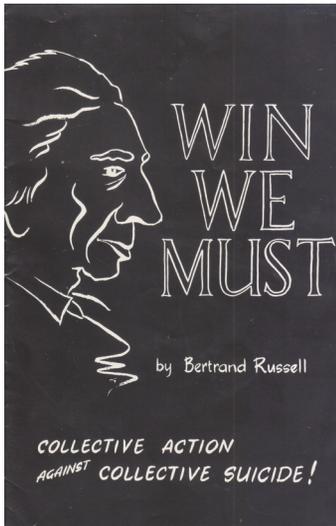


Win we must

Bertrand Russell



Adding some perspective to current concerns, Russell's anti-nuclear broadside was delivered in Birmingham in March 1961 and subsequently published as a pamphlet by the organisers of the Second Midlands Conference for Peace.

My purpose in the remarks which I shall be making is to place the British agitation against nuclear armaments within the framework of the situation in the world. Our movement is part – but only part – of a world-wide movement to persuade mankind to abstain from collective suicide. Collective suicide, given the present known weapons of mass destruction, can only be prevented by collective action. Nothing that any one country can do in isolation will bring safety to any part of the world. If our movement against British reliance on nuclear weapons is to be effective in diminishing the peril which now threatens all nations, this result can only be achieved through international repercussions of what our own country does. Our main purpose must be to prevent a war using weapons of mass destruction – and not only to prevent it for a time by makeshift devices, but to establish such institutions in the world as shall make it reasonably certain that a war of extermination will not occur in the foreseeable future.

What would happen?

It is, to my mind, amazing and profoundly saddening that there should be any human beings who advocate a state of affairs that makes nuclear war not unlikely. What, exactly, would happen if a general nuclear war broke out is, fortunately, as yet unknown. It may be that such a war would put an end to human life entirely. It may be that there would be survivors in the most southerly of inhabited regions. It may be that there would be some survivors in Europe and Asia and North America. American governmental experts who take the most optimistic view that is al all

plausible have published horrifying figures. In 1958, the US Secretary of Defence, summarising a Pentagon report, maintained that, in such a war, 160 million people would be killed in the United States, 200 million in the USSR, and everybody in Britain and Western Europe. Nothing has occurred since to modify this estimate, which is the most governmentally authoritative estimate available.

Madness

How is such a war to be prevented? Each side has a simple answer: it is only necessary, we are told, that our side should be stronger than the other, since we are friends of peace and would not initiate a war even if we were sure of victory. The trouble for this formula is that it is impossible for each side to be stronger than the other. So long as each side believes that this is the way to secure peace, the only result is an armament race which must first reduce the populations of East and West to subsistence level and, in the end, is almost certain to produce actual war. Many people tell us that, however much each side goes on piling up armaments, there will never actually be a war because that would be madness. I agree emphatically that it would be madness, but I do not agree that is a reason for expecting it not to occur. Many careful studies have been made in America, and almost all of them have concluded that, if the present policies persist, a nuclear war is more likely than not. This, for instance, is the conclusion of Oskar Morgenstern, a politically orthodox American defence expert. It is also the conclusion reached by a committee of experts appointed by Ohio State University to examine precisely this issue. Quite recently, Lord Hailsham, our Minister of Science, unequivocally pronounced the same sense. What is strange and perplexing is that, nevertheless, many of these experts do not draw the conclusion that present policies ought to be changed. I think it is probably true that neither America nor Russia would deliberately inaugurate a general nuclear war, but there are various ways, some of them terrifyingly probable, by which a general war could come about without the deliberate intention of any government.

War by accident

One of the most probable of these is war by accident or by misunderstanding. Our Prime Minister, in terms of dogmatic certainty, has pronounced: '*There will be no war by accident.*' It seems charitable to suppose that he believed this when he said it; but if he did, he was ignorant of things which it was his duty to know. The danger of unintended war arises, at present, mainly through the American doctrine of instant retaliation. American military authorities believe – or pretend to believe –

that, at any moment, Russia may make a surprise attack upon NATO countries. There is not a shred of evidence for such a view, and very strong evidence against it, but it is held and proclaimed and made the basis of American strategy. Radar stations in Canada, Greenland, Yorkshire, and many other places, are perpetually on the look out for approaching Russian missiles. They have frequently misinterpreted flights of birds as approaching bombs and, on at least one occasion, they mistook the moon for a Russian attack. Whenever a mistake of this sort occurs, American airmen armed with bombs get into the air. They have practised such speed that they can now be off the ground within two minutes of receiving the warning signal. Hitherto, mistakes have been discovered in time, but this is a piece of luck, upon which it would be most imprudent to rely. If one key man is drunk or insane or suddenly ill, the mistake may not be discovered. Since the Russians, like the Americans, expect a surprise attack and also believe in instant retaliation, one such mistake may easily precipitate a full scale war.

Polaris

Polaris submarines which are being stationed in Holy Loch increase the danger of accidental war. It is claimed that they can voyage anywhere without being detected by the Russians. Their bombs are always in instant readiness. Their captains receive orders direct from Washington. In the event of war, these orders might not get through, and each captain would have to act on his own initiative. It might easily happen that through some mechanical defect the captain failed to receive expected messages and concluded that war had broken out. In that case, it would break out.

These are only samples of the danger, which also takes various other forms. The danger is so great that every day during which we still exist is a subject of thankfulness; and, although disaster on any one day is not probable, disaster in the long run is almost certain unless new, radical measures are adopted.

What the world needs is obvious to every sane and informed man. It needs the abolition of all weapons of mass destructions – nuclear, chemical and biological. It needs an immense lessening of East-West tension and of the mutual suspicion that is engendered by tension. It needs a world-wide authority with power to arbitrate on vexed questions in any part of the world. Above all, it needs a general realisation that war has become an insanity which cannot secure anything that any belligerent can desire, for, if this is not generally realised, suspicion will remain and each bloc will fear that the other is evading whatever disarmament treaties may have been concluded.

All this is what the world needs if the human race is to survive. What can Britain do to further these international aims?

Unilateralism

The policy that we advocate is called 'unilateralism', but, unless accompanied by some explanations, this name for our policy is somewhat misleading. We want multilateral disarmament, but we think that British unilateral disarmament is the most effective step that Britain can take towards that end. This conclusion has been forced upon us by the utter failure of all disarmament conferences since the end of the last war. We have been reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the West, at least, has not been sincere about disarmament and has made only such offers as it was confident the East would reject. Once, in 1955, the insincerity of the West was dramatically exposed: the West made some excellent proposals towards disarmament, but, to the horror of the Western Powers, the Soviet Government accepted these proposals, whereupon the West at once withdrew them.

The Soviet attitude

At the present time, Russia is urging complete and speedy nuclear disarmament. Apart from the repeated statements by Khrushchev, the Russian position has been set forth unequivocally in an article by Major General Talenski called 'The Character of Modern War' (printed in English in *Survival* for January-February, 1961) which announced: 'War in the military-technical sense has outlived itself as a weapons of policy.' 'We must,' he concludes, 'struggle even more stubbornly and consistently for the destruction of all armaments, for the exclusion of war from the life of human society, for peace in the whole world.' This attitude of the Soviet Government has made Western governmental circles very angry, since they cannot see how to resist it without giving Russia a great propaganda advantage. American military authorities evaded the issue when it was new by means of the U-2 incident, and it is to be feared that something similar may dash the hopes of sane men whenever there is a danger of agreement. It is this constant failure of attempts at multilateral disarmament which has persuaded many of the friends of peace in Britain to advocate British unilateral disarmament without waiting for general agreement. In addition to this incentive, British unilateralists have, however, a number of other reasons in favour of their policy. I will enumerate four of them.

A neutral Britain

(1) The plan, which has hitherto been pursued, of having conferences between NATO and the Warsaw Pact alone has the great disadvantage that each side comes with a prepared plan and, for reasons of prestige, feels that it must not yield an inch to the plan of the other side. It is obvious that this is an ideal method of not reaching agreement, and entirely convenient to the military authorities and the armaments industry. But, if disarmament is really desired, it is not a sensible method. It would be far better to invite neutrals to draw up a scheme which should be strictly impartial between East and West, and which, since it would spring from neutrals, each side could accept without loss of face. For this reason, there is more hope of solving the world's problems by the initiative of neutrals than by acrimonious disputations between East and West alone. If Britain became neutral, Britain could take part in this work of conciliation by organising, and perhaps leading, a group of politically mature uncommitted Powers. Those who wish Britain to adopt neutrality and unilateral nuclear disarmament are often accused of urging Britain to abdicate responsibility. This is the exact opposite of the truth. Britain's responsibility to the world cannot be adequately fulfilled while Britain is tied to NATO and is supposed, however fallaciously, to be protected by American nuclear power. Britain as the leader of a group of neutrals, inspired by the hope of peace, can do a work of immeasurable value in resolving the present deadlock and urging upon both sides such measures of conciliation as will remove the pall of terror which now darkens the world.

(2) Even if it were true – which it is not – that nuclear weapons protect us, it would still be abominable to depend upon such protection. When American military authorities tell us that in a nuclear war there will be 160 million American deaths and 200 million Russian deaths, we are expected to deplore the 160 million but rejoice at the 200 million, so that, on balance, we are to feel pleasure at the holocaust. It is considered wicked and a sign of Communist tendencies to remember that Russians are human beings and that a nuclear death is as painful to them as to us. I find it unbearable, as I go about my daily business, to think that I owe my continued existence to my Government's capacity of unimaginably vast slaughter. It is not by means of such ferocity that a good world can be built.

Protection illusory

(3) But the protection afforded by H-bombs is not only wicked. It is also illusory. This is especially true as regards Britain and other allies of the US. At the time of the U-2 incident, Khrushchev and Malinovsky informed

the world, in characteristically vigorous language, that allies of the United States which allowed their territory to be used by America for what Russia considered unfriendly acts ran a risk of obliteration. Orthodox American military authorities pointed out that Britain, or any other ally of America, could be completely exterminated by Russia in about half-an-hour, and that, in spite of NATO, it is very unlikely that America would avenge our extinction by proceeding to extinguish the rest of mankind. At most, two per cent of Russian bombs would be needed to put an end to Britain. And, while Britain allows America to make use of her territory for purposes hostile to Russia, Russia might conceivably feel impelled to such action. This would not be the case if Britain were neutral. It follows that our reliance upon American protection, so far from making us safer, in fact makes us less safe. Our membership of NATO is, therefore, not only wicked, but also foolish. I do not pretend that, as neutrals, we should be safe. But I do say with all imaginable emphasis that we should be less unsafe than we are at present.

Britain and NATO

(4) There are those who argue that our membership of NATO increases the strength of the alliance and, therefore, diminishes the likelihood of a war initiated by Russia. This is, in every respect, a fallacious argument. We do not add anything appreciable to the strength of America by our alliance. On the contrary, we saddle America with a very onerous obligation to protect us. Every humane person must hope that America would not fulfil this obligation, since the attempt to do so would only make death world-wide instead of merely British. This view is taken by military authorities in America, but is rejected by British military authorities, not upon any rational grounds, but only because it is humiliating to British pride. There is a further fallacy in the argument: ever since the death of Stalin, Russia has been less inclined to war than America and, if it were indeed the case that we added appreciably to the strength of NATO, we should be increasing the likelihood of general war by belonging to the more bellicose side.

Some authorities, especially in America, endeavour to persuade their readers that something tolerable may survive a nuclear war. The most detailed of these is Mr. Herman Kahn who believes, or pretends to believe, that the economies of both America and Russia might recover, perhaps within ten years. One gathers – though on this point he is not explicit – that, as soon as they have sufficiently recovered, they are to prepare to fight again. And, after a second nuclear war, if Mr. Kahn is right, there may be a third and perhaps a fourth, and so on, until there are not enough people

alive to build H-bombs. If on the other hand, Mr. Kahn supposes that, after a nuclear war, which has given no supremacy to either, both sides will be ready to negotiate a secure peace, there can be no reason why they should not negotiate a peace without first having a war.

There can be no certainty as to the magnitude of the destruction which a full-scale war would bring about. Some think that the whole human race would perish. Others maintain that, while all the great nations of the northern hemisphere would lose social cohesion and be reduced to small marauding bands, the southern hemisphere would fare better and a new culture might be developed, presumably under the leadership of the South African White. This view is taken by Fred Charles Iklé in his book *The Social Impact of Bomb Destruction*:

‘Those speculatively inclined, then, ought to picture the world, after an all-out nuclear war with extreme fallout contamination, not as a planet inhabited only by lower forms of plant life immune to radioactivity, but as a world with expanding populations and perhaps thriving economies in South America, South Africa, Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand. From this picture one might try to look still farther ahead and perhaps reach the conclusion that the surviving generations would be farther away from a peaceful millennium than ever, because of the deep racial, religious, and ideological differences that divide the peoples of the Southern hemisphere. Indeed – this speculation could continue – both capitalism and communism might survive, since both might be represented among the survivor nations. But the powerful states which fought for these issues would have disappeared from history – much as the Inca Empire and the realm of Carthage have ended forever.’

As for North America, the most cheerful prophecy which seems to have any kind of justification is that of John M. Fowler in a book called *Fallout* which has a preface by Adlai Stevenson. Mr. Fowler says:

‘A skilled and resourceful individual or family outside the ring of complete destruction and on the outskirts of the lethal umbrella of fallout might survive the nightmarish early weeks. By burrowing into the walls of the basement or huddling under some hastily improvised shield in a corner, a person might survive although the outdoors was an oven of silent death.’

Such statements represent the extreme of hope that is in any degree reasonable. Nevertheless, when there were Congressional hearings about the possible effects of nuclear war, the newspaper reports, we are told,

were pervaded by a 'spirit of optimism' [sic] on the basis that some human beings might survive. I find it impossible to understand the mentality of those who regard such a prospect as cheerful, especially as the war they envisage would do nothing towards establishing the sort of world that they profess to desire.

A silly suggestion

One is almost driven to the conclusion that many people hate the prospect of a world without war and will invent any argument, however flimsy, to persuade men that war need not be abolished. One of the silliest suggestions in this direction is that Russia and America might agree not to employ H-bombs, but to conduct their future wars as if nuclear weapons had never been invented. It is remarkable that those who make this suggestion are among those who proclaim most loudly the complete untrustworthiness of the Soviet Government. It must be obvious to anybody who has seen war-passions in operation that, if either side was in danger of defeat, it would employ H-bombs if it had them whatever agreements to the contrary might exist.

A cruel hoax

Another plan for persuading populations that the destructiveness of nuclear warfare can be kept within bounds is what is called 'civil defence.' I find it impossible to speak with any moderation about this cruel and murderous hoax. Mr. Kahn, with the approval of many military authorities, suggests that the United States should spend 30 billion dollars on civil defence. As we know, America is in one respect more fortunate than Britain since, when the radar chain is completed, Americans will have 25 minutes' warning that the bombs are on the way, whereas Britain will have only four minutes. The purpose of these schemes is to persuade the populations of their several countries that their Governments are not sentencing them *all* to death, but are prepared to show mercy to a certain percentage. In pursuit of this aim, they advocate fantastic measures which those who invent them must know to be futile. In America, large shelters are advised to be created in all large cities. When the radar chain is completed, it is hoped that there will be 25 minutes' warning of a nuclear attack. When the 25 minute warning is issued, the populations of all the large cities are to rush into the shelters and to stay there until (if ever) it is safe to come out.

I find it quite impossible to believe that those who have devised this fantastic palliative can think that it can serve any useful purpose. Let us consider, stage by stage, what would be likely to happen. Imagine the

whole population of (say) New York faced with the prospect of almost certain death if they remained on the surface for another 25 minutes, and officially advised to get into the shelters during this very short time. Everybody knows the sort of thing that happens when a fire in a theatre causes a stampede. If you compare the number of people in a theatre with the number of people in New York, you may get some idea of the stampede which the Authorities recommend. It must be obvious that a very large proportion of those seeking shelters would be trampled to death, and that the only people who would reach the shelters alive would be males muscularly vigorous and morally ruthless. At an optimistic estimate, one might hope that one per cent of the population of New York would reach the shelters undamaged.

Minimising the danger

How long would they have to stay there? The Authorities speak as if a day or two would be long enough, but they must know that lethal fallout and radioactive soil would make a very much longer stay necessary. Taking the most cheerful view that is at all realistic, let us assume that they are let out after six months because the food in the shelter is, by that time, exhausted. What will they be able to do when they emerge? All food and water will be radioactive. The air they breathe will still be full of Strontium 90. Most will soon die of leukaemia. A few, even more painfully, will die slowly of cancer. The same sort of thing will be happening to the populations of all large cities. The rural population, for whom shelters have not been provided, will already be dead, except for a moribund minority. It must be remembered that roads and railways will have ceased to be usable; most hospitals, medical men and nurses, will have been exterminated; and that the dying population will, in most cases, have to be left without assistance.

There is a tendency on the part of the Authorities to minimise the dangers due to radioactivity and its products. To this there are some honourable, but little advertised, exceptions. For instance, Harwell, the British atomic station, has announced that, in the one year from 1958 to 1959, the amount of Strontium 90 in the bones of British children increased by sixty per cent. Strontium 90 hardly exists in nature and is almost entirely due to nuclear explosions. Since Britain is far removed from any of the test explosions of recent years, it is not likely that the increase of Strontium 90 in British bones is greater than that in bones elsewhere. This makes it highly probably that, throughout the world, those who are not killed quickly in a nuclear war, will die slowly and very painfully of leukaemia of bone cancer.

Die quietly

The British Government has not hitherto told us much as to what civil defence can do for us. We have been advised that, if our house has no basement, we should die quietly, without making a fuss; but if it has a basement, we should go down into it when we hear the four-minute warning. We should spend four minutes in heaping sand-bags round the walls of the basement to the height of five feet, collecting jars of water and tins of food, and washing and drying the curtains. What remains of the four minutes, we are presumably to spend in repentance. But quite recently the *Daily Mail* has revealed further plans for our salvation. We are to go back beyond the days of the Heptarchy. In those days, England was divided into seven kingdoms, but now it is to be divided into twelve, each with its own Prime Minister. I had thought one Prime Minister bad enough; the thought of twelve appals me. When the four-minute warning sounds, everybody is to dive, simultaneously, into a vast underground refuge, maintaining, one is asked to suppose, perfect order during the descent. There everybody is to stay until the danger of fallout has become small. The *Daily Mail* tells us, cheerfully, that fallout decays rapidly once it is down on the ground. It apparently does not know that, for instance, Strontium 90 has a half-life of 28 years, and Carbon-14, which can cause your children to be idiots or monsters, has a half-life of 5,600 years. The *Daily Mail* report endeavours to persuade us that by these precautions nine-tenths of the population of Great Britain could be saved. I am afraid reality would be rather different. Very many would be killed in the initial panic rush. Others, misled by what they had been told about fallout, would perish soon after emerging. The last few pallid, emaciated stragglers, as they came into something like the light of day, no longer about to shout, would whisper, 'Rule Britannia,' and add themselves to the heap of corpses obstructing the exit. To advocate this sort of thing is called 'patriotism.'

Why fight and hate?

Is it not obvious that all this is a mad, murderous, monstrous nightmare, imposed upon the world mainly by bands of fanatical lunatics? Why should we think it necessary to fight? Why should we hate the Russians? The Russians offer universal nuclear disarmament, with adequate inspection. They are willing to accept co-existence. The West prefers to invent elaborate schemes of scientific horror. The *Daily Mail*, in the same issue that I have been quoting, reiterates the catchword (as it has become) of Patrick Henry: 'Give me liberty, or give me death.' Patrick Henry did not say, 'Give me liberty, or give everyone death.' This is what his modern

imitators say. I am completely at a loss to understand the mentality of those who contemplate, calmly and arithmetically, the immense holocaust that they consider admirable. I cannot but feel that this is the greatest, as it will probably be the last, of the long list of crimes that have darkened the history of our species. What would you think of an individual who, to secure the victory of his own political party, was willing to condemn his own children to an agonising death? What would you think of a man who was willing to extend this cruelty to the whole of the human race? Yet that is what the Governments of the West are doing. And all who have voted for these Governments are accomplices in this immense wickedness. And it is all unnecessary. We only have to let ourselves live in amity and the world could be transformed from a murder factory to a happier community than has ever yet existed.

Our duty

It is our duty, the duty of those who realise the awful facts, to work with all our power, and with such abilities as we possess, to turn men aside from hate and destruction, to generate such an overwhelming determination to liberate our country and the world from purposeless destruction as shall overcome the stubborn pride of wicked Governments and leave us free to breathe an air uncontaminated by man-made poisons. This is a great task. But, given determination and energy, it can be achieved. As yet we are comparatively few, but we have on our side reason and mercy and the hope of life for coming generations.

WE CAN WIN, AND WE MUST.

