

V-22
Washington, D.C.
June 15, 1962

GETTING OFF THE LINE OF LEAST RESISTANCE

By

Leo Szilard

Under the last two Presidents, and so far also under the Kennedy Administration, the United States has steadily followed the line of least resistance. The United States followed this line when she dropped the Bomb on Hiroshima and she is following this line at the present time. In 1945 Japan was suing for peace, but it was easier to stick to the demand of "unconditional surrender" and to drop the Bomb, than to arrive at a decision - jointly with our allies - on the peace-terms to be offered to Japan. At the present time it is easier to keep on building long-range solid fuel rockets, as fast as they can be produced, than to propose an agreement on arms limitation that Russia could accept. And if we keep following this line of least resistance we may reach, within a few years, a point of no return in an all-out arms race.

With President Kennedy, a number of able men moved into the Administration who are deeply concerned, but so far they have not been able to integrate their collective wisdom and to deflect the seemingly inexorable course of events. I personally find myself in rebellion against the fate that history seems to have in store for us and it appears that there are many others who are equally rebellious. Even though they are in the minority, still this minority could take effective political action, provided they are able to agree on the specific political objectives that must be pursued in order to halt our drifting towards war, and provided they are willing to compensate for their numerical inferiority by making substantial campaign contributions to Congressional candidates - about 2 percent of their income annually. The contributions of 100,000 such people, having an average income of \$7500 would amount to 15 million dollars per year.

Two interrelated political committees would have to operate in Washington: The Lobby for Abolishing War and the Council for Abolishing War. It would be the function of the Lobby to advise the people where their contributions ought to go in order to

bring about a change in Congressional attitudes, that would encourage the Administration to pursue truly constructive policies. The Lobby would support those now in Congress who are deeply concerned about our drifting towards war. More importantly, the Lobby would strive to find able men and women, similarly concerned, who could get elected to Congress if they received the nomination of their party. It would be the task of the Lobby to persuade them to seek the nomination, and to help them get the nomination, by assuring them of adequate campaign funds in advance. It would be the task of the Council to bring to Washington, from time to time scientists, scholars and other public spirited citizens, who could help members of the Administration and Congress clarify their minds on the complex issues which have to be resolved if peace is to be based on reliable foundations.

Starting at the Harvard Law School Forum last November and ending at the University of Oregon in January, I spoke at eight universities and colleges across the country. In each place I spoke before large student audiences and I asked the students to help me explore whether a political movement of this sort could get off the ground. The students distributed mimeographed copies of my speech among their elders in their home communities, and to date I have received about 2500 letters from persons pledging 2 percent of their income. In view of this response the Lobby and the Council were set up on June 2nd in Washington, D.C. The political objectives which the council may be expected to pursue, in the months to come, have been outlined in my speech; reprints are now obtainable at 935 East 60th Street in Chicago, from the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

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