IT'S TIME FOR ACTION
BY FRED CRANSTON, Physics Department

The traditional role of the academic scholar has been one of quiet contemplation in a scholarly fashion of the problems of society, science, economics, or whatever. The ideal professors profess their scholarly findings in the classroom without propagandizing and take restrained attitudes in public pronouncements. On most issues this tradition has served us well.

I contend, however, that there is now an issue which is of such overriding importance that we (and by we I mean all us from whatever field of study) should put aside our reticence. We must speak out in the classroom or wherever else we can get an audience. We can no longer sit back and take a detached view of the nuclear arms race. We must all get involved and attempt to get our students involved in first, understanding the problem of nuclear arms and second, doing something about it.

We must become activists in the arms race issue because as John Kenneth Galbraith says:

"If we fail in the control of the nuclear arms race, all of the other matters we debate in these days will be without meaning. There will be no question of civil rights, for there will be no one to enjoy them. There will be no problem of urban decay, for our cities will be gone. So let us disagree, I trust with good humor, on other issues...but let us agree that we will tell our countrymen, all of our allies, all human beings, that we will work to have an end to this nuclear horror that now hovers over all mankind. (A life in our Times, New York, 1982, p. 537).

At one time the so-called anti-nuclear activists were considered to be on the "fringe." This attitude is no longer valid. There are now too many reputable observers saying we must stop the nuclear arms race. As early as 1957 General Omar Bradley said that what worried him most was not the "magnitude of the problem, but...our colossal indifference to it." More recently, Admiral Hyman Rickover, one of the early advocates of our nuclear enterprise, has stated, "The most important thing we could do is start...
by having an international meeting
where we first outlaw nuclear
weapons, and then we outlaw
nuclear reactors, too.” Admiral
Gene LaRoque, USN (Ret.) now
leads an organization devoted to
stopping the arms race. He states:

For years I made plans
to use weapons against
enemy forces. During my
seven-year stint in
strategic planning in the
Pentagon, I became
aware that nuclear
weapons had created a
whole new ball game.
They are a quantum
jump. They changed all
the old rules of warfare.
The concept of military
superiority has become
meaningless. (Personal
communication.)

In spite of the number of
reputable people involved in the
issue, President Reagan dismisses
European and American expres-
sions of concern by saying they
come from “increasingly vocal
groups carrying a message of
pacifism and neutrality.” The
president’s top assistant, Ed Meese,
said of the British and West Ger-
man demonstrations, “We feel this
will not impact our policies.”

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The first thing we academics
must do is to inform ourselves of
the facts and issues involved in the
arms race. There is now a plethora
of books on the subject. (A few of
these are listed in the bibliography.)
I believe one of the most important
of these is the one by Jonathan
Schell. Schell’s thesis is that any use
of nuclear weapons by a major
power will bring an escalation of
such extent that essentially all
human, and most lower forms of
animals and plants, will be
eliminated from the face of the
earth. He calls this “second death”
or extinction. Whether we agree
with him or not (I do), there cer-
tainly is no question that life and
civilization as we know it will be
gone. There will be no such thing as
a winner in such a war.

I do not share Rickover’s
pessimism when he says, “I think
we will probably destroy ourselves,
so what difference will it make?
Some new species will come up that
might be wiser.” However, I do
believe that we must work to make
Rickover’s prediction turn out to be
wrong.

After informing ourselves con-
cerning the facts and issues of the
arms race, we all must take action.
A few months ago, when I made
this suggestion to some of my col-
leagues, I received two responses
with which I disagree. One was to
the effect that “we will muddle
through just as the British always
seem to do when they have over-
whelming problems.” If this is cor-
rect, then the implication is that we
can sit back and do nothing and
everything will turn out alright. I
can only feel as Seneca writes, “He
who does not forbid sin when he can, encourages it."

The other response made by one of my colleagues was to the effect that many times in the past people have thought that they now had a weapon which would destroy the world and these new weapons are just extensions of the ones we've used in the past. I completely disagree with this. There is no question, from the point of view of weapons effects, that only a fraction (probably less than one-tenth) of the weapons in today's stockpiles are capable of destroying the world as we, and as most living organisms, know it. The statement that these are "just an extension of other weapons systems" can only be made by someone in complete ignorance of the situation.

In addition to speaking out on the problem, there is another step we can take. It deals with the whole nuclear infrastructure. The arms race cannot continue if people refuse to be employed in the arms industry. We can point this out to students who ask us for advice about future employment. We can actively assist our students to seek out positions as far removed from the nuclear industry as possible.

So I urge my colleagues in academia to come down from the ivory tower on this issue, to become familiar with the facts on weapons effects and then at every opportunity be willing to discuss, encourage, and stimulate everyone within hearing to put aside other activities and join in the effort to cleanse the earth of nuclear weapons.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*, New York, Knopf, 1982. (This book is a "must read")


