

DISARMAMENT AND NUCLEAR TESTS

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
15TH MAY, 1962

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) has read us, very carefully, a long statement, and I must say that throughout the first 90 per cent. of it I wondered whether he had any point on which to criticise the statement that had been made by the Minister for External Affairs (Sir Garfield Barwick). However, in the last bit, if I may so describe it, he went through the motions of warming up, and this produced suitable applause from his, until then, bemused followers. But one thing that he said - and I have had the advantage of reading this paper - was this :

"Yet there is no suggestion or offer of any contribution comparable to that being spent on nuclear weapons by the nations involved and their allies so that the causes of these diseases and physical and social ills can be cured".

That is, of course, what might be described as a distributive allegation. It is put forward as an allegation as much against the United States of America and the United Kingdom, the Western Powers, as against the Soviet Union.

I fear, Sir, that the honourable gentleman has forgotten that if anybody cared to examine the contributions made in the field of health, in the field of research, in the production of the great antibiotics in the positive combatting of disease, he would find that the Western world has an unchallenged position in those fields. He would also find that there are millions of people who can gaze from time to time on the sputniks and other things that may be put into the sky by the Soviet Union, who would not be there to see them if it had not been for the devoted, scientific and medical research of the free world. Therefore, the honourable gentleman falls into error, if I may be allowed to say so, in distributing these allegations as if they applied with equal force to both sides in this great and unhappy conflict.

I want to try to direct the attention of the House to the real problems that we have to consider. The honourable gentleman has made, I am happy to say, several references to the communique of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, issued at the time of the last conference in March of last year. I know something about this, because I was one of those Prime Ministers. I also know that no communique emerges from a Prime Ministers' Conference unless it refers to matters upon which unanimous agreement has been reached. That is something that honourable members should note - nothing is included in such a communique unless it has been unanimously agreed that it should be included. Therefore, on the occasion in question all the Prime Ministers agreed to the statement made with regard to atomic tests. These are the precise words of it:

"Every effort should be made to secure rapid agreement to the permanent banning of nuclear weapons tests by all nations, and to arrangements for verifying the observances of the agreement. Such an agreement is urgent, since otherwise other countries may soon become nuclear powers, which would increase the danger of war and further complicate the problem of disarmament. Moreover, an agreement of nuclear tests, apart from its direct advantages would provide a powerful psychological impetus to agreement over the wider field of disarmament."

I think those words are well worth quoting. We - and I speak as one of the parties - heartily supported that statement, and we supported it for the simple sake of humanity. The profound cause of humanity required, in our mind, that a statement of this kind should be made.

There were talks about disarmament. There were conferences about it. They were abortive. You can go on talking about disarmament, in the general, for a long time. But here, in our view, was a specific matter on which we thought, or at any rate hoped, that sensible people of all nations could agree. We hoped that they could all agree to stop further testing of nuclear weapons, and we said so, the Prime Minister of Great Britain amongst us. And what happened? It was not more than a few months thereafter when the Soviet Union, which had itself undertaken to conduct no further tests pending agreement on their abolition, and at the very time when the powers were meeting in Geneva to discuss not only the general principle of abolishing tests, but also the essential correlative of effecting inspection, so that we might not be misled, simply broke up the discussions, walked out, and within 48 hours began a series of at least 30 nuclear tests, preparations for which had obviously been made long before.

That is the kind of problem that the world is dealing with. We need not live in a world of abstract phrases. We are living in a most terribly difficult world. We are living in a world of stark realities and unless we admit the existence of these realities we will walk into danger.

That was the position, and our distinguished visitor of the other night - I am not going to discuss any other matters in connection with his visit because honourable members are quite entitled to their views about everything that he said - made this statement: -

"While we were still negotiating, they" -

The Soviet Union -

"broke the moratorium on testing with a long, and obviously long prepared, series of tests. Nevertheless, we -

The United States of America -

"stood on our offer to conclude a test ban treaty, and with an inspection arrangement that would have involved an international inspection team looking at less than 1/2000th of the territories of the Soviet Union in any given year.

Honourable members on both sides of the House will recall that one of the pretences of the Soviet Union was that it could not have inspection because this would involve espionage inside its borders. The statement went on -

"But, as the Soviets were still unwilling to agree, President Kennedy felt obliged to resume our own testing for the security of the free world. As you know, he reached that decision most reluctantly. And we stand prepared to stop testing at any moment that the Soviets agree to a test ban treaty with essential international verification".

That is a pretty plain statement by the man who, as second to the President of the United States, occupies one of the most responsible and powerful positions in the world.

He went on -

"But the President of the United States will not accept the responsibility for allowing people who want their kind of world order to move ahead of the free world in this nuclear field".

I wonder who disagrees with that? I wonder if there is anybody in this House - I do not really believe there is - who believes that after all this series of tests by the Soviet Union which will add enormously to the Soviet Union's knowledge and technology in this field, the U.S.A. should have said, "Well, you can have it; we will do nothing about it. We are prepared to stabilize the knowledge of the free world in this field while you go on year after year, month after month so that you will have the power to impose on the world what is to us your rotten system of government". Really, Mr. Speaker, I would have thought it hardly admitted of debate.

Now, there are practical issues here and I think that unless they are resolved by unanimity in this House, they ought to be analyzed frankly on both sides of the chamber. The first of them is involved in what I have just said: Should the western nuclear powers cease testing whatever the Soviet does? When I say that, let me elaborate a little. I feel that there is a great assumption in many minds that all these tests are tests of weapons to be deposited on the enemy and to destroy or to blast his cities. But we have got to a stage when a great deal of testing in the world is of what are called the anti-missile missiles. These tests are devoted to discovering how to defend a country and how to defend hundreds of thousands of innocent people against an attack from the air. You cannot have one of these things done and forget about the other. You cannot have the Soviet Union perfecting its means of attack and perhaps developing its means of resistance by special experiments in the nuclear field and say to our own side - and do not let us forget that, alive or dead it is our side - "You are not to do it. You stop where you are". All these experimentations that go on have not only a relevance to attack but also a relevance to defence. Therefore, I propound my question and I would like to think that it reached the people of Australia: Should the Western nuclear powers cease testing nuclear devices whatever the Soviet Union does? The clear answer to that in the name of humanity is: No.

The second issue is this: Can there be any effective cessation of testing which could give to the world a feeling that there was a calm in the storm or a hope for ordinary humanity, unless we have inspection or verification - whatever the word might be? Are we so naive in the free world - we are not really; we have a long history of practical wisdom and experiment, but I repeat: Are we so naive as to say to the prospective enemy - the country which is the great and only threat to the peace of the world - "We will take your word for it? We do not want anybody to go near your country to see whether you are conducting tests or not". Can anybody imagine such a thing? The United States of America, the great western nuclear power, and the other western powers have gone to great lengths, as we were reminded the other night, to reduce their demands for verification to a mere minimum. Are they to abandon those demands? Would we sleep more comfortably if they did? Would the ban-the-bomb processionists sleep more comfortably if they knew that on our side tests had ceased and development had come to an end, and that we were relying upon the punic faith of the authorities in the Kremlin? I do not believe it. We say: No. I do not know what other people might say, but we say: No.

In the third place there is an issue that perhaps scarcely emerged in what my honourable opponent had to say but it is clearly implicit in certain things that have happened. It is this: Should Australia, not a nuclear power herself - remember that in all these matters - permanently contract herself out of permitting nuclear weapons to be used in war or defence or in the grave arbitrament of war on her soil? Because I did hear suggestions that when the Minister for External Affairs (Sir Garfield Barwick) said we were not prepared to give a permanent undertaking to that effect, he was under criticism. Under criticism! Have we reached the very ecstasy of suicide in Australia? Are we prepared to say that come war, come peace, come any circumstances nobody shall bring a nuclear weapon on our soil or discharge a weapon of that kind there? Are we bent on self-destruction or are we prepared to sit up and wake up to the fact that those nuclear powers which are on our side in the contest of freedom, cannot protect us if we warn them off the premises in perpetuity.

These are the three questions. All must have considerable difficulty in understanding how there could be any more than the one clear answer to any of them. There is certainly nothing in what the honourable gentleman has said that in form cuts across what I have been saying in these matters; but if there is a feeling in this Parliament anywhere that this attitude is wrong, let us for the sake of our own self respect, for the sake of our standing in the world and for the sake of our capacity to talk to the other countries of the world, learn it now. Let them stand up and be counted.

---