

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

Atomic Energy 900 P+P

FROM: RBF

DATE: August 29, 1945

TO:

DHS		
JM	SEP-6-45	gm
DHS		JH
<del>SE</del>		

COMMENTS:

Interested & moved by it!

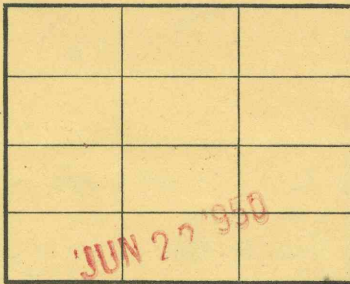
on return

SUBJECT:

Here is a letter which I have written  
to WW. You may be interested in seeing it.

RAT





*710  
J. P. P. C.  
Atomic energy*

*gen. inf. 1-20*  
*Atomic energy*  
**JUN 27 1950**

August 29, 1945.

Dear Warren:

*Where?*  
? I am troubled by one or two sentences in your letter of August 14 about the atomic bomb - troubled because ordinarily I find myself in accord with your point of view, but this time I don't think I am. I am not writing this with the idea of arguing with you, (for each of us is entitled to his own judgment) but because I want to find out what I think myself, and generally I can clarify my ideas better if I put them on paper.

You say: "Moralizing about the atomic bomb, in terms of the last century, is in my judgment silly and useless. It was inevitable. The only question was: who would get there first? I think we may have real pride in the fact that our scientists won the race ..... I believe the two bombs which were dropped - and which I honestly think won the war - have saved thousands and thousands of American lives and perhaps even of Japanese lives."

I think you are probably correct in saying that this discovery was inevitable. I think, too, that with the knowledge which we had that the Germans were working on it, research on our part was not only justified but mandatory if we wanted to survive as a nation. As you say, we won the race - that is, we discovered how to make an atomic bomb before anybody else did.



So far, so good. But when we finally perfected this discovery the German war was over, and we knew perfectly well that the Japanese had no such weapon as this, and no facilities whatever for making it. Nevertheless we used the bomb just the same.

We justify it on the ground that it saved American lives, and, as a salve to our consciences we add: "and Japanese lives, too." But this, it seems to me, is the short view. The long view is that by using this weapon to bring victory to our side in this particular war we may have taken a step that will cost millions of American lives in the future.

Think what we have done in dropping those two bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We have legitimatized the use of the atomic bomb as a weapon of war. We have made it respectable. We have placed the seal of our approval on that kind of indiscriminate slaughter. We have given it our moral sanction. More than that, we have given our moral sanction to any weapon in the future that will win a war, no matter how destructive it may be, no matter how many thousands of lives it may blot out. We have thrown out of the window all considerations of "military objectives." The winning of war has become the sole criterion by which we judge the legitimacy of weapons. Our deep indignation at the Germans over their bombing of Rotterdam and Coventry is conveniently forgotten. We have the superior weapons now and we are determined to use them - let the world think what it may. Moralizing about them in terms of the last century is "silly." Might makes right. Sieg heil!



What we do not stop to consider is that in the next war, if and when it comes, these weapons of ours will be turned back on us, and the advantage that we gained in shortening the Japanese war will be wiped out in a slaughter of American civilians "beyond the wildest nightmares of the imagination." (General H. H. Arnold's phrase)

The argument will be made that atomic warfare was coming anyway, and even if America had not initiated it, she would have been drawn into its use. But the fact remains that America did initiate it. We might have protested its use; we might have heeded a movement to try to outlaw it, or to combine with other nations in using it as a police measure against any power that even threatened to use it or was prepared to use it. But we have now lost all chance of moral leadership. There is a maxim in equity which every law student learns: "He who comes into equity must come with clean hands." Our hands are not clean. We have used this weapon to bring to a conclusion a war which we were fighting. By what logic or with what persuasion can we appeal to other nations to limit the use of atomic bombs in the wars in which they may be engaged?

It seems to me that America has taken her place among the conquerors of history who have won by utter ruthlessness. Only nothing that Attila or Genghis Khan ever dreamed of can match our wholesale slaughter of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I confess I don't feel any sense of "pride" about it from any point of view. My conscience is deeply troubled, and I think the conscience of the American people is uneasy, too, in spite of the floods of rationalization



that have been pouring through the press and over the radio. We dropped those two bombs without any advance warning, without giving civilians a chance to evacuate, without giving the Japanese nation an opportunity to see what the bombs could do in some locality where loss of life could have been minimized. Our eyes were so bloodshot by the prospect of bringing the Japs to their knees that we sacrificed the future to a present advantage - sacrificed it at a time when Japanese surrender was probably almost within sight.

You say: "Moralizing about it in terms of the last century is silly." You may be right, and I may be way behind the times. But I still believe that the rules of civilization, wrought out on Sinai and the Arcopagus, are valid, and that we violate them at our peril. We didn't merely sow a wind at Hiroshima and Nagasaki; we sowed a hurricane - and the reckoning is yet to come.

This sounds rather somber, and I fear you may think I have taken advantage of sentences in your letter which perhaps were hastily written. But as I said earlier, what I really had in mind was to find out what I thought myself about this business, and that is why I used your letter as a text or perhaps a pretext. Forgive me if I have misinterpreted you.

Always yours,

RAYMOND B. FOSDICK

Mr. Warren Weaver,  
Candlewood Lake Club,  
Brookfield, Connecticut.

*Copies sent*  
*JH W, AG, DHS*  
*and HEF*