

Final

July 10, 1957

STATEMENT BY LEO SZILARD

As a result of the development of atomic and hydrogen bombs the past ten years have been a perilous period for mankind. We are now moving towards a stalemate between the strategic airforces of America and Russia, and it is clear that war will represent universal disaster for mankind. The general recognition of this fact, as well as other historical events have created an atmosphere in which it became possible for us to meet in Pugwash, Canada, and to discuss dispassionately many important and highly controversial issues.

Because our time was limited and because we do not believe that a wanton attack by America against Russia or by Russia against America is among the possibilities that need to be considered, we have discussed only in passing President Eisenhower's open-sky proposal which is primarily aimed at safeguarding against a surprise attack. We regard as the greatest peril, in the present circumstances, the possibility that a war might break out somewhere between two smaller nations, that Russia and America might militarily intervene on opposite sides and that such a war might be fought by using atomic bombs in combat. We believe it would be very difficult to limit a local war of this kind -- particularly if it is fought with the use of atomic weapons in the tactical area -- and that what may start out as a local war can very well end up in an all-out atomic catastrophe. In order to avert this danger, we need to have as soon as possible a political -- aimed specifically at eliminating risk of the outbreak of a local war between smaller nations and the risk that in case of such a local conflict America and Russia may intervene, militarily, on opposite sides.

At the end of the last war, it was generally believed that -- as long as the Great Powers act in concert with each other -- the United Nations Organization may be able to guarantee the security of the smaller nations and may make it unnecessary, as well as impossible, for them to go to war with each other. Attempts to use the United Nations in the past ten years for purposes other than those for which it was designed have weakened this organization, but -- we hope -- they have not damaged it be-

We all agree that war would be a disaster to mankind, and this recognition is essential for the establishment of a lasting peace. But this recognition is not enough. Cholera did not stop when everybody agreed that cholera was bad. Cholera stopped only when it was discovered that it was caused by microbes. When Pasteur was able to tell the people that they must boil the water that they drink, then and only then, was cholera stopped.

We believe that goodwill is not lacking at the present time. We believe it is now possible for us to discuss dispassionately controversial issues and to examine successfully what the obstacles are that stand in the way of establishing a stable peace. We are confident that if we are not afraid of using our imagination it may be possible to find a way to get around these obstacles.

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In our deliberations we have examined a number of specific questions of which we shall list here a few examples:

(1) We have examined what considerations had induced the American government to put forward the Baruch Plan in 1945 which was aimed at international control of atomic energy and why the Russian government was in no position to accept this plan.

(2) We have examined in what manner the banning of atomic weapons would affect -- today -- the power balance between America and Russia, and whether it is likely that the Great Powers would accept such a ban -- even if they were satisfied that adequate methods of inspection are available which, as such, are acceptable to them.

(3) We have examined the possibility that England, America and Russia might agree to stop the manufacture of bombs at a future date while retaining their stockpiles of bombs. We believe that such an agreement if acceptable to all nations would eliminate certain grave dangers that might otherwise arise a few years hence.

In event of war, we fear even more than the devastation of our cities by blast and by fire the effects of radioactive fall-out. This might not only lead to premature aging and early death of those living within the countries attacked but it could affect also future generations.

We took note of the remarks made by President Eisenhower at one of his recent press conferences in which he spoke of the clean bomb. We regard his statement that he would want to share the secret of the clean bomb with Russia as a hopeful sign for the eventual return to sanity in international relations, but neither the invention of clean bombs, nor their eventual production can appreciably lessen our apprehension of what might happen in case of war.

In our deliberation we tried to examine dispassionately the causes which render the present state of peace rather instable, and we discussed steps that might be taken for the purpose of achieving greater stability. We hope to continue our deliberations of this particular problem on a future occasion.

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