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Britain Blinks at Bikini

BY exploding the second hydrogen bomb off Bikini Islands. America has made it distressingly evident that she is determined to "go it alone" in her "press-button" strategy. Thinking persons throughout the world will echo Mr Attlee's profound concern at the devastating threat projected by the H-bomb to mankind and civilization. Even as there will be dismay over humanity's crisis inherent in the manufacture of the hydrogen bomb, there will be regret that Britain has lost a glorious opportunity to make her moral influence felt.

Any discussion of major world events in the context of personalities has obvious limitations. But it is undeniable that personalities shape events just as events throw out personalities. These reflections are prompted by the inability of Sir Winston Churchill to rise to the occasion. Sir Winston may have many faults. Even at this old age, he remains essentially a party politician. Probably, he has an exaggerated notion of his knowledge of logistics. But even his critics have never denied him a profound "sense of the occasion".

He has made many mistakes in the past. His quixotic support of the Kornilov regime in Russia is one of them. He did not enhance his reputation by delivering the Fulton speech. India was one of his blind spots. He is too realistic to ignore the Soviet Union's growing might. But, until recently, he flirted with the idea that the tide could be rolled back in China. Since he became Prime Minister, he, however, gave indications that age and experience had made him a mature statesman, aware of the supreme need for an agreed arrangement between the rival power blocks to live side by side in peace.

He fought, and won, the elections, which returned him and his party to power, with an eloquent appeal to the electorate to give him a last chance to win world peace. He began well. He captured the world's imagination by his plea for a "parley at the summit". His call for a meeting between the heads of the Western Powers as a preliminary to a Big Four Conference was enthusiastically welcomed. But subsequent developments indicate Sir Winston's complete surrender to Washington. It is possible that he, in his realism, is reconciled to the inevitable consequences of American leadership of the Western world. But there would be regret at his seeming loss of inspiration to make Britain's influence felt at a moment of deep world crisis. By his inability to rise to the occasion, he has not only prejudiced his and his Party's future, but he has dealt a severe blow to Britain's prestige.

It is not Sir Winston's disinclination to request America to stop the series of hydrogen bomb experiments, which are to be undertaken throughout April, that is as significant as his deplorable lack of imagination to seize the occasion for a determined move to make it abundantly clear to America that her allies strongly disapprove some of the aspects of her foreign policy. Over and over again, America has made it brutally plain that her allies must meekly submit to her policy in return for monetary and military help. It is more than time for America's allies to make it clear to her that there are limits beyond which they would not submit to her dictation even in return for her, admittedly, valuable aid and help.

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Disclosures made by Sir Winston in his speech in the House of Commons this week explain the legal position. Britain no longer has any joint authority on issues relating to research, development and use of nuclear weapons by America. But America is as undiplomatic in her confirmation that the Quebec Agreement "no longer applies", as in undertaking a second test of nuclear weapons only a couple of days after the hostile British reaction, as reflected in the Commons debate, to the first H-bomb explosion.

There are reasons why hydrogen bomb experiments by America have created consternation throughout the world. These bombs are not only far more devastating than the atom bomb in their destructive effects, but they do not possess the potential advantages of the process of manufacture of atom bombs. Nuclear energy can be used not only for the manufacture of atom bombs, but it can also be harnessed for use by industry, and for service to mankind. But the ingredients and the process of manufacture of the H-bomb cannot be diverted to channels useful to mankind and society. H-bomb is essentially and entirely a destructive weapon. Unlike the atom bomb, the knowledge of manufacture of H-bomb can be of no use for the progress of industry or of humanity.

Because the H-bomb is an exclusively destructive force, American experiments with this weapon become all the more sinister. It might be, and has been, argued that the experiments are being undertaken so that they may have a deterrent effect. It is now known that the American H-bomb is more powerful than that yet manufactured by Russians. Its destructive effects have been well advertised, and are beyond dispute. It would be conceded that there was need to demonstrate this American show of force to deter Russia from any future aggression. But now that the demonstration has been made, there is hardly any necessity for further experiments to prove the American hydrogen bomb's fantastic destructive powers. And hydrogen bombs are by no means the last word in destineitiveness.

It is debatable whether Sir Winston is right in his conviction that the American H-bomb experiments have brightened the prospects of peace rather than enhanced the chances of war. Experience belies any such assumption. Throughout

history, the destructive potentialities of weapons of war have been improved as wars have been fought. Even as the manufacture of poison gas did not prevent the second world war, the manufacture of hydrogen bombs will not, by itself, prevent a third world war. It may be that, as both America and Russia now have the secrets of manufacture of the H-bomb, it may never be used as a war weapon. But, as an eminent British scientist has recently observed, irrespective of the relative destructive potentialities of the American and the Russian hydrogen bombs, it is already apparent that the H-bomb has ceased to be a weapon of diplomacy.

Pandit Nehru was right in his eloquent appeal to the Powers concerned to save the world from annihilation. But he was, for once at least, less realistic, than he usually is, in his suggestion for a "standstill" arrangement on the hydrogen bomb. Recent developments call

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not only for a "standstill" arrangement, but for a firm agreement on reduction and control of nuclear and conventional weapons of war. This problem has been under consideration for some years now. Recently, Britain, America and France have made a move to initiate disarmament talks with the Soviet Union under the auspices of the United Nations. Sir Winston is aware that an agreement on disarmament is not feasible "until conditions of confidence between nations have first been established". It is, therefore, all the more regrettable that he lost the opportunity of taking the initiative in reiterating his call for a "parley at the summit" to discuss outstanding world issues. Many feel convinced, unlike Sir Winston, that although this was not their intended effect the American hydrogen bomb experiments have created just the opportunity for an immediate conference between the heads of the leading States.

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