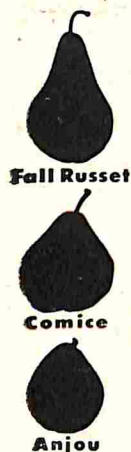




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What goes on here

by PAYSON S. WILD, JR.

The only real defense against the most deadly instrument of destruction ever devised by man is to keep the weapon out of irresponsible hands. Professor Wild analyzes the different plans for atomic control and the reasons for the difference with clear-sighted objectivity



Last August 6, the Hiroshima survivors had a little ceremony to mark the second anniversary of the atomic explosion that annihilated nearly 100,000 persons. Throughout the rest of the world, also, some notice was taken of the day but there was no jubilation or contentment. The reason for the grim attitude was not difficult to ascertain: everybody knew that little progress had been made toward the international control of the most deadly instrument of destruction ever devised by man.

Hanging over the lives of all of us is this atomic threat. No amount of concentration upon the ordinary tasks of everyday living can quite banish the sense of dread which is always in the back of our minds. Sometimes one wonders how people can go about their affairs in such an apparently normal fashion when the extinction of our civilization remains as a very real possibility. Those who know most about the bomb, namely the scientists, have told us over and over again that there is no defense and that the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are already outmoded. "Smaller and better" bombs are on the way. Perfectly rational and responsible government officials have estimated that if this country were subjected to a surprise atomic attack, forty million Americans might be killed in the first few instants. No magic counter-weapon which might save us can be counted upon.

Therefore, most experts agree that the only real defense is to be found in international political measures which would take the bomb away from individual countries. The reasoning back of this position is that atomic energy is potentially so dangerous that nations cannot be trusted to use it for peaceful pur-

poses without some sort of international guarantees. To put the matter more graphically: if one atomic blow could literally wipe us off the face of the earth (as the scientists say it could) and if we have no device to ward off such a catastrophe, then, obviously, what we want is to make certain that no other country possesses such bombs. Our security and safety depend upon keeping the weapon out of irresponsible or hostile hands. That's a matter for politics, not science!

Since 1945 only the United States, Britain and Canada have known how to make atomic bombs, supposedly, and only this country, really, has the equipment now for producing them. The rest of the world has had to rely upon our good faith and has had to assume that we would not be attacking anybody. Because of our virtual monopoly, we have felt safe. But how long will this state of affairs last? The scientists in 1945 declared, and still say now, that we had three to five years of grace before the Soviets or some other nation learned how to make the bomb themselves. More than two of these years have already elapsed so that within another year or so, it's possible that Russia will have mastered the atomic technique. What then?

It's obvious that reliance upon keeping the "secret" of the bomb is the height of foolishness. So our government has endeavored, through the United Nations, to work out an international treaty in accordance with which we would share the "secret" in return for rigid, international guarantees that atomic energy would be properly controlled.

How far have we got? Unfortunately, the story is a complicated one, full of technical issues and long-drawn-out committee discussions and debates. Yet, it is no exaggeration to say that man's fate may literally depend upon the outcome. Because some knowledge of what has happened is so essential if we are to keep our bearings these days, I

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