

On the publication of Niels Bohr's "Open Letter to the United Nations"

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Niels Bohr's Open Letter to the United Nations dated 12 June 1950 which is being published for the first time in Russian represents a historical document which characterizes with unusual clarity the alarm which gripped the eminent Danish physicist in the years when the terrifying atomic weapon was born.

After fleeing clandestinely in 1943 from his homeland occupied by Hitler's forces Niels Bohr first found himself in England and later in the U.S.A. where he participated as a consultant in realizing the atomic bomb project. But long before the completion of the project when in the spring of 1944 it became clear that the collapse of the Nazi Reich had already been predetermined by the heroic efforts of the Soviet people Bohr began to ponder the mortal danger which hung over humanity as a result of invention of atomic weapons. The thought concerning the fate of human civilization alarmed Bohr. He immediately undertook an effort to influence personally the leaders in the U.S.A. and England, to win them over to the idea of the necessity of international control over atomic weapons. Having been unsuccessful in this effort and, possibly, having felt their lack of confidence in himself (cf., the note in Usp. Fiz. Nauk **146**, 4–6 (May 1985) [Sov. Phys. Usp. **28**, 329 (May 1985)]) Bohr left the U.S.A. even before the decisive tests of the atomic bomb at Los Alamos. But he continued his efforts to exert an influence on leaders in the U.S.A. by addressing to them three memoranda—dated 3 July 1944, 24 March 1945 and 17 May 1948. In these memoranda Bohr pointed out the disastrous consequences of atomic wars for human civilization, argued the necessity of working out measures of international control over the use of atomic energy, called for the development of international collaboration, for the creation of an atmosphere of trust between states, for the resolution of rising conflicts not by means of war but by conferences (across a negotiating table). He expressed his conviction that everyone would be against atomic war if they were correctly informed concerning its destructive force.

Most of all Bohr was worried by the problem of establishing trust: it is specifically the absence of trust that impedes true collaboration of individuals, of peoples, of states, Bohr asserted. And it seemed to him that he had found a solution to this problem. In his memoranda and in the Open Letter to the United Nations being published here Bohr advanced the idea of creating a regime of openness in the relations between peoples and states. This meant that in the period of intensive development of science "not only would universal access to full information about scientific discoveries be necessary, but every major technical enterprise, industrial as well as military, would have to be open to international control." Bohr asserted that only on the basis of universal openness would the development of an atmosphere of true trust between states be possible and only in this way

would it be possible to "guarantee common security." And so an "open world" must be created.

It is specifically here, in our opinion, that weaknesses are manifest in Bohr's arguments and hopes. He did not see that the establishment of such a regime of openness is contrary to the nature of capitalist society based on a system of secrecy of industrial technologies even in the production of peacetime goods. The regime of openness is incompatible with the nature of capitalism particularly at its highest stage of development.

In contrast, the strategy of socialist countries aims to develop the potential forces of society, to attain the highest productivity of labor, to guarantee a high level of welfare of the workers. In order to solve this problem they, to an ever greater extent, unify their efforts and resources, bring about an exchange of experience and attainments of science, and increase the integrating links through the organization of the Council of Economic Cooperation. One can say that to a certain extent these integrating processes are a realization of the idea of an open world, but it is realizable only in the world of socialist cooperation.

Bohr, of course, saw that the leaders of the U.S.A. and England kept the production of atomic weapons in strict secrecy even from their ally who bore the main burden of the struggle against the armies of German fascism, and this led to his great bewilderment. He also stated with regret the fact that after victory over fascism "divergences in outlook" began to appear between the allies, but he supposed that they could be overcome and could not give rise to a world catastrophe. But also here he did not take into account the nature of imperialism: within it new claimants to world supremacy continually arise. At present such a claimant to world supremacy is American imperialism. It is specifically responsible for the competition in nuclear armaments, tries to extend it into space, directs the aggressive policies of NATO against the Socialist Concord. It is hopeless to appeal to the moral duty ("world citizenship") of those for whom preparation for a nuclear war is a source of profit.

Bohr understood correctly that mutual confidence between peoples is a necessary step towards peace. But how to strengthen this confidence? In the 1970's on the initiative of the socialist countries an attempt was made to bring about in Europe an atmosphere of trust between states under the real conditions of that time. The countries of Europe, and also the U.S.A. and Canada in 1975 signed the Helsinki Pact which was intended to regulate all forms of relationships between states. The beneficial results of the Pact have been given the name of detente. But in subsequent years the military block of NATO directed by the military industrial complex of the U.S.A. did everything possible to undermine detente. Use was made of the deliberate lie concerning the preparation of the USSR towards a conquest of Europe. As a

result Western Europe was stuffed full of nuclear rockets aimed at socialist countries. This is the actual reality. It is far from naïve dreams about an "open world."

In defending the idea concerning an "open world" unrealizable under present day conditions Bohr in passing uttered a deep thought: "Those reluctant to enter on the proposed course (of true international cooperation—S.S.) would have been brought into a position difficult to maintain since such opposition would amount to a confession of lack of confidence in the strength of their own cause when laid open to the world." Quite to the contrary the Soviet people which has built a socialist society is convinced in the rightness of its cause, in its socially progressive significance. There is no need for it to take up arms in order to realize its aims, all it needs is peace. It is this specific idea that lies at the basis of the principle of peaceful coexistence and competition of the two systems with different social structure, the principle upon which is based the international politics of socialist countries. This principle was bequeathed to us by Lenin. Perhaps quite unexpectedly to himself Bohr, by the very logic of his deliberations, was led to an argument confirming the validity of this principle.

Already in the 1948 memorandum Bohr noted that "the

hopes embodied in the establishment of the United Nations organization have met with repeated great disappointments and, in particular, it has not been possible to obtain consent as regards control of atomic energy." At that time many peoples who had not yet achieved political independence were not yet represented in the UN and within it the influence was great of claimants to atomic monopoly. Bohr's ideas on the control over the utilization of atomic energy were met by them with unconcealed irritation. His idea of an "open world" was in sharp contradiction with their plans of preparing a war against socialist countries.

One can suppose that Bohr did not hope that under those conditions his Open Letter to the United Nations could exert an influence on the subsequent course of events, and it was submitted by him for publication in specialized journals.

In commemorating a century since the day Niels Bohr was born we must recall with gratitude his bold pronouncements against the monopolists of atomic weapons of those days, his well founded alarm concerning the fate of humanity. Today this alarm is shared by the predominant majority of human society.

Translated by G. M. Volkoff