

Atoms, Armaments, And America

By WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

THE atomic bomb, the fearful weapon which marked the end of the Second World War, ought to make a third global conflict unthinkable and impossible. The terrific destructive power of this formidable scientific discovery makes it highly probable that the next great war would leave in its wake not the victors and vanquished of the relatively humane wars of the past, not even the frustrated and impoverished winners and the bomb-wrecked losers of the recent struggle, but only the exterminated and the survivors in a sad new world of cave-burrowers.



Chamberlin

In view of these facts, a decision by the United States to depart from its historic policy and introduce peacetime conscription would be profoundly pessimistic in its implications. The simplest mind could scarcely be deceived by the pretext that such a measure is necessary in order to protect us against any threat of future German or Japanese aggression.

For Germany and Japan have suffered much more than military defeat. Both countries have been economically pulverized, with political and social consequences which cannot yet be fully foreseen. Long before they can hope to achieve even a moderate recovery the march of science, invention and industrial development in the nations of the Big Three will have left the former Axis powers far behind in the race.

The adoption of permanent conscription would be a devastating critique of the official mythology of the war that has just ended. According to this mythology, the war was entirely or largely the result of the wickedness of the German and Japanese peoples. The adjective "peace-loving" has even been pre-empted for the use of the United Nations.

But why should truly peace-loving peoples remain armed to the teeth against each other? Why should America reveal a greater sense of insecurity than it felt after the end of the First World War, when the attempt to impose compulsory military training was overwhelmingly defeated?

* * *

SURELY our rational objective should be not to universalize conscription by adopting it here, but rather to abolish it, by consent and agreement, everywhere in the world. Although we have won the war, we are very far from having won the peace. The unlimited violence of modern total war has proved more effective for negative than for positive ends.

It has unfortunately been easier to reduce German cities to masses of shapeless rubble than to plan for a just and orderly European reconstruction. It is a simpler matter to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki than to pluck out by the roots the elements of imperialism and race prejudice that have long poisoned and still poison the relations between West and East.

By sponsoring a program of general agreed limitation of armaments, including the renunciation of conscription in all countries, the United States Government could take the lead in a hopeful movement to place world peace on a firm and hopeful basis. It would be difficult for any government to justify to its people rejection of such a proposal, when the sacrifices and sufferings of the recent war are so vividly remembered and the nameless horrors of warfare in the atomic age are so clearly in prospect.

Perhaps it might be utopian to revive Maxim Litvinov's proposal for absolute disarmament in a world that will experience many years of turbulent aftermath of the greatest and most destructive conflict in its history. But a scheme of armament limitations by category, with due consideration for the size, population, industrial resources, and special defensive needs of every country, should not be difficult to work out, assuming an atmosphere of genuine goodwill.

Volunteer land, air, and naval units could easily fulfill essential policing functions. And what a sigh of relief would come from the masses of human beings everywhere if the "blood tax," as conscription is appropriately called, could be eliminated simultaneously everywhere! All experience points to the fallacy of believing in the permanence of a heavily armed peace.

* * *

AMERICA is in a singularly favorable position to take the lead in proposing the general abolition of conscription. It is emerging from the war in a position of incomparable strength, actual and potential. It is much less exhausted than either of its major partners. It shares with Great Britain and Canada the tremendous secret of the atomic bomb.

America is definitely in a position to lead from strength. It would be a profoundly impressive gesture for a country in such a position of power to take a practical stand for limitation of the abuse of power through an armaments limitation convention, accompanied by the general abandonment of the conscription system.

This system, it may be noted, possesses no sense or justification unless it is assumed that the Big Three are arming against each other. No other power will be able to wage effective large-scale modern war in any predictable future.

The announcement of a specific concrete arms limitation agreement would be the best imaginable cornerstone for an edifice of enduring peace. The whole world would feel a sense of enhanced security and stability. Men and women everywhere would feel more confidence that the fearful threat of the atomic bomb would not find future application.

The material saving would be enormous. Great reserves of human skill and labor, vast stocks of raw materials that would otherwise be swallowed up in competitive planning for destruction would be released to repair the ravages of the late war and to create that higher all-around standard of living which modern science, invention and technology have made possible. Still more significant would be the lift of human spirit that would be felt if the three great victors of the present war should give this convincing demonstration that they propose to act as leaders, not as dictators, as trustees, not as tyrants.

Suppose, however, that the Soviet Union or Great Britain, or both these powers, should refuse to accept an American proposal for arms limitation. Unquestionably it will be easier for opponents of conscription for the United States to win their cause if the system is abolished throughout the world. But the possibility of rejection should not deter the American Government from placing itself on record as quickly, definitely, and specifically as possible in favor of a world free from unlimited arms competition.

* * *

THE very advancement of such an offer under such powerful sponsorship would tend to fix responsibility for rejection, and world public opinion would surely rally to its support. Of course the abolition of conscription and the category limitation of armaments would

be only the beginning, not the end of the struggle for peace. Adequate enforcement machinery in the form of mixed commissions of inspection and control would have to be worked out. It is only too easy to foresee difficulties and obstacles.

But the acceptance of an attitude of do-nothing and drift, of assuming that no agreed limitation of armaments among the major powers is possible will open up far greater dangers. It is almost impossible to preserve international goodwill in the tense atmosphere of an uncontrolled arms race. Suspicions increase and multiply.

The war has led to an unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of the Big Three. But permanent peace demands that this power be checked, controlled, mitigated. Agreed limitation of armaments is a good place at which to begin.

Even if, most unfortunately, an international agreement for limitation of armaments should prove unobtainable, the case for conscription would still have to be proved. The stock arguments about the supposed incidental benefits of military training in terms of health, education, and discipline do not stand up to very serious examination.

The armed services, by their very nature, are not schools or hospitals or physical training institutes; civilian health and education agencies, given sufficient funds and facilities, can do a far better job along these lines. The type of automatic discipline that is essential in war bears little relation to the intelligent self-discipline of the free citizen of a free country.

Conscription as a permanent policy could only be justified if there were overwhelming proof that the post-war world will be so dangerous that our national independence and existence will be imperiled by its absence.

American naval and air power have reached such a high state of development that there is only one conceivable threat to the security of American soil. This lies in the further development of the atomic bomb in the hands of a hostile power. But what could millions of drilling conscripts do to ward off that particular type of monstrous scientific terror? The defense against the atomic bomb, if a genuine defense is possible, lies with the scientist in his laboratory, not with the raw recruit learning to execute the command, "Squads Right."

* * *

THE tremendous change in the nature of future warfare which is heralded by the atomic bomb is itself a strong argument against rushing into such a departure from the American way of life as peacetime conscription would represent. What is rather needed is a close study by high military, naval, and scientific authorities of the implications of the atomic bomb for American defense.

And simultaneously there should be a vigorous diplomatic offensive aimed at the elimination of compulsory military training everywhere as part of a general scheme for limitation of armaments. An America going in for the traditional system of European militarism, a system that has never kept the peace and never can keep the peace, will be throwing away the fruits of two victories over the most highly militarized nations of Europe and Asia.

An America that will put aside conscription as soon as the military emergency is over, that will bend all its efforts to bring about the abolition of this ugly servitude throughout the world will be a beacon of hope and inspiration to free and humane men and women in all lands.

Join The Progressive's Campaign For New Readers Now!

Buy Two **Trial** Subscriptions Today At **\$1.00**

Each And You Get A Third One **FREE!**

ACT NOW - - - - **Use The Handy Coupon**

<p>(Good only for new Subscriptions)</p> <p>Pay for Two Subscriptions Get One FREE!</p>	<p>THIS ONE COSTS ONLY</p> <p>\$1.00</p> <p>Please send The Progressive for 22 weeks to</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Street _____</p> <p>City _____</p> <p>State _____</p>	<p>THIS ONE COSTS ONLY</p> <p>\$1.00</p> <p>Please send The Progressive for 22 weeks to</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Street _____</p> <p>City _____</p> <p>State _____</p>	<p>THIS ONE FREE!</p> <p>(with the other two)</p> <p>Please send The Progressive for 22 weeks to</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Street _____</p> <p>City _____</p> <p>State _____</p>
--	---	---	--

This Order Sent By: Name _____ Street _____ City _____ State _____