

## Robert Jungk – An Introduction

I first met Bob Jungk in the 1980s – which was rather late in his long career. At the time I did not really appreciate the role he'd played in so many lives, not least of which was to lead the opposition in Germany to nuclear power. Nor had I read his best seller *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns*, first published in 1956. But I do have a clear memory of him taking the podium at a World Future Society meeting in the USA right after a featured 'big name' speaker. He glowered at the audience and, in his thick German accent, wondered aloud how it was that he appeared to have 'boarded the wrong aircraft.' It was his way of saying how strongly he disagreed with the previous speaker's emphasis on the latest technical wonders. As I soon learned he had, after all, spent half a lifetime warning of the dangers of technology-led views of the future and arguing passionately for more nuanced, human approaches and the wider use of foresight. It was one of my earliest exposures to the chasm that existed – and still does to some extent – between the 'European' tendency to focus on human, social and cultural issues and the 'American' preference for new technologies: the 'car of the future,' the 'conquest of space' etc., etc.

While never formalised in any way Bob became a kind of mentor. I would look forward to meeting him here and there and each time deepening the conversation. Apart from the aforementioned US gathering, and others I may have forgotten, I met him in Barcelona, Beijing and, finally, in Salzburg. I treasure the photo I have of he and I standing together on the Great Wall of China in 1988. Not long afterwards I received a copy of his book *Future Workshops* with a hand-written dedication thanking *me* for inspiration! That was typical of his generosity. He was one of the founders of the World Futures Studies Federation and, as such, a figure that many people looked up to, not only in Austria and Germany but also in many other places.

The last chance I had to spend any time with him was during a 1990 forum held in Salzburg at the library he'd established there. Allen Tough, a Canadian colleague, was on hand to take the above shot of us having a brief conversation between presentations. I also recall having lunch with his family and meeting at the library late one evening to continue our discussions. It was a fitting end to an all-too-short but, for me at least, life-changing relationship. When I look back at how my own views of futures, and Futures Studies, developed, Bob Jungk is one of those key people who helped me to 'clear away the fog' and begin to understand what it was all about. I believe he influenced many people in this and similar ways. Years later, on a visit to Hiroshima, I was bemused to see a copy of his book *Children of the Ashes* on display in the museum there. In the interview he mentions how speaking with those caught up in the conflagration profoundly affected his own views and subsequent life work.

The interview was first published in 1992 in the Australian Commission for the Future's handsome *21C* journal. He was very happy with the layout of the piece and I certainly agreed that the title '*One Man Revolution*' was appropriate. This was also the year he ran as a Green Party candidate for the Presidency of Austria. He passed away two years later leaving a big gap in the lives of all who knew him.