

# The Narrowing Way

EUGENE RABINOWITCH

THE hands of the clock of doom have moved again. Only a few more swings of the pendulum, and, from Moscow to Chicago, atomic explosions will strike midnight for Western civilization.

The achievement of a thermonuclear explosion by the Soviet Union, following on the heels of the development of "thermonuclear devices" in America, means that the time, dreaded by scientists since 1945, when each major nation will hold the power of destroying, at will, the urban civilization of any other nation, is close at hand.

The Soviet thermonuclear explosion of August 12 may have been "weak," i.e., compared to the first "thermonuclear experiment" at Eniwetok in 1951, rather than to the full-fledged explosion achieved on November 1, 1952; and the latter itself may have been the try-out of an earth-bound "gadget" rather than of a deliverable thermonuclear bomb. It needs, however, little optimism—if optimism be the right word—to predict that the "gadget" will soon be converted into an H-bomb capable of delivery by a bomber, and that a Soviet H-bomb will follow the American without much delay. The British, if they so decide, undoubtedly will be able to produce one, also.

The continued existence of the urban, technological Western civilization will soon hang in a precarious balance, resting almost entirely on a highly irrational and unreliable fear. Elimination of atomic weapons from national arsenals, through an international control mechanism, substituting mutual interdependence for mutual fear, had a slight chance of success in 1945 or 1946. It has none now and will not until the cleavage of the world into two sharply opposed power camps disappears. As long as these two camps exist, both of them are bound to hang on to atomic weapons as a

major guarantee of their precarious "security."

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The Soviet Union must cherish its atomic bombs as the only means to exert military pressure directly on the continental United States. The Soviet leaders are unlikely to give up their creed that the "capitalist" world, led by America, is bound by the "dialectic" laws of history to prepare aggression against the "socialist" states, led by the Soviet Union. They will not let themselves be deprived of the most potent arm to keep these postulated aggressive intentions in check. Even in 1945, when atomic bombs were an American monopoly, thoughtful analysts pointed out that the invention of atomic weapons would, in the long run, affect the military security of the United States more unfavorably than that of the Soviet Union, because of the greater vulnerability of our more strongly concentrated population and industry. The possibility of long-range attack with atomic bombs means the loss of the unique advantage America has enjoyed in the two world wars—a safe industrial base and military staging area in which mobilization and organization of forces for decisive battles could proceed without interference. Soviet leaders were probably aware of this ultimate advantage of atomic weapons for them when they stalled for time during the U.N. negotiations for atomic control, instead of eagerly accepting the American proposals, which offered them security against atomic attack while the A-bomb was an American monopoly. At the present time they must be contemplating their growing advantage with considerable satisfaction. In contrast to the situation in 1945, when the Soviet Union was in desperate need of economic assistance, one sees now no inducement we could offer them to give up this advantage.

Despite the greater threat of atom-

ic weapons to American security, American military planners also are unlikely to contemplate giving these weapons up even on a truly reciprocal basis. They also see in atom and hydrogen bombs the most effective deterrent against an attack by the Soviet totalitarianism on any member of the Western Bloc, including those who lie open to Soviet land invasion.

Furthermore, the American tradition is to trust, in war as well as in peace, in the superior American capacity for rapid development of new technological methods and devices. Most Americans believe that in a race of technological weapons with any other nation, America is bound to make the better showing and that therefore we have no reason to be afraid of such a race—a proposition in which, unfortunately, only the first half is correct.

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We must therefore face the all but inevitable prospect of a more or less prolonged period of "cold peace," precariously supported by a mutual threat of atomic and thermonuclear annihilation. In this period, the survival of our civilization will depend on whether the political leaders of all nations—including any power-drunk dictator in whose hands the fate of a nation may rest now or fall in the future—will be rational enough to abstain from actions which might precipitate an atomic holocaust.

This hope cannot be justified by the past history of mankind. Contemporaries have asserted that wars had been made impossible by the invention of firearms, dynamite, or the airplane; but again and again, nations have produced and followed leaders willing to take the risk of war despite all its added terrors.

It cannot be denied, however, that never before has the realization of the destructiveness and futility of war been so general, particularly in nations exposed to aerial bombardment in the last war.

However, revulsion to war based on personal experience will largely wear off with the change of generations. This is why the much maligned "scare propaganda" initiated by atomic scientists in 1945 should not slacken until the horrible vision of an atomic or "super-atomic" war becomes etched forever in the minds of people, including those behind the Iron Curtain. To create a powerful and universal fear and revulsion against war, which even a totalitarian dictator should be un-

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*Physical scientists have now found means which, if they are developed, can wipe life off the surface of this planet.*

—JOHN FOSTER DULLES, Secretary of State,  
address before the United Nations  
September 17, 1953

able to flout, is one of the most important things American policies can do to strengthen the precarious peace.

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No exaggeration is needed in this campaign, but merely a candid and realistic presentation of facts and prospects. The present official policy, unfortunately, is to withhold this kind of information from the people. The only admitted reason is its possible utility to the Soviet Union. Actually, we believe, fear of popular reaction and of a clamor for effective counteraction is another reason; since to such a clamor the Administration has—and, in justice, can have—no satisfactory answer. A more statesmanlike and realistic policy would be, however, for the American authorities to give the world a sober account of the present and reasonable estimate of the anticipated destructive capacities of the atomic and thermonuclear weapons in American and foreign hands. The public should also be acquainted with the possibility of preventing the delivery of atomic bombs to the main targets. Such authentic information, kept up-to-date as time progresses, could be made the basis of a sustained American “peace-mongering” campaign throughout the world.

It is a task that calls for unprecedented political skill, in order to pursue relentlessly the offensive and defensive armament program and simultaneously to foster, here and abroad, the solidification of a rational and powerful anti-war world opinion.

The maintenance everywhere in the world of a public clamor for peace is perhaps the strongest prop that could be put under the shaky edifice of a peace based on threat of retaliation. If fear be temporarily the basis of our survival, let this fear be rational, deep, and permanent, not uninformed and volatile.

The second task American policy can and must achieve to further strengthen this precarious peace is to make aggression clearly unprofitable. Capacity for instantaneous and powerful retaliation is an obvious aspect of this policy, but it is not the only one. Less obvious for many—including some political and public opinion leaders in America—is the necessity and possibility of a substantial reduction of the damage and casualties during an A- or H-bomb attack on America. The preceding issue of the *Bulletin* was devoted to this problem—which Congress and the Administration persistently refuse to face.

There is a third, and even more important point. The experience of the two world wars, as well as of the Korean war, indicates that the greatest danger of war lies not in a sudden frontal attack on the main antagonist, but in a miscalculated attack on a minor member of the opposing coalition, based on a mistaken hope for impunity. Who could know whether the allies would fight for Siberia in 1919, for Czechoslovakia in 1928, for Danzig or Poland in 1939, for Korea in 1950? Nobody rose to defend Czechoslovakia and Danzig, but the attacks on Serbia and Poland unleashed the two world wars, and that on Korea came close to starting a third.

In the face of Soviet A- and H-bombs, the maintenance of unmistakable unity and collective security in the non-Communist world becomes more important, and more difficult, than ever. Unfortunately, every report from Asia and Europe—including this writer's own experiences on a recent trip—shows that the present Administration has permitted the situation to deteriorate badly. The Republican Administration has begun with a handicap of widespread—whether justified or unjustified is beside the point—international distrust of its policies, which were supposed to be nationalistic, isolationist, anti-European, and reactionary, particularly in respect to the undeveloped nations of Asia and Africa. This mistrust has not yet been dispelled, despite some reassuring statements of the, personally popular, President. The movement for European unification is floundering. What is needed to help Europe find its unity and strength, is not moral reminders of a self-righteous Sunday preacher, but active, day-by-day cooperation of a warm-hearted friend. The only kind of Western world unity which will not ultimately crumble in the face of atomic threat and skillful political maneuvering of Communist diplomacy, is a functional and organizational unity, binding all its nation members by the bonds of the mutual economic advantage of a large free-trade area, and commanding a constantly growing legal and spiritual allegiance of their peoples. Between 1947 and 1952, America has, hesitantly but steadily, moved toward becoming a part of such a community of free nations; its example has caused others to take heart and move in the same direction. European unification is stalled now mainly because England does not want to become a part of it, and France is afraid of German domina-

tion of a European Union of which England is not a part. There is only one way to bring England and the British Commonwealth into closer ties with the European Union, and that is by America showing the way, if not by a sudden and radical decision to join an Atlantic federation, then at least by a return to the pre-1952 trend of gradual sympathetic engagement. Only in this way can we stop the disintegration of the non-Communist world and the growth of nationalistic and anti-American attitudes in Europe and Asia which invite overt or covert Soviet aggression. Our own future is at stake in this disintegration, and our willingness to sacrifice and to adjust our policies must be commensurate with the danger.

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Since 1945, the trend toward a third world war and atomic annihilation has been fast and inexorable, like a destiny that fulfills itself despite all attempts of little men to divert it. It is meager satisfaction to recall that this development was forecast, on a correct time-scale, in the writings and memoranda of atomic scientists eight years ago. At that time, they were derided as naive sentimentalists without sense of reality because they saw a much greater and more terrifying reality than was encompassed by the field of vision of most others, and proposed logically adequate solutions to deal with it. In a recent speech before the Bar Association, Secretary of State Dulles said that he and other delegates at the United Nations founding conference at San Francisco in 1945 had been unaware of the most important factor in the future world situation—atomic weapons—and therefore had failed to evolve a sufficiently strong world organization. Secretary Dulles went on to propose changes in the U.N. charter which, he believes, could remedy this deficiency.

The failure of the American government in 1945 to realize the political importance of the then newly discovered atomic weapons and to take their implications into account in its major policies, was the heartbreak of atomic scientists at that time. In the demarcation agreement with Russia, abandoning to the latter the uranium ores of Central Europe, as well as in the more fundamental plans for the postwar world, the threat of atomic war did not count for much, if for anything at all. Secretary Stimson, the cabinet member most closely acquainted with

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his associations of his faith. There is no greater mistake we of this generation can make than to imagine that the tendencies which in other countries have led to the nightmare of totalitarianism will, as they appear in our own midst, politely pause—out of some delicate respect for American tradition—at the point where they would begin to affect our independence of mind and belief.

The forces of intolerance and political demagoguery are greedy forces, and unrestrained. There is no limit to their ambitions or their impudence. They contain within themselves no mechanism of self-control. Like the ills of Pandora's box, once released, they can be stopped only by forces external to themselves.

It is for these reasons that I feel that you, in setting up at this time within this great academic community a center for liberal arts, are taking upon yourselves a great, though honorable, burden. You are going to have to swim against the tide of many of the things I have been talking about. You are frequently going to find arrayed against you, whether by intent or otherwise, the materialists, the anti-intellectuals, the chauvinists of all sizes and descriptions, the protagonists of violence and suspicion and intolerance, the people who take it upon themselves to delimit the operation of the principle of Christian charity, the people from whose memories there has passed the recollection that in their Father's house there are many mansions. What you do in these walls will often be unsettling and displeasing to such people. They will view it with jealousy. You will have to bear their malice and their misrepresentation. But, unlike what many of them profess to wish to do to their own chosen enemies, it will be your task not to destroy them but to help in their redemption and remaking, to open their eyes, to demonstrate to them the sterility and hopelessness of negative undertakings, to engender in them an awareness of the real glories and the real horizons of the human spirit.

In this lies both the duty and the opportunity of the devotees of the liberal arts within our contemporary American civilization. It lies with them to combat the standardization of our day: to teach people to accept the great richness of the human mind and fantasy—to welcome it and to rejoice in it, happy that we have not

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the facts of atomic energy, required a year to realize that the atomic bomb was rapidly becoming an important factor in world politics.<sup>1</sup> Eight years later, Secretary Dulles calls atomic energy *the* most important factor. In the meantime, the fleeting possibility to forge, from the fiery flux of the Second World War, an international structure strong enough to harbor atomic fire without a danger of bursting with an explosion, has been allowed to slip. The flux has crystallized into the ugly forms of armed, sovereign states or alliances growling distrustfully at each other—a familiar state of affairs in human history, greatly aggravated in this case by the ideological fanaticism and totalitarian dictatorship prevalent in one of the two camps. In 1945, it was realistic to call the establishment of a world authority with sufficient powers to enforce universal atomic disarmament, the paramount task of American policy, to which other considerations of economic and political postwar planning must be subordinated. Eight years later, when the realization of the supreme importance of the atomic threat to our future, dawns on American political leaders, the same realism requires us to acknowledge that the time for a radical, constructive solution is not now at hand. After honest hesitation, but without a desperate search for alternatives, America has engaged on the path of power alliances and atomic arms race. There seems to be—at least at the present juncture—no turning away from this path.

As a nation, we failed to face the situation realistically in 1945. We have banked on continued American monopoly (first in fission, then in fusion bombs), on the magic protection of secrecy, on Soviet weakness, or Soviet reasonableness—and we have lost. This does not mean that we should neglect any chance of negotiation, or not explore openmindedly all lines of settlement but it means that the chances of successful negotiations are very low at this time.

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We cannot go back to 1945, but we can learn the bitter lesson, and face the much darker present situation realistically. This is, however, impossible unless the nation is given a sufficiently comprehensive and frank re-

<sup>1</sup> Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Bomb," *Bulletin*, III (February 1947), 37-41, 66-67.

port on this situation. The lively controversy over the need of more public information concerning the destructive power of the A- and H-bombs and the atomic capabilities of the several nations which possess them, turns mostly around practical arguments; such as the need for a much more effective civil defense on the one hand, and the advantages that may accrue to the Soviet Union from this or that disclosure on the other hand. These specific arguments are valid, but the decision needs to be made on a higher plane. In the American democracy great political decisions, such as increasing engagement of America in the European or Atlantic community or the building of a continental aerial defense barrier at the cost of many billions of dollars, ultimately lies with the people through the support they give, and pressure they exert on the Executive and Congress. At present, this mechanism of democratic determination of national policies is crippled. If it were suspended altogether, and fully informed leaders were left to operate on their own responsibility, the situation would perhaps be less dangerous—provided the leaders were of proper stature. However, the system of democratic checks and controls is still in operation, and the leaders cannot move unless they are supported by the people. Furthermore, these leaders are *elected* by the people—and the kind of leaders people choose depends on the kind of problems they believe these leaders will have to face.

For these fundamental political reasons, a frank presentation to the American people—and to the world—of the realities of the recently inaugurated age of abundant atomic bombs and the dawning age of available thermonuclear bombs, seems to be all-important. Only with the general recognition of the desperate seriousness of this situation, and of its threat to the survival of our own and other nations of the Western world, can the necessary remedial policies be put into operation. We believe these policies to be: a world-wide American anti-war campaign; the building of an adequate continental defensive system, whatever increase in national budget this may require; and revived American participation and leadership in the functional and organizational unification of the non-Communist world, whatever radical departures in American world policy this may entail.