

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY
WASHINGTON 25

September 28, 1945

THE ADMINISTRATOR



The President

The White House

My dear Mr. President:

In response to your request for my views on the atomic bomb and the peacetime development of atomic energy, I respectfully submit the following:

Like Mr. Krug, I learned much at the last Cabinet meeting--particularly from the Secretary of War and Dr. Bush.

Approaching the subject from the standpoint of the industrial use of atomic energy, I am convinced that our scientists will find opportunities for many applications in which atomic energy will supplant some sources of mechanical power now available. Thus, if we can utilize atomic energy for motor power--which certainly appears to be within the realm of possibility in the not too-distant future, as the physicists seem to be agreed--the methods of its application will soon be common knowledge. Such has been the history of the use of steam as a prime mover, of the gasoline internal combustion engine, and the Diesel engine which, once put to commercial and industrial uses, ceased to be secrets.

Consequently, if the fundamental techniques can be discovered by other nations relatively soon, we obviously gain nothing by attempting to keep them secret. Former Secretary Stimson and Dr. Bush report that the basic knowledge is now widespread among scientists the world over, and that any great nation--particularly the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics--by devoting the talents of its physicists, its industrial resources and its energies to the subject, can be as far advanced within five years in the fabrication of the atomic bomb and the utilization of atomic energy as we are today.

Presumably no nation which lacks the atomic bomb will declare war against a nation which has a store of them. It seems evident, therefore, that if we deny the U. S. S. R. access to our secret we certainly will have averted the possibility of war with that nation, but perhaps for no longer than five years.

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But that is only one side of the ledger; what is on the other?

As already indicated, we cannot hide our knowledge from Russia, or any other great nation, forever. Great Britain and Canada already know the secret, and so may other Dominions. To conceal it from our other great ally will certainly arouse on her part suspicion, distrust, and resentment, and provide her with an incentive to devote the next five years to atomic research. This, of course, by diverting her resources, would retard the industrial development of the U. S. S. R., which would not be to our own advantage since our interests would be served by the development of Russia to a point where we can profitably interchange a growing trade with her.


By sharing our secret with the U. S. S. R. we may acquire a trustworthy, reliable friend. I spent six weeks in the U. S. S. R. last year and I am convinced that the great mass of the Russian people desire only peace and friendship with us.

It seems to me, therefore, that we should hesitate to gamble five years of assured peace against the more desirable prospect of perpetual peace. I should prefer to gamble on the latter by sharing our secret with Russia, asking in return a free interchange of scientific knowledge and of scientific students between their universities and ours.

If my convictions in regard to this matter are unacceptable, I propose an alternative:

We, Great Britain and the U. S. S. R., by joint action, obviously can guarantee the peace of the world. Perhaps, then, we can keep our secret, lay in a store of atomic bombs, and agree that if either of our great allies is attacked, or in danger of attack, we will supply them with the necessary bombs to guarantee their security.

Sincerely yours,


Philip B. Fleming
Major General, U. S. A.
Administrator



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