

Letters to The Times

Use of A-Bomb Condemned

Group Notes Tenth Anniversary of Bombing of Hiroshima

The signers of the following letter are religious and educational leaders.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

On Aug. 6, 1945, as a result of a decision taken by the Government of the United States, an atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima in Japan. Thus the era of atomic war was initiated by the United States. As the tenth anniversary of that tragic day approaches, it is fitting that we pause to reflect on its meaning and that we open our minds and hearts to what the Spirit may have to say to us and to the American people generally. The call that comes to us is, we believe, the call to confession and repentance.

It is easy to imagine what multitudes of us would have said if it had been German Nazis, Italian Fascists, Japanese militarists, or Russian Communists who unleashed the atomic terror: that it was "like them," that "Americans would not have been guilty of such a crime."

But it was the Americans and not any of these others who were responsible for the bombing of Hiroshima. Moreover, there were no extenuating circumstances to give some semblance of warrant for this leap into a fearsome new type of war. No one has ever suggested that on that August day ten years ago this nation was threatened with extinction or catastrophic defeat, which only resort to the new weapon could avert.

Japan's Bombing Capacity

Japan was not in a position or equipped to drop a single bomb, atomic or otherwise, on American soil. No responsible person has ever suggested that we "had" to use the A-bomb in order to win the war.

It has often been said that the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was really an act of mercy because by bringing the war to a quick close it spared many lives. This theory is based on the assumption that a land invasion of Japan would have been necessary to bring the war to an end if the atomic weapon were not used. In view of the havoc which had already been wrought in Japan, this assumption seems to us an extremely questionable one.

The event demonstrated, according to the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, that it was false. It is the habit of governments when they resort to a new and more destructive weapon to proclaim that in so doing they are really saving lives and being merciful. The Nazis so characterized the blitz of Rotterdam and other cities. It is a habit which we should not have perpetuated, especially where atomic terror was involved.

We are not condoning the behavior of other nations who, following in our footsteps, undertook to acquire their own atomic arsenals. But on this anniversary it is necessary that we should be concerned with our own conduct and look into our own hearts.

Providing Leadership

Let this tenth anniversary of Hiroshima, then, be for the American people a day of repentance. Let it be a day to reflect on what it means that after visiting atomic death on thousands of Japanese in order to disarm them forever and writing a pacifist clause into their Constitution, our Government is now desperately engaged in urging rearmament upon Japan. Let us realize once and for all that no people has a moral right to drop H-bombs on another people at any time or for any reason and let this realization become the basis of national policy. Let us reflect that the nation which took the initiative in discovering and using atomic power for unprecedented destruction has the responsibility now to provide leadership in finding new ways to use another kind of power, the power of love which is for the healing of the nations.

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New York, July 28, 1955.