature and social psychology in order to find a generic approach to resolving conflict. It was his colleagues in the USA who eventually embraced his multidisciplinary approach (and who, to my amusement, dubbed him ‘Mother Burton’!)

The shift away from International Relations to conflict generally is seen in Chap. 7, “Conflict as a Function of Change”. Here, John looks at assumptions made about behaviour, and challenges the assumption that power is not necessarily the essential or main factor in the organisation of world society. Of note is John’s introduction of the term ‘Provention’ into the conflict resolution lexicon. The coining of this phrase is an example of his conceptual thinking. John explains the term Provention in the first title of the four volume Conflict Series: *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*:

The term *prevention* has the connotation of containment. The term *provention* has been introduced to signify taking steps to remove sources of conflict, and more positively to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control behaviors.

Chapter 20, below, “Conflict Provention as a Political System”, introduces the phrase, and Chap. 27, having the same title but different content, builds on it and outlines the significant contribution conflict resolution can make to decision making.

Many distinct threads of thought weave through John’s work. An example is his discussion of the ‘human needs’ theory which he explores and elaborates on in his writings between 1982 and 1998 (see Chaps. 16, 18, 23 and 25 of this book). Yet, the seeds of thought behind this can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s when John, as an Australian public servant and diplomat, argued that to quell violence and conflict

⁸ See Chap. 22 of this book, “Civilizations in Crisis: From Adversarial to Problem-Solving Processes” in *International Journal of Peace Studies* (1996,) 1: 5–24.

⁹ *International Relations: A General Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965): 141–150. An extracted chapter is reproduced in Chap. 6 of this book: “From Power to Steering”.

in neighbouring countries struggling to gain independence from their colonial rulers, their basic human needs for economic stability, identity and autonomy had to be met.

Part III of this book contains four assessments by colleagues of John, scholars from the UK, USA and Australia, respected for their work in the theory and practice of Conflict Resolution: John Groom, Dennis Sandole, Christopher Mitchell and Kevin Clements.

As a final word, it is sad, as Tillet pointed out in 2005, that while my father, John Burton, is widely known and respected in the UK and the US, he is little known for his work in homeland Australia. It is my hope that this book will change this. I encourage you to read on.

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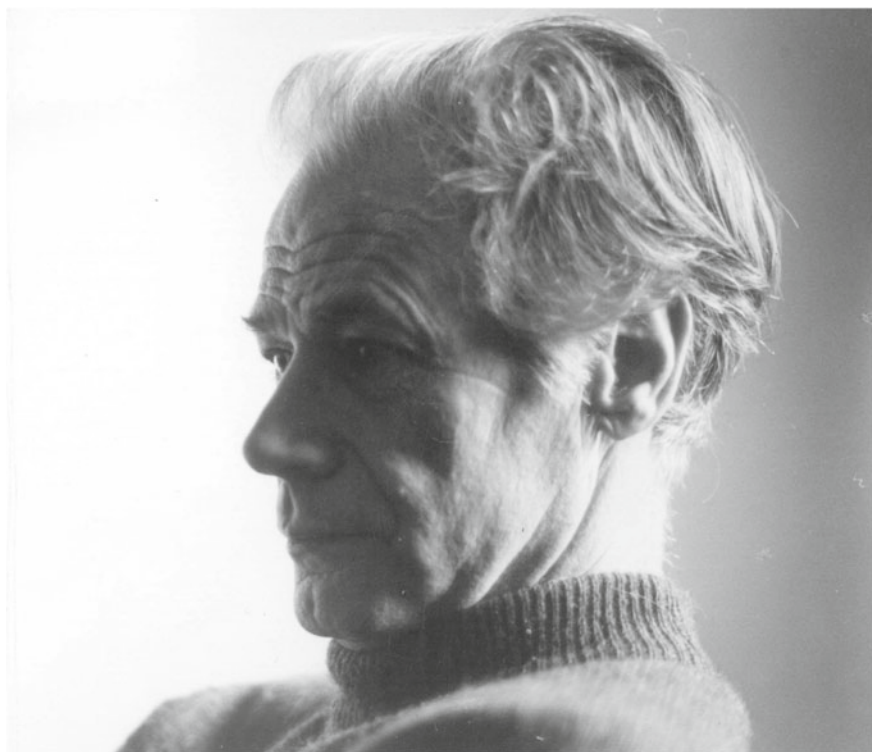
**Hans Günter Brauch is the Sole Editor of Two Book Series of these
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Part I
On John W. Burton



John W. Burton © The Burton Family's Private Photo Collection

Chapter 1

John W. Burton: From Cold War Politics to Peace Research Pioneer



David J. Dunn

You cannot find out what a man means by simply studying his spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken or written statements, even though he has spoken with the perfect command of language and perfectly truthful intention. In order to find out his meaning you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer.

R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography*, 1938: 28-29

“I have been saying the same thing all my life”

John Burton, 2004

1.1 Introduction

The introductory comment made by Burton in conversation towards the end of his life, might lead some about to embark on a survey of his work to believe that such an endeavour would be repetitive, limited and, ultimately uninteresting. What, in fact, is revealed in a survey of Burton’s life and work is how he sought to give voice to his convictions, which were a consequence of his experiences. He believed that the problems we face are inherent in the assumptions we make about people, institutions and the interactive processes that connect them. Examples might be the nature of human beings, the nature of politics and, principally, the problem of conflict in the spectrum of history and contemporary life and politics. There were, he felt, problems in thinking and, directly and consequentially, behaviour. These, he was convinced, needed to be changed, because they were wrong.

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In approaching this introductory essay two audiences have been borne in mind. Firstly, for those already interested in the field, it demonstrates how, and explains why, Burton was an innovator in Conflict Resolution and the pioneer of ‘provention’. The word is both new and, to some extent, controversial. Certainly it needs a simple explanation at this stage. Burton felt that where there were demands for socio-political change in societies, but that these were often seen as fundamental challenges to the existing order. For the authorities, often these demands needed to be prevented. For Burton, where these preventive measures were implemented or, even worse, imposed, conflict followed and/or existing conflicts worsened. ‘Provention’ suggested an alternative approach involving dialogue, social transformation and peaceful change. The process of change was to be central to all of this. Secondly, for those encountering Burton’s work for the first time, and attracted by the label ‘Pioneer,’ new readers will find what he has said, and has to say to us still, worthy of further engagement as well as increasingly relevant to our own troubled times. The following is also informed by an agenda, which seeks to answer a series of implicit questions: What did he want to do? Why did he want to do it? How did he do it? Who helped him? What means did he employ? What, at the end of the day, did it all amount to?

Burton was a man decades ahead of his time in terms of thinking about peace, conflict and system change. It may come as a surprise to many to discover that Burton never intended to be an academic. In post-war Australia he was at the centre of foreign policy-making. That he changed from action to thought, so to speak, should not be considered a ‘clean break’. The lessons learned – and the opposition encountered – in the one were the impetus that informed the other. There was a continuum, as we shall see.

Burton lived an extraordinary life, making waves in two distinct but linked arenas, on three continents. Over a decade ago the eminent, authoritative Australian broadcaster Phillip Adams described Burton thus: “probably the most controversial and visionary public servant of the Twentieth Century ... he did more to shape the Australian foreign policy towards Asia and the Pacific than any person, before or since” (Adams 2006). Greg Tillett (McDonald 2010) said of him that he was “a prophet without honour in his own country”. When it came to his work in the discipline of International Relations there were those who saw him as controversial, an irritation, and not to be taken seriously. Why? Because he contested the fundamental assumptions: he did not accept the conventional, ‘truths’. He seemed not to be ‘realistic’.

1.2 About John Burton

The eminent art critic Robert Hughes had a direct, critical manner and chose the title *Nothing if not Critical* for a collection of essays, borrowing the phrase from Shakespeare's Iago in *Othello*. An Australian, Hughes had a formidable reputation. That title would be appropriate for a biographer of another formidable Australian critic: John Burton. No such biography has been forthcoming as yet, but when it does appear it will be of necessity a substantial work. John Burton fitted a lot into a lifetime that lasted ninety-five years. He lived a life that was truly extraordinary. That phrase has become something of a literary cliché these days, but of Burton it can be said, with no hint of qualification or ambiguity. He had immense experience of international politics in practice, as well as the study of international politics and research on the problem of human conflict. In all of this he was nothing if not critical. This is not the place for psychological commentary, but it is appropriate to discuss the issue of character.

Burton's given name was John Wear Burton. *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* contains two major entries under that name: Burton the father and Burton the son. Thus, the son carried the label 'junior'. The senior of the two was a man of some status and, as far as this work is concerned, a profound influence on the younger Burton in terms of outlook and manner. Burton senior was born in humble circumstances in Yorkshire, in the north of England in 1875 and his father was a carpenter by trade. The north of England has a reputation for 'plain speaking', which is to say that the manner is direct, and avoids circumlocution. In 1883 the family emigrated to New Zealand. And after leaving school at the age of twelve Burton senior worked as a fleece-picker and wheelwright and started training to become a lay-preacher in 1895, continuing a family tradition.

To cut a long story short, Burton senior became a pacifist and was, for twenty years General Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia (1925-1945), followed by three years as President General of the Methodist Church in Australia. Before that he was active in exposing poor labour conditions in Fiji. After such revelations, conditions improved and indentured labour ended. He was a prolific writer. He was father to five children; one son and four daughters. With such a father rising, as he clearly did, from relative poverty to some status, and with a predisposition to speak his mind, John junior acquired some of these traits. He would, most certainly, have been fully aware of the nature of poverty, deprivation, humility, (in)tolerance, class and single-mindedness. Moreover, having seen his father identify social problems and effect changes, he would surely subscribe to the view that all is mutable; things do not have to be the way they are.



John Burton (Jn) and John Burton (Sn) late 'forties © The Burton Family's Private Photo Collection

John Wear Burton junior was born on 2 March 1915, in Melbourne, Australia. As he grew he developed an interest in things 'practical', but his early years were not problem-free. The most significant problem seems to be that he suffered from dyslexia, such that, as he told one interviewer, he "was bottom of the class year after year". Manifestly, this had to be addressed and he clearly made some significant progress, but it may be relevant to mark this, since very few, if any, would subscribe to the view that Burton was a literary stylist. He was well aware of that. So, as well as searching for a critical 'voice' throughout his life, a constant problem was how better to express himself. That he wrote more was a means to make his ideas clearer.

There was also another major issue to be addressed. We might assume that John was fundamentally affected by his father's staunch beliefs, not in Pacifism perhaps, but certainly in terms of religion. It is worth noting that his father was steadfast in his beliefs and articulate in expressing them. Would the young John follow his father's religious calling? He would have none of it. He could, it seems, understand 'religion' in terms of doing good, reforming and the like. What he could not tolerate – and would not accept – was what he once described, in conversation, as “all of that religious bowing and kneeling stuff.” All the “beliefs and metaphysical stuff” was not for him. Rather than the church, Burton junior equated ‘doing good work’ with the public service. “He lost his faith, not his values” (Steketee 2010).

Burton was educated at Wesley College in Melbourne and Newington College in Sydney. He went to university in Sydney and graduated in 1937, with a first-class honours degree in Psychology. From there, consistent with his idea of service, he joined the Commonwealth Public Service during which time he studied part-time to achieve a first-class honours degree in Economics. These degrees notwithstanding, he entered the CPS “in the normal way”, which is to say at the lowest level of entry. His first job was as a postal clerk. More to the point, at that stage in the organisation's history, graduate entry was not the norm. After “going the rounds” and, presumably showing himself capable of more demanding jobs, he progressed and won a cadetship to undertake post graduate work whilst working in Australia House in central London.

Close by was the London School of Economics where, in 1939, he commenced a Master's degree which he later converted to a Ph.D., supervised by Lionel Robbins, which he completed in 1941. He received his degree in 1942. The issues discussed in an (ostensibly) economics frame of reference are examined later, in the context of his academic career. He returned to Australia just before Pearl Harbour. From there, his ascent was remarkable (in terms of rapidity and rank). By the time he was thirty-two years old he was the Permanent Head of the Department of External Affairs. On his return from London he had worked in the Department of Labour and National Service, with post-war reconstruction on the agenda. It was a significant move, for many of his colleagues were, like him, young graduates who “created a policy in an atmosphere of intellectual excitement seldom encountered in Canberra. Some of them were influenced by the ideas of (Harold) Laski and Keynes” (Bolton 1990: 29). The context of this is worthy of mention, for this was in Australia in a different era, where ties to London were still extremely important and where the Empire and Dominions were key, especially as seen from the London perspective. Secondly, the Canberra of that period was fundamentally different from the city of today. It was said that some of the civil servants rode their horses to the office.

Burton moved to the Department of External Affairs, to the role of a Probationary Third Secretary, then on to be Departmental Private Secretary to H. V. Evatt, the Minister of External Affairs in the Labor Government of Ben Chifley. Again, we can cut a long story short. Sufficient for our purpose is to recognise that the ascent of Burton was rapid indeed. He was young, capable, articulate and knew his own mind.

He encountered critics, rivals and opponents as well as allies. (Undoubtedly, some were glad to have him, others glad to see the back of him.) The views of Burton are important. Of this period he said “Evatt respected anyone who had a view and stuck to it. We were very close. We understood each other. There was never a situation where he would give me much instruction. ‘You know what to do’ was the kind of instruction I got” (Clack 1991). Manifestly, Burton was given some latitude and authority. In what policy context?

As the war came to an end, major issues presented themselves. Return to ‘normal’? Hardly. Spheres of influence? Restoration of ‘Imperial Authority’? The defeat of Japan, the revolution in China, the agenda of reconstruction, the nature of the ‘Western Alliance’ and the nature and function of the United Nations were all on the agenda. Burton was involved in much of this. He attended the conferences that gave rise to the *Food and Agriculture Organisation* (FAO) in 1943, the *International Labour Organisation* (ILO) in 1944 and the San Francisco conference founding the United Nations Organisation in 1945. But closer to home was the issue of empire, and specifically the Dutch attempt to re-assert control in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), which had turned violent. Australia was a member of the United Nations and a member of the Security Council, and Canberra sought to involve the United Nations. India supported the Australians, the United Kingdom and the United States were opposed, presuming that they, the Permanent Members of the Security Council could deal with the matter, indeed that they should. By 1948 and with the Indonesian issue still persistent the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, intervened and sought to convene a conference to discuss the conflict, with a significant Afro-Asian presence. The conference took place in January 1949, with Australia and New Zealand involved, as states having a regional interest. However, the British were assured that the Australasian participation would be only as ‘observers’. The Australian observer? John Burton. Of this episode, Gregory Pemberton observed that, “after Nehru, the 33-year-old Burton was the dominating figure (at the Delhi conference) ... Many of the key speeches made, and resolutions initiated, were Burton’s. ... The Delhi Conference was a triumph for Burton’s foreign policy” (Pemberton 1991). As if that were not enough to mark Burton out as ‘someone to watch’, the issue of recognition of the People’s Republic of China, was a ‘cause for concern’ for his critics. From an Australian perspective, and not that of Washington or London, Burton was an advocate of recognition. There was now a regional perspective developing, clearly threatening control from London, it was assumed. Moreover, Nehru and Delhi threw into sharp relief the notion of ‘nonalignment’ as a policy option, a means to steer a way, in the context of Cold War bloc-politics, that implied choice and policy options.



Minister for Foreign Affairs, H. V. Evatt with John Burton at the United Nations Charter Conference San Francisco, April 1945 © The Burton Family's Private Photo Collection



H. V. Evatt and John Burton walking near 10 Downing Street, London, 1945 © The Burton Family's Private Photo Collection

By the end of 1949 the Labour Party was voted out of office in Australia, a new government being formed in March 1950. Had this not happened, Burton might have become Foreign Minister (Edwards 1983 p.184). In the event, Burton carried on in the Department of External affairs, only to resign in June 1950, shortly before the outbreak of the Korean War. Having attracted attention, one official file described him as a “strongman from Moscow” (Pemberton 1991). In the context of Cold War politics, Burton was of great concern for many. He was appointed High Commissioner in Colombo, Ceylon, but within days of arrival he returned to Australia to stand as a Labor Party candidate in a New South Wales constituency: He lost.

At that point, the ‘practical’ experience of politics ended for John Burton. But not quite. As the Cold War developed, ‘security’ was centre-stage, even in domestic politics, and there were investigations with regard to the identity of spies who might