



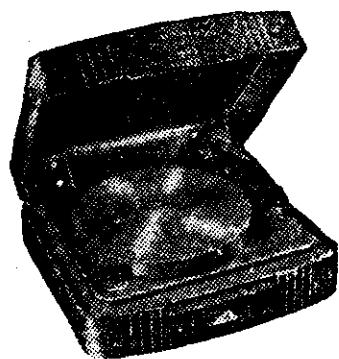
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The Outlook for Disarmament

WHAT is to be done about the hydrogen bomb? In the past few weeks this question has been asked in parliaments, in radio broadcasts and newspapers, and in homes and public places in all countries where people are allowed to read uncensored news. Out of the discussion came a request from Britain, the United States and France for an early meeting of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, presumably to set up a sub-committee which will try to find agreement on the control of hydrogen and atomic weapons. This action was suggested last November when the Commission's third report was being debated by the General Assembly, but events have now given it new importance and urgency.

The problems to be studied have been debated many times since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, they have been argued so often, without sign of agreement between East and West, that the resumption of talks will not arouse much optimism. Yet the work is now being done in new circumstances. There can be little doubt that uneasiness over the H-bomb explosions has been felt in Moscow not less than in the capitals of Western Europe. The truth can be seen quite plainly that a third world war would destroy our present civilisation. Some men in high places have declared their belief that the H-bomb has improved the outlook for peace. "Strange as it may seem," said Sir Winston Churchill in the House of Commons, "it is to the universality of potential destruction that I feel we may look with hope and even with confidence." Mr. Clement Attlee had a different opinion. He pointed out that the issue is not between democracies, and that "the advantage for unexpected, immediate action is always with the authoritarian States." And he added: "Once there is a war . . . in the last resort, if the existence of a nation is at stake, any weapon will be used."

It is to be hoped that Sir Winston Churchill was right; but peace

seems to hang precariously in the balance while it depends on theories about the restraining influence of fear. The inescapable facts, which surely must be linked in any realistic view of the situation, are: (1) wars occur; (2) the weapons used are those most likely to bring victory; (3) in total warfare, victory requires the mass destruction of centres of supply and organisation; (4) the H-bomb is now the most effective weapon for this purpose. Use of the bomb must therefore be expected as the logical outcome of total war. The view that atomic warfare is unlikely because it would be too dangerous for both sides has led to a bad habit of treating it as a separate problem, set apart by its very magnitude from ordinary questions of disarmament. The mountain, however, cannot be reached until we have climbed the foothills. Open warfare is going on in Indo-China; and there, rather than in stockpiles in the United States and in Russia, is the danger zone. Wherever men are fighting, even if they go into action with nothing more than rifles and hand grenades, the shadow of the H-bomb drifts above the smoke. Campaigns may be isolated, but never with complete security. If they spread, and the flame reaches out to other fronts, the world is again in danger of total war.

The real task, then, is to stop fighting everywhere and to open the way for gradual disarmament. History can be profoundly influenced by the demonstrations of power in the Marshall Islands. They have already brought a sense of urgency to tasks that had been allowed to drift into stalemate. The tasks have not changed, and they have become no easier; but Western opinion has never been more strongly behind the peacemakers, and the possibility that a similar attitude exists in the East is real enough to be worth exploring. As Mr. Attlee put it, "The time has come to make the United Nations a reality."

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 23, 1954.