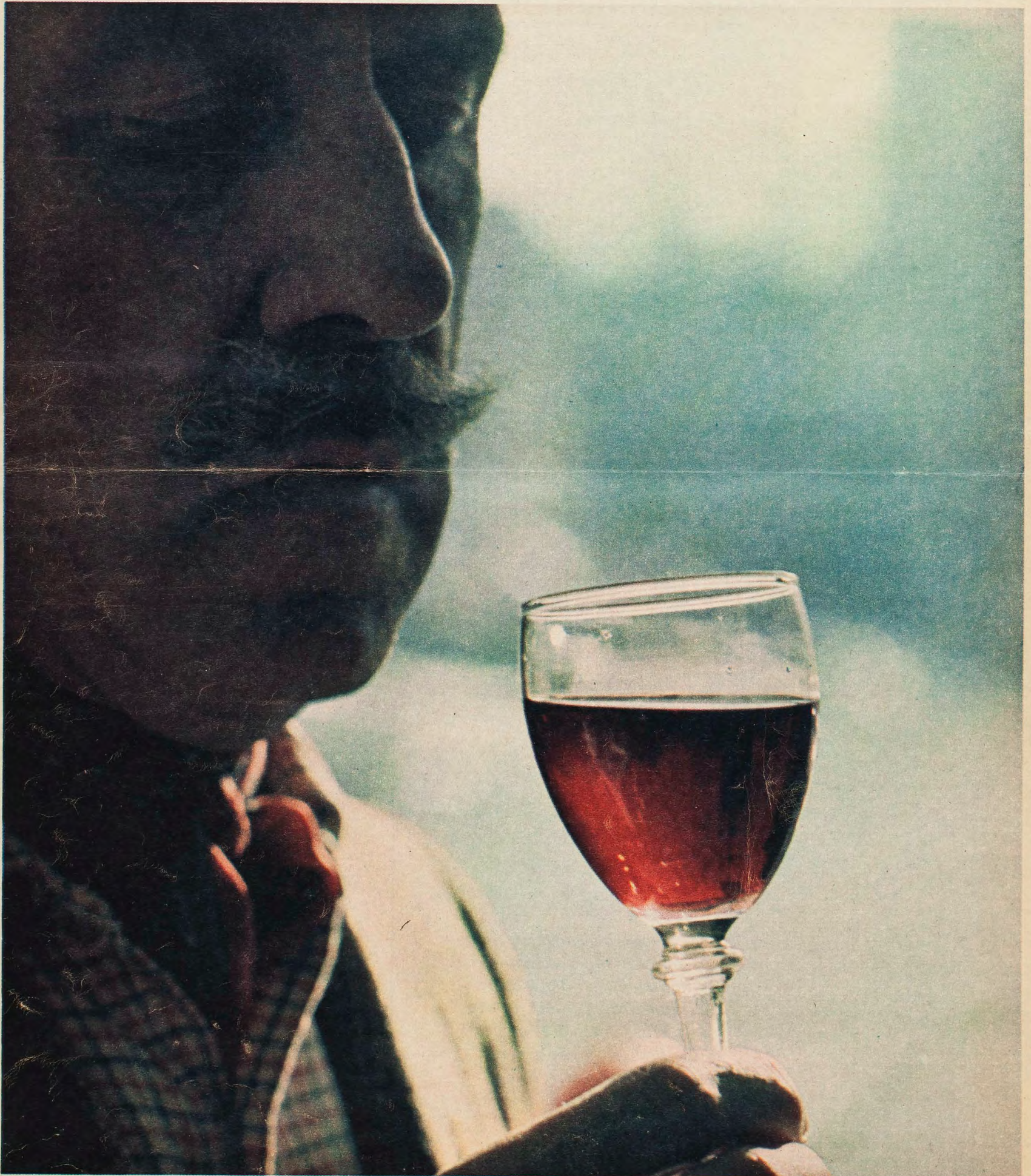


Sunday

The Washington Star



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MARCH 24, 1963

CONTENTS

THE CHANGING SCENE, by Jerry O'Leary, Jr.	4
"THE WORLD HAS SIX YEARS TO LIVE," by Bernard Gwertzman	6
3 UNDER 3, by Moselle Caldwell and Tom Hoy	10
THE NORTH SIDE OF PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, by John W. Stepp	12
A MOST IMPORTANT AIRLINE, by Paul McIlvaine	16
A TASTE OF WINE, by Walter Hackett and Carl Purcell	18
THE CIVIL WAR AS REPORTED BY THE STAR 100 YEARS AGO: FARRAGUT RUNS ANOTHER GAUNTLET, compiled by John W. Stepp	20
GIRLS' BASKETBALL, by Ken Firestone	21



Pennsylvania avenue, once a glorious dream of the city's first planner, Pierre L'Enfant, has deteriorated over the years into something more akin to a nightmare. But the dream is being revived by modern planners. John Stepp, of the SUNDAY staff, writes about Washington's most famous thoroughfare, starting on Page 12. Included is a reproduction in color of a painting on wood by Howard Thomas and black-and-white drawings by Lily Spandorf. Mr. Thomas builds up layers of paint on small oak blocks, using casein and polymer tempera. Four of his blocks are shown above. A collection of his blocks, all depicting scenes on Pennsylvania avenue, will be on display this week at the Artists' Mart, 1361 Wisconsin avenue N.W.

The Cover

Our roving contributor, Walter Hackett, looks critically at a glass of wine in the photo by Carl Purcell. Mr. Hackett also served as wine steward for a night at the Blue Room at the Shoreham Hotel—an important part of his research (he says) for his story about wine and its uses, on Page 18.

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“THE WORLD HAS SIX YEARS TO LIVE”

Leo Szilard, who helped invent the atomic bomb, now is trying desperately to save the world from it. Do his programs make any sense? Are his predictions to be taken seriously?

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

PHOTOS BY LYNN MILLAR

LEO SZILARD usually can be found in Washington's Dupont Plaza Hotel. If not in his seventh floor room dictating, he probably is in the lobby, reading his mail or expounding his ideas.

Listening to the 64-year-old, gray-haired, somewhat overweight Szilard is an unforgettable experience. Some have said that an hour with him has changed their whole outlook on world problems. Others have found such conversations terrifying. Ideas, concepts, assertions come so quickly from Dr. Szilard that most listeners have trouble keeping up with him.

On a given day, this many faceted professor may speak to a historian about his work on the atomic bomb (he and the late Enrico Fermi hold the first patent dealing with nuclear energy); he may write a letter to a fellow biophysicist about some problem of aging; or, as is most likely these days, Dr. Szilard will talk long and ardently about the matter closest to his heart—saving the world from ruin.

His mind is "faster than a computer," one awed friend has said. "It grinds facts up and spits them out as conclusions before you have even grasped what he is discussing."

Dr. Szilard's friends call him "genius" with the same matter-of-factness that others are called "intelligent." He is vain, and occasionally arrogant. Notwithstanding this, Leo Szilard is one of the most respected men in the scientific profession. In an age when so many scientists have doubts about the Frankenstein



"...The possibility of a chain reaction in uranium had not occurred to Einstein..."

monsters they have created, Dr. Szilard has been a conscience for many of them. A conscience, it must be added, with a biting sense of humor.

In 1939 this man brashly and fruitlessly tried to dissuade his colleagues from publishing any information on their research in nuclear physics, for fear of helping the Nazis find the key to the atomic bomb—then believed by most people to be no more than an H. G. Wells fantasy.

It was he who participated in an equally brash and equally fruitless rebellion of atomic scientists in 1945 against the Government's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. And it was his efforts in 1946, just before he quit active work in the nuclear field, that rallied support for civilian control of atomic energy.

For the last 17 years, Leo Szilard has spoken out satirically—at times majestically—for sanity in international affairs. He is cynical, even contemptuous of some public officials. Unlike such colleagues as J. Robert Oppenheimer, Edward Teller and Linus Pauling, Dr. Szilard is not well known to the general public. He has devoted his talents until now to

the scientific community, and there he is something of a legendary figure.

His book, "The Voice of the Dolphins," published in paperback, is a collection of satirical essays, written since the war and compiled when he thought he was dying of cancer. The title story, in which a group of dolphins save mankind from nuclear destruction, is a brutal Swiftian essay on international politics. It has gained him a cult of followers who have given his unorthodox views a kind of cocktail party currency around the country. After reading or listening to Dr. Szilard one is likely to come away feeling that if this man is right, then everyone else must be wrong.

It was Leo Szilard who in 1947 wrote an open letter to Joseph Stalin suggesting that American and Soviet leaders speak to each other's people at regular intervals. His idea, preposterous then, is now considered a rather conservative cultural exchange proposal.

Regularly, Dr. Szilard—now a University of Chicago professor—comes up with seemingly outlandish proposals to prevent mutual destruction. He is tireless in forcing people to hear him out. He has talked to Nikita S. Khrushchev for several hours in New York; he traveled to Moscow a few months later to talk with Soviet scientists. As a result of these talks he is convinced that the Russians are amenable to some sort of international agreement to prevent war.

His recovery from cancer of the bladder in 1960 is typical of the man's courage and persistence. Doctors had prescribed radiation treatment followed by surgery. Dr. Szilard asked his wife, who also serves as his personal physician, to examine records of patients with cases like his.

Out of 40 such cases that went to surgery, Dr. Szilard recalls, they found only one who was saved. With such a low recovery rate, Dr. Szilard refused to go under the knife. Against medical advice, he asked for more radiation instead. Gradually his symptoms disappeared. He finally left the hospital apparently cured.

He came to Washington in February, 1961, a month after John F. Kennedy's inauguration. He had a vague idea of doing something about heading off a devastating war. He prepared a speech, "Are We on the Road to War?" and gave it to audiences around the country in the fall of 1961 and in early 1962. In it he said:

"Those of you who have watched closely the course of events... may have been led to conclude that we are headed for an all-out war. I, myself, believe we are, and that our chances of getting through the next 10 years without war are slim." (He now thinks only six years are left, if no solution is found.)

This flat assertion of terror, secretly believed by great numbers of people, has aroused considerable interest in Dr. Szilard's recommendations. While many people speculate on the future, Dr. Szilard claims to offer a way out, a road away from war. He says:

"I personally find myself in rebellion against the fate that history seems to have in store for us, and I suspect that some of you may be equally rebellious. The question is, what can you do?"

In asking, a la Kennedy, "what can you do?" Dr. Szilard struck a responsive chord around the country. The encouraging response led him to form a new Washington lobby, and branches began springing up in Boston, New

York, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The name of the lobby was originally "The Council to Abolish War." In this era of positive images, however, the council recently decided to change its name to "The Council for a Livable World."

Through his talks, his personal contacts and his articles, Dr. Szilard is trying to find 20,000 comparatively well-heeled disciples who will pledge 2 per cent of their annual income to the council. This expensive request—by far the most striking made by any such organization—has so far not met with overwhelming response. About 2,000 persons have promised to send the council their 2 per cent, a total which Dr. Szilard says is not bad for less than six months time, but far from good.

Ideally, Dr. Szilard hopes for about \$40 million a year. The money would be used to elect to Congress men who are "intelligent... and who have insight into what goes on." This view of politics seems absurdly oversimplified. It suggests that a surge of money from his lobby can somehow direct the course of Amer-



"...The squash court was a foregone conclusion. We knew it would work..."

ican policy. But Dr. Szilard has no other firm policies besides a few "first steps."

These include a joint Soviet-American non-governmental study group on disarmament matters; an increase in our conventional military forces so that we could promise not to use our nuclear forces first; and a number of other steps designed to clear the cold war air.

These are unspectacular proposals, not nearly so unorthodox as many he has made (he once proposed facetiously that the Russians and Americans plant nuclear mines under each other's major cities, so that there would be instant retaliation if one side used the bomb first). Today, the Administration is reported on the road to making just such a non-first strike pledge as Dr. Szilard advocates.

The morale of his council is good, if the size of the membership is not. Last fall, the first trickle of funds was used to set up a two-room office in the Dupont Circle Building, a long stone's throw from Dr. Szilard's hotel, and to support two Democrats in their senatorial campaigns—Clark of Pennsylvania and McGovern of South Dakota, both of whom won.

The council claims the McGovern victory as its first triumph. Since Senator McGovern won by only 597 votes, the council says its \$20,000 contribution can be cited as the factor that made the difference. Senator McGovern's office acknowledges the sizable support (it was one-fifth of his total campaign expenditure) but hesitates to say that one man's dollar was more responsible for victory than any other's. It is true, however, that the \$20,000 would not have been possible one year earlier.

Continued

SIX YEARS

Continued

Dr. Szilard hopes to come up with more McGovern in 1964, but he is the first to admit that he needs more than 2,000 members to do it. He plans to remain in Washington for about a year more—and if the council membership has not reached close to 20,000 he plans to call it a good try, and quit. So far, his support has come from a hard core of wealthy professional people, including a large number of psychiatrists, who have written him adoring letters. (For some reason, psychiatrists make up the initial sponsors of almost any organization devoted to saving society.)

Dr. Szilard first came to Washington in February of 1961, accompanied by his wife, Dr. Gertrud Weiss, a physician. In the fall of 1961 and winter of 1962, he toured the university circuit, giving his "two per cent" speech. By June of 1962, the response was encouraging enough to form the council. He is co-chairman together with William Doering of Yale. The national director is Allan Forbes, jr., of Cambridge, Mass., who formerly was associated with SANE, an earlier and still active group that protests but is not as politically oriented as the council.

Because he prefers his hotel to the office across the circle, Dr. Szilard is constantly calling up the office and asking for one of the three secretaries to drop everything and come over to pick up a letter that needs answering or to take dictation. He is such a stickler for perfection that he has been known to dictate 30 drafts of a document before being satisfied. As a result, Mr. Forbes handles almost all Dr. Szilard's correspondence—"otherwise it might never be answered."

Dr. Szilard is a prodigious worker. He generally spends his mornings talking, his afternoons writing. His diction is rapid, and somewhat too highly pitched. There is an intonation that suggests but does not give away his Hungarian origin and German education (he speaks to his Viennese-born wife in German). The clipped nature of his speech sometimes leads strangers to suspect he is irritated, and that can be unsettling in a first meeting. When he is thinking out a problem he can be impolite, a typical "absent-minded professor." He is loved and admired by his friends for his tremendous energy, his deep integrity, his sharp wit, and his fantastic mental powers.

He loved nuclear physics in the pre-bomb days because it was new, exciting and challenging. He quit after the war because he thought biology (or his specialty, microbiology) would be more stimulating. In this, too, he was ahead of his time.

Dr. Szilard was one of the initiated few in the late 1930s who knew that, theoretically, Einstein's formula " $E = mc^2$ " might be applied to splitting the atom. And it was his perseverance that was largely responsible for the United States' decision to try to make an atomic bomb. The few scientists in 1939 who recognized the power that could be produced by setting off a nuclear chain reaction feared that Nazi Germany was on the verge of perfecting this scientific monster.

This led Dr. Szilard, himself a Hungarian Jew, schooled in Berlin, and a recent emigre to the United States via Austria and England, to try to persuade responsible authorities to take more dramatic action. His own experiments (with Walter Zinn, a Canadian) con-

vinced him that a chain reaction was possible, and that it was vitally important to prevent the Germans from cornering the world's supply of uranium, then found in the Belgian Congo.

With a Hungarian friend, Eugene Wigner, a professor at Princeton, he went to see Albert Einstein, who was a friend of the Belgian queen. They thought a letter from Einstein would persuade Belgium not to sell to Germany. In July, 1939, Professors Wigner and Szilard drove out to Einstein's summer cottage in Peconic, Long Island, and told him what was happening.

"The possibility of a chain reaction in uranium had not occurred to Einstein," Szilard recalls. "But almost as soon as I began to tell him about it, he realized what the consequences might be and immediately signified his readiness to help us and if necessary stick his neck out, as the saying goes."

Originally the scientists planned to send a letter to the Queen and a copy to the State Department. Back in New York, Dr. Szilard



"...You... may have been led to conclude that we are headed for an all-out war..."

talked to Alexander Sachs, a financier, who knew President Roosevelt from the early New Deal days. Mr. Sachs advised a direct approach to the President and advised Dr. Szilard to go beyond the problems of uranium: to seek support for atomic research in the country.

On August 2, Dr. Szilard went to see Einstein again. This time his driver was another Hungarian, Edward Teller, who at that time was close to Dr. Szilard (now they are intellectual foes). He recalls that Einstein dictated a draft of a letter to Dr. Teller. From this, Dr. Szilard wrote two more drafts, one long and one short. Einstein chose the long one.

Thus, the famous Einstein letter to President Roosevelt was born. Mr. Sachs personally gave it to the President in October. The letter is considered by historians as the turning point in atomic research in this country. It begins:

"Some recent work by E. Fermi and L. Szilard which has been communicated to me in manuscript, leads me to expect that the element uranium may be turned into a new and important source of energy in the immediate future..."

Once the war started, the Manhattan Project was established. An illustrious group of scientists went to Chicago, where on December 2, 1942, the first chain reaction was set off in a squash court at the university. It was produced within graphite, as proposed by Dr. Szilard.

"The squash court was a foregone conclusion," Dr. Szilard said recently at the Dupont Plaza. "We knew it would work. It was more a festive occasion than anything else." Some one cracked open a bottle of Italian chianti, a rare item then, in honor of director Fermi. And as Dr. Szilard remembers, "someone even had paper cups."

Although he had a great deal to do with developing the theories behind the bomb, Dr. Szilard objected firmly to its use against Japan. By August, 1945, he argued that the war was virtually won; that Japan could be made to surrender without using the bomb. Dr. Szilard sent a memo to the White House, and signed another sent by a group of scientists. As a final step, Dr. Szilard tried to see the new President, Harry Truman. Mr. Truman sent him to James F. Byrnes, soon to be Secretary of State, who was then living in South Carolina.

The interview was unproductive. Mr. Byrnes had little comprehension of what Dr. Szilard was talking about. The bomb went off, the war ended, and Dr. Szilard quit government work.

Aside from the moral issues involved, Dr. Szilard believes the use of an atomic bomb prevented an effective arms control treaty at the end of the war with the Russians. This view is open to doubt, as are most of his theories, but there is no doubt that he is correct in stating that American officials seriously underestimated the progress Russian scientists had made on their own bomb.

When Dr. Szilard talks about the events at the close of the war, he is quite bitter. Responsible public officials, he insists, did not know what the scientists knew; there was no effective communication.

"While every creative physicist was saying that the Russians were two to three years away from a bomb," Dr. Szilard says, "officials were saying it would take 7 to 15 years." As a result, a wonderful chance to reach an international agreement with the Russians was lost, he believes. He says the Baruch Plan, much praised by American leaders, "was an attempt to have our cake and eat it too."

Dr. Szilard came to Washington briefly in 1945-46 to help rally the scientific community against the May-Johnson Bill in Congress which would have put atomic development within the purview of the military. Ironically, Dr. Szilard had asked secrecy in 1939, to prevent the Germans from knowing about nuclear development; now, he was the leader for free exchange of ideas.

The May-Johnson bill eventually was defeated and the McMahon bill was accepted, setting up the present Atomic Energy Commission.

Although the experience at the end of the war left its bitter marks, Dr. Szilard faces the future undaunted, although worried about the nearness of total war. Like a scientist, he believes that if facts are presented in a logical way to men who can comprehend them, truth will triumph.

Dr. Szilard has spent the past few months talking to all sorts of men. He has lunched several times on Capitol Hill. He knows the top men in the Pentagon. Summing up, he is led to conclude that there are many more wise men in government and politics today than at the time of Hiroshima. If only they see the facts and act on them...

This explains why a basically shy man has taken on a task which seems preposterous to many. Whether he succeeds or not in electing "clear-thinking men," and whether or not he succeeds even in the first steps of his plan to avoid nuclear war, he already has brought what sounds to many like a singular "sweet voice of reason" to the Nation's Capitol. Such sounds are welcome amidst the cacophony. ★