

## I. Disarmament: four questions

# A Soviet Inquiry

BY VICTOR F. WEISSKOPF

On March 23, 1981, I received a telephone call from Mr. Victor Tagashov, an official at the Soviet embassy in Washington. He asked me to respond to four questions (see below), the replies to be published by TASS. I asked for a written copy of the questions and promised a written answer. He agreed, and after receipt I sent him my answers with a specific request to publish them in full and to send me copies of the papers in which they were published.

I never expected them to be published because of my answer to No. 4. Great was my astonishment when, on May 22, I received by mail copies of the *Moscow News* in Russian, English, French, and Spanish containing my contribution and those of other Western personalities, among them Harvard chemistry professor George B. Kistiakowsky.

The answers of other people were all rather trivial assents, some of them to only a few of the questions. Censorship in those cases cannot be ruled out, in particular because the paper mentions explicitly that I asked for *full* publication.

Included here is a response to my comments by Moisei Markov, academician and chairman of the Soviet Pugwash Committee. I am afraid that his point about the lack of Western response after the reduction of Russian tank forces is justified.

I believe that this publication of a divergent view in the Soviet press should be known to the public. Here is an example of a fair exchange of views in a Soviet newspaper. That is news.

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### Prof. Victor F. Weisskopf

1. *What do you think may be the consequences of a nuclear war for the whole of world civilization?*

2. *How, in your opinion, are the arms race and the threat of a nuclear war affecting even now the living standards of people, their health, including mental health, and the environment?*

3. *Do you think the people should know the truth about the destructive consequences for humankind of a nuclear war?*

4. *Is it worthwhile, in your opinion, to set up a competent international committee, as L. L. Brezhnev suggests, composed of the most eminent scientists of different countries, whose conclusions would demonstrate to the world public opinion the vital necessity of preventing a nuclear catastrophe?*

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1. As I have written in numerous publications, I consider a nuclear war between the superpowers a major catastrophe. Apart from the number of victims, which could be near 100 million or an even greater number of people, the material destruction, the complete cessation of all organized activities, and the radioactive pollution of the environment will make it difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild human civilization as we know it today. There will be no victors, but only losers.

2. The arms race and the threat of nuclear war have a negative effect on the living standards because of the public means diverted to weapons production, and a negative effect on the mental health because of the increasing fear of a holocaust.

3. Of course, I believe that the American people are informed about this. Indeed, in recent times, this kind of information has been increased and more people are aware of the danger.

4. No. Scientists have spoken many times already and they cannot add much more. What is necessary today are actions by the governments. Both the Soviet government and the U.S. government should reduce the number of nuclear weapons, instead of increasing them. Today there are more than 50,000 nuclear warheads deployed. Neither the Soviet Union nor the Western Alliance needs so many nuclear weapons for their safety. The security of both sides would be increased by a reduction of these numbers.

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Victor F. Weisskopf is Professor of Physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the former Director General of the Centre Européen des Recherches Nucléaires (CERN) in Switzerland.

The Soviet Union and the United States should start a Peace Race, by reducing the number of their strategic and tactical weapons. The Soviet Union (or the U.S.) would be more secure if it reduced the stock of nuclear weapons, say, by 10 per cent, even if the other side does not follow up. They may join the peace race later. Actually, a much smaller amount of nuclear weapons than the present one is enough to act as a deterrent, since hundreds rather than tens of thousands of bombs suffice to destroy the other side completely.

If the Soviet Union wants to prevent nuclear war, why does it not start with a reduction of nuclear potential?

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### Moisei Markov

4. Everything boils down to how we understand the tasks of this committee which, I think, is simply indispensable. Prof. Weisskopf is right when he says that scientists have already spoken many times about it. Moreover, there are several hundred specialized institutes and scientific councils in the world whose task is to explore the problem of peace and the possibility of preventing war.

There is indeed a tremendous amount of written works on this question, but we must choose the most important and chief ones. More than a quarter of a century ago the manifesto of Russell and Einstein was published. Even at that time that manifesto stated that mankind is threatened with self-destruction as a result of the use of nuclear weapons in a future war, and that there would be no victors in that war, as Prof. Weisskopf also says. The authors of the manifesto, Prof. Weisskopf and others, have come to such conclusions because they know the truth about nuclear war. The task of the scientists' committee would be to produce a document that would be in the nature of a new manifesto. In this second manifesto it is necessary to explain what has taken place over the years following the first manifesto. Unfortunately, much has changed and not to the better.

Some people are trying to refute the thesis "there will be no victors" by evolving new weapons of mass destruction. The myth is being created that nuclear war is permissible and is even "humane" since it is based on new technical achievements, as a result of which the accuracy of the attacks launched from any distance, no matter how great, is enormous, and that it is possible to hit only military targets, not harming civil ones. The piling up of various kinds of tactical nuclear weapons is a technical way of recognizing the possibility of nuclear war, allegedly localized.

In this way the ideas of the 60s about a limited preventive war are being revived. Bertrand Russell wrote about this in his preface to F. Cook's book *The Warfare State*: "There is only one way of reversing the trend toward preemptive war. It is to make the truth known to the American public. This is a difficult task, since the military-industrial fanatics have a large measure of control over the major means of publicity."

This also refers to Prof. Weisskopf's belief that "the American people are informed." It would be good if this

belief were based on the results of a broad poll among American people. Polls of this kind are held frequently in the USA. Of course, it is important to know how accurate and definite this knowledge among average Americans is.

It is very important to tell the people the truth about nuclear war.

It is very important to know who has told this truth. And how, because it must be told in a language that is universally understood.

We must bring the truth to the people. If it were made through the private initiative of a group of scientists this would not be effective, as their many statements have revealed.

It could also be the result of the work done by an international body of scientists under the aegis of an authoritative agency like the U.N. If so, will the corresponding mass media be used by a decision of the U.N.? Ideas acquire force only if the broadest masses are given the opportunity to accept them.

Professor Weisskopf is right: action is necessary today. But what kind of action? There was a time when the level of arms was determined quantitatively. Today, the increasing qualitative index is becoming more and more dangerous: the MIRV, phenomenal targeting accuracy at tremendous range, cruise missiles, and so on.

As for Professor Weisskopf's proposal that the Soviet Union should unilaterally reduce the number of atomic bombs, it is known that the USSR has already made armaments reductions (recently one thousand tanks were withdrawn from Europe), but this has never led to a reciprocal step by the other side. Moreover, the mass media abroad has labeled such significant actions propaganda stunts.

It is necessary to point out that one important term, that of parity in armament levels, has emerged over the past few years in the process of peace debates.

This term is important because, first of all, superiority in armaments leads to the idea that victory is possible, and may lead to risky ventures. (Let me recall, by way of example, the Truman Doctrine—the plan for nuclear war against the USSR, so-called Dropshot. This was when the U.S. was indeed superior militarily.) Having such experience, the USSR will naturally see to it that the opponent's side has no decisive advantage. The arms race would only increase.

Second, parity is possible at any armament level. Therefore, it can serve as a way to reduce these levels and terminate the arms race.

The existing tendency of conducting negotiations from positions of strength throws mankind backwards to the time when the motto "If you want peace, prepare for war" (even if you don't want peace) was used. Now, what we need are talks on parity and the creation of an atmosphere that would serve to further solve the problems of disarmament. **[WV]**