

Einstein, Russell, and the Bomb: The 50th Anniversary

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July 9, 2005 will be the fiftieth anniversary of one of the most important statements ever issued about the threat posed by nuclear weapons to human survival. Usually referred to as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, it was initiated by Bertrand Russell, the famed mathematician and philosopher, and Albert Einstein, the world's best-known scientist.

After the annihilation of Japanese cities with atomic bombs in August 1945, both Russell and Einstein had warned the world of the enormous dangers of the new weapons. Nevertheless, by the mid-1950s, the rampaging Cold War produced an even more ominous situation: a Soviet-American confrontation, in which both sides were armed with the hydrogen bomb, a thermonuclear weapon possessing a thousand times the power of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. The Cold War competitors displayed little hesitation about integrating the new weapons into their war plans. Nuclear weapons, President Eisenhower declared publicly, should "be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else."

Taking note of this perilous situation, Russell wrote to Einstein on February 11, 1955, suggesting that "eminent men of science ought to do something dramatic to bring home to the public and governments the disasters that may occur." It was necessary "to emphasize . . . that war may well mean the extinction of life on this planet" and, consequently, that in the nuclear age, nations must learn to live in peace. In response, Einstein said that he agreed "with every word" in Russell's letter. Something had to be done to "make an impression on the general public as well as on political leaders." As a result, Russell drafted a statement that he circulated among a distinguished group of scientists in the hope of their joining him in signing it.

This proved a difficult task. In the Cold War context, it was not easy to get such intellectuals to ignore their political differences and to focus on the common interests of humanity. Indeed, scientists in the Soviet Union and China refused to sign the statement. Furthermore, after a short illness, Einstein died on April 13.

Nevertheless, in one of the last acts taken before his death, Einstein sent a letter to Russell saying that he had agreed to become a signatory. And, eventually, Russell lined up nine other eminent scientists: Percy Bridgman, Hermann Muller, and Linus Pauling of the United States; Cecil Powell and Joseph Rotblat of Britain; Hideki Yukawa of Japan; Frédéric Joliot-Curie of France; Max Born of West Germany; and Leopold Infeld of Poland.

On July 9, 1955, addressing a public meeting in London jammed with representatives of the mass media, Russell unveiled what became known as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto. "We are speaking on this occasion, not as members of this or that nation, continent, or creed, but as human beings . . . whose continued existence is in doubt," it declared. In the context of the Bomb, "we have to learn to think in a new way. We have to learn to ask ourselves, not what steps can be taken to give military victory to whatever groups we prefer, for there no longer are such steps." Instead, people must ask: "What steps can be taken to prevent a military contest" which would "be disastrous to all parties?" The question confronting the world was: "Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?" And a good "first step" along the way to ending war would be to "renounce nuclear weapons." The Manifesto concluded: "We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest."

The reaction to this bold, uncompromising statement was surprisingly positive. Initially skeptical, the press ultimately treated it favorably, in part because of the dramatic news of

Einstein's deathbed endorsement. Around the world, scientists and other intellectuals sprang into action. Among them was the Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov, who began his heroic campaign to halt the nuclear arms race and the Cold War. Around the world, citizens organized Ban-the-Bomb movements, including America's National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and Britain's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The signers of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto played important roles in the burgeoning campaign. Organized by Max Born, a group of 52 Nobel laureates in the sciences signed the Mainau Declaration, calling upon nations to "renounce force as a final resort of policy" or face the prospect of utter destruction. Together with Rotblat, Russell launched the Pugwash movement, drawing on scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain to discuss the feasibility of nuclear arms control and disarmament. Rotblat and Pugwash went on to lay the groundwork for the Partial Test Ban Treaty (for which Rotblat was knighted by the British government). Both later received the Nobel Peace Prize. Speaking at the opening meeting of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Russell subsequently became its first president. Muller issued powerful warnings about the harmful genetic effects of radioactivity. Pauling rallied scientists in the United States and, later, the world against nuclear testing, thereby becoming a thorn in the side of the Eisenhower administration and yet another recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Russell-Einstein Manifesto also affected policymakers. In large part, its impact was indirect, for it was the antinuclear campaign and the antinuclear opinion that it generated which helped to reshape their policy. Faced with strong popular resistance to nuclear testing, Eisenhower agreed reluctantly to a nuclear testing moratorium in 1958. Besieged by protests against nuclear testing and nuclear weapons, Kennedy drew back from atmospheric testing and tapped the founder and co-chair of SANE, Norman Cousins, as his test ban emissary to Khrushchev.

But sometimes the effects were more direct. Mikhail Gorbachev clearly drew his cherished concept of "new thinking" from the Manifesto. "The nuclear era requires new thinking from everybody," he told Francois Mitterrand. Or, as he stated in his book *Perestroika*: "All of us face the need to learn to live at peace in this world, to work out a new mode of thinking." And "the backbone of the new way of thinking is the recognition of the priority of human values, or, to be more precise, of humankind's survival." Gorbachev's choice for Soviet foreign secretary, his fellow party reformer Eduard Shevardnadze, recalled that "the Russell-Einstein Manifesto offered politicians the key to the most troublesome and complex riddles of the age." According to Georgi Arbatov, another of Gorbachev's top foreign policy advisors, major ideas for the new thinking "originated . . . outside the Soviet Union," with Einstein and Russell.

Today, fifty years after the issuance of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, it should not take the world's greatest scientist or philosopher to see that, in a world crammed with nuclear and other devastating weapons, resorting to war is an immensely dangerous and destructive act. Nor should it be difficult to see that the world would be a safer place with fewer nuclear weapons rather than with more of them. Yet, somehow, leaders of supposedly advanced, civilized nations—including the United States—continue to go right ahead laying plans for building up their nuclear arsenals and plunging their countries into dubious battle, as if their soldiers were armed with sticks rather than with the deadliest, most destructive devices in human history. It is one of the tragedies of our time that, despite all the scientific, technological, and cultural advances over the centuries, so many nations are governed today by people with primitive values and limited intelligence.

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to the Present.