

STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS : Press Release by Earl Russell,
9 July 1955

In the tragic situation which confronts humanity, we feel that scientists should assemble in conference to appraise the perils that have arisen as a result of the development of weapons of mass destruction, and to discuss a resolution in the spirit of the appended draft.

We are speaking on this occasion, not as members of this or that nation, continent or creed, but as human beings, members of the species Man, whose continued existence is in doubt. The world is full of conflicts; and, over-shadowing all minor conflicts, the titanic struggle between Communism and anti-Communism.

Almost everybody who is politically conscious has strong feelings about one or more of these issues; but we want you, if you can, to set aside such feelings and consider yourselves only as members of a biological species which has had a remarkable history, and whose disappearance none of us can desire.

We shall try to say no single word which should appeal to one group rather than to another. All, equally, are in peril, and if the peril is understood, there is hope that they may collectively avert it.

We have to learn to think in a new way. We have to learn to ask ourselves, not what steps can be taken to give military victory to whatever group we prefer, for there no longer are such steps; the question we have to ask ourselves is: what steps can be taken to prevent a military contest of which the issue must be disastrous to all parties?

The general public, and even many men in position of authority, have not realised what would be involved in a war with nuclear bombs. The general public still thinks in terms of the obliteration of cities. It is understood that the new bombs are more powerful than the old, and that, while one A-bomb could obliterate Hiroshima, one H-bomb could obliterate the largest cities, such as London, New York and Moscow.

No doubt in an H-bomb war great cities would be obliterated. But this is one of the minor disasters that would have to be faced. If everybody in London, New York and Moscow were exterminated the world might, in the course of a few centuries, recover from the blow. But we now know, especially since the Bikini test, that nuclear bombs can gradually spread destruction over a very much wider area than had been supposed.

It is stated on very good authority that a bomb can now be manufactured which will be 2,500 times as powerful as that which destroyed Hiroshima. Such a bomb, if exploded near the ground or under water, sends radio-active particles into the upper air. They sink gradually and reach the surface of the earth in the form of a deadly dust or rain. It was this dust which infected the Japanese fishermen and their catch of fish.

No one knows how widely such lethal radioactive particles might be diffused, but the best

authorities are unanimous in saying that a war with H-bombs might quite possibly put an end to the human race. It is feared that if many H-bombs are used there will be universal death—sudden only for a minority, but for the majority a slow torture of disease and disintegration.

Many warnings have been uttered by eminent men of science and by authorities in military strategy. None of them will say that the worst results are certain. What they do say, is that these results are possible, and no one can be sure that they will not be realised. We have not yet found that the views of experts on this question depend in any degree upon their politics or prejudices. They depend only, so far as our researches have revealed, upon the extent of the particular expert's knowledge. We have found that the men who know most are the most gloomy.

Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful, and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race: or shall mankind renounce war?[†] People will not face this alternative because it is so difficult to abolish war.

The abolition of war will demand distasteful limitations of national sovereignty.[‡] But what perhaps impedes understanding of the situation more than anything else is that the term "mankind" feels vague and abstract. People scarcely realise in imagination that the danger is to themselves and their children and their grandchildren, and not only to a dimly apprehended humanity. They can scarcely bring themselves to grasp that they, individually, and those whom they love are in imminent danger of perishing agonisingly. And so they hope that perhaps war may be allowed to continue provided modern weapons are prohibited.

This hope is illusory. Whatever agreements not to use H-bombs had been reached in time of peace, they would no longer be considered binding in time of war, and both sides would set to work to manufacture H-bombs as soon as war broke out, for, if one side manufactured the bombs and the other did not, the side that manufactured them would inevitably be victorious.

Although an agreement to renounce nuclear weapons as part of a general reduction of armaments* would not afford an ultimate solution, it would serve certain important purposes. First: any agreement between East and West is to the good in so far as it tends to diminish tension. Second: the abolition of thermo-nuclear weapons, if each side believed that the other had carried it out sincerely, would lessen the fear of a sudden attack in the style of Pearl Harbour, which at present keeps both sides in a state of nervous apprehension. We should therefore welcome such an agreement, though only as a first step.

Most of us are not neutral in feeling, but, as human beings, we have to remember that, if the issues between East and West are to be decided in any manner that can give any possible satisfaction to anybody, whether Communist or anti-Communist, whether Asian or European or American, whether White or Black, then these issues must not be decided by war. We should wish this to be understood, both in the East and in the West.

There lies before us, if we choose, continual progress in happiness, knowledge and wisdom. Shall we, instead, choose death, because we cannot forget our quarrels? We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death.

Resolution: We invite this Congress, and through it the scientists of the world and the general public, to subscribe to the following resolution:—

"In view of the fact that in any future world war nuclear weapons will certainly be employed, and that such weapons threaten the continued

existence of mankind, we urge the Governments of the world to realise, and to acknowledge publicly, that their purposes can not be furthered by a world war, and we urge them, consequently, to find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute between them."

Professor P. W. BRIDGMAN (Professor Harvard University; Foreign Member of Royal Society, London; Nobel Prize in physics.)

ALBERT EINSTEIN

MAX BORN

Professor L. INFELD (Professor University of Warsaw; Member of Polish Academy of Sciences.)

Professor F. JOLIOT-CURIE (Professor College de France; Foreign Member of Royal Society, London; Nobel Prize in physics.)

Professor H. J. MULLER (Formerly a professor in Moscow, India, etc. Now a professor at University of Indiana; Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine.)

Professor L. PAULING (Professor California Institute of Technology; Foreign member of Royal Society, London; Nobel Prize in chemistry)

Professor C. F. POWELL (Professor Bristol University; Nobel Prize in physics.)

Professor J. ROTBLAT (Professor St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College, University of London.)

BERTRAND RUSSELL

Professor HIDEKI YUKAWA (Professor Kyoto University; Nobel Prize in physics.)

[†]Professor Joliot-Curie makes the reservations that Governments should renounce war "as a means of settling differences between States"; and that "limitations of national sovereignty should be agreed by all, and be in the interests of all."

*Professor Muller makes the reservation that this be taken to mean "a concomitant balanced reduction of all armaments."

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BERTRAND RUSSELL'S STATEMENT

THE EXTREMELY widespread and enthusiastic support given to the letter signed by Einstein, Bertrand Russell and other distinguished scientists, shows that people at large are beginning to realise that war, using atomic weapons, is not to be tolerated.

The statement pointed at the dangers of annihilation of the whole human race but whether this is possible or not, it remains a fact that if the hydrogen bombs were used a substantial proportion of humanity would be killed and much of the remainder would suffer radiation sickness of various degrees of severity.

It is good that this possibility should be stated in the first place with some authority, but that is not enough. As the signatories point out, there is a need to call a conference of qualified scientists from all countries to put down quantitatively, within ascertainable limits, what the danger is. Such a conference would be an essential complement to that called by the United Nations in Geneva which is definitely limited to questions of beneficent uses of atomic energy. The two are linked by the fact that the major limitations to-day to such peaceful uses, is the stranglehold of

military authorities over both materials and knowledge in the nuclear field. Like the United Nations conference, it is essential that it should be really international, and this should not be impossible to achieve in view of the fact that the original statement carries signatures of scientists of both right and left political views and has had the sympathetic support of others both in the United States and the Soviet Union.

The statement and the conference which will follow it, will find their true value only if they become the basis for a widespread campaign of explanation and action. In the last resort the decisions the governments take will only result in disarmament and abolition of atomic weapons if there is sufficient popular pressure to make them do so. That pressure, if it is to be effective, needs to be for specific objectives, culminating in actual conversion of military equipment and productive capacity to civil uses.

The aims of the statement are in complete accord with the efforts of the World Federation of Scientific Workers and its affiliated bodies, who will, no doubt, do everything in their powers to assist the initiative taken by the signatories.