



*Hiroshima Before the Bombing - 1935*

PEOPLES SCHOOL FOR MARXIST-LENINIST STUDIES™



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AAFC Presents: 80th Anniversary of the Bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki

PSMLS 8/5/25



# What we'll be learning today:

- The Manhattan Project, Operation Unthinkable and the truth about the justification to drop the bombs
- Actual event of the bombings, effects on civilians, racism against Japanese people
- Atomic aftermath and the present day nuclear threat



*Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6th, 1945*



*Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6th, 1945*

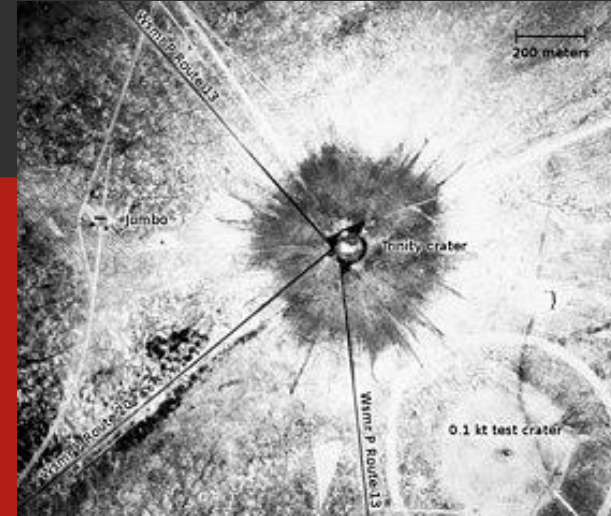


# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb



# Manhattan Project

- In the early 1930's, British scientists split lithium atoms with protons and an era of nuclear science began. By 1938, with the discovery of neutrons earlier in the decade, scientists Otto Hahn and Fritz Strausman shocked the world by splitting a uranium atom with neutrons, creating fission of the nucleus of the atom, which could result in a nuclear chain reaction.
- Politically, the world was beginning to see more and more the threat of Nazi fascism and though research was kicked off at different times in several different countries, many atomic scientists, such as Albert Einstein, came to the United States and requested to FDR that nuclear weapons be developed to beat the Nazis in the race for a successful nuke, which Nazis would've used indiscriminately.
- Nazis had been trying to develop nuclear weaponry, but gave up in 1942 to focus on V-1 and V-2 rocketry, but this wasn't known until 1944 and Nazis could have begun research again at any point. However, the first US bomb, Trinity, developed in part by American communists like J. Robert Oppenheimer, was tested successfully in July 1945, just 1 month before the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

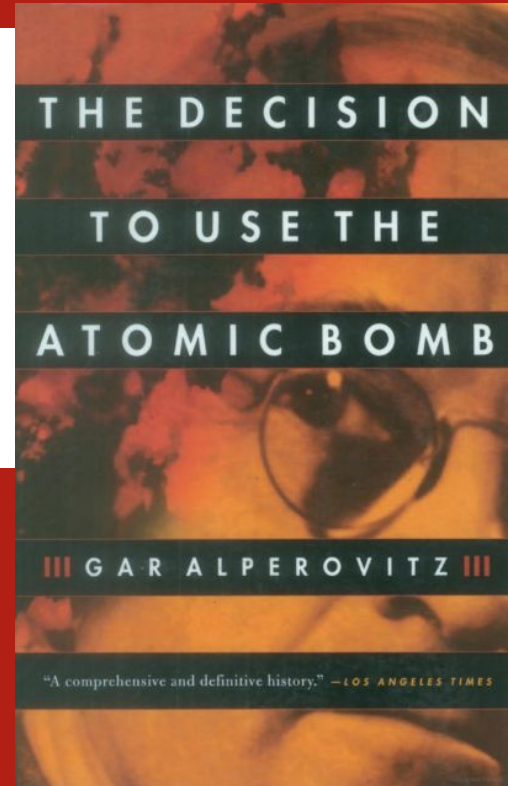




# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb

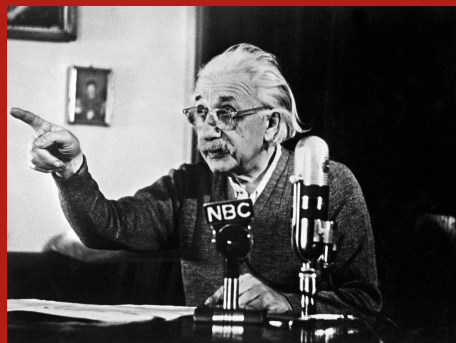
## - Gar Alperovitz

It is certainly the case that we Americans have been badly served by our leaders in connection with the promulgation of various Hiroshima myths—that we were systematically misled about many of the basic facts. Furthermore, an entire generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines (and through them, their families and friends) were taught that their lives were saved by the atomic bomb; their understandable relief based on this false information has added to the strength of the myth.





# The Complicity of Silence



"Had I known that the Germans would not succeed in developing an atomic bomb, I would have done nothing for the bomb." -Albert Einstein

Over fifty years we often also seem to have felt a strong need to justify the bombings by reference to what can only be called notions of "revenge."

A recent survey of the press concluded that "present media coverage is worse than it was in the euphoric aftermath of World War II—the media now ignore, with limited exceptions, an impressive body of evidence and argument that run counter to the official line. . . ."

in the earlier [1945–1950] period 1) some journalists and editors themselves questioned the decision to use the bomb, in ways that are strikingly similar to the current scholarly consensus, and 2) journalists understood that the Russian entry into the Pacific war played an important part in ending the war. . . .<sup>3</sup>

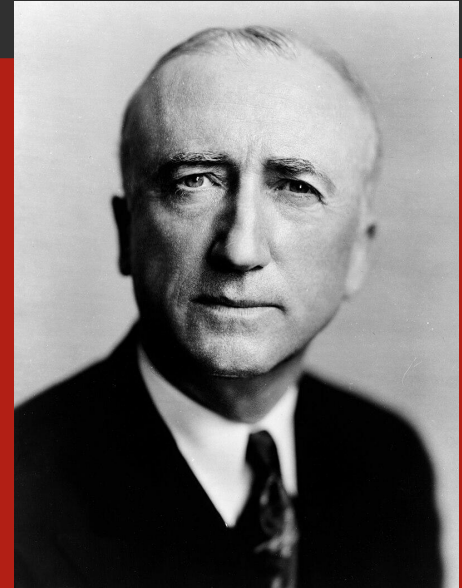


# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz

Quite simply, it is not true that the atomic bomb was used because it was the only way to save the “hundreds of thousands” or “millions” of lives as was subsequently claimed. [REDACTED]

Modern evidence—reinforced, again, by the information which has been discovered in the course of research for this book—suggests not only that the president and Byrnes knew Japan was on the verge of surrender, but that once the new weapon had been successfully tested, rushing to end the war before an expected mid-August Red Army attack was indisputably a major concern.

To be silent about the past is to accept the decision silently, with no challenge. It is thereby also to sustain and silently nurture the idea that nuclear weapons can and should be used or threatened to be used.

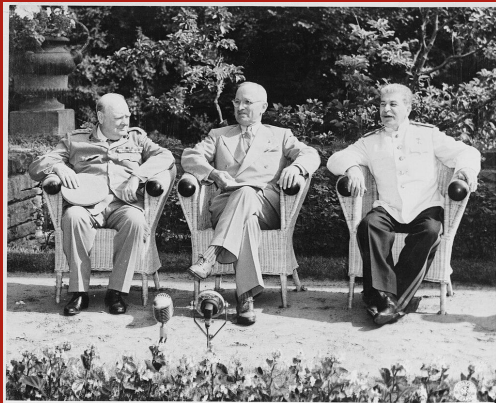


**James F. Byrnes** was the Secretary of State under Truman. According to Alperovitz he was pushing the president to use the atomic bomb more than anyone else that was close to the president.



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz

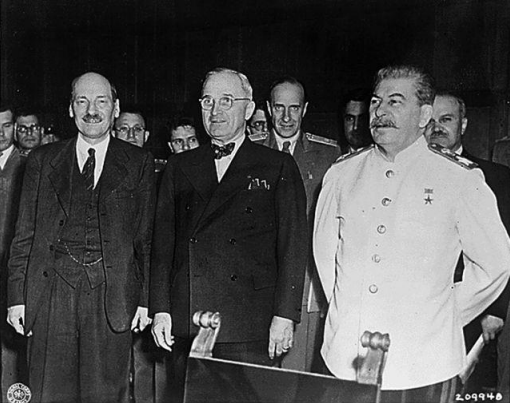
The first decision involved rejection of the recommendation that to offer any meaningful possibility of surrender a statement to Japan would have to allow enough time for the development of a serious response. As we have seen, a conscious choice not to allow a meaningful interval was made early on—and explicitly reaffirmed at Potsdam.



The Potsdam Conference was held at Potsdam in the Soviet occupation zone from 17 July to 2 August 1945, to allow the three leading Allies to plan the postwar peace. Truman was secretly informed that the Trinity test of the first atomic bomb on 16 July had been successful. He hinted to Stalin that the U.S. was about to use a new kind of weapon against the Japanese.



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz



The Potsdam Conference issued the Potsdam Declaration, the Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender (26 July 1945) wherein the Western Allies (UK, US, USSR) and the Nationalist China of General Chiang Kai-shek asked Japan to surrender or be destroyed.

We must also note that all along—as Truman subsequently acknowledged on many occasions—it appears to have been clear to those concerned that in the end the Emperor would in any event almost certainly have to be retained to command a cessation of the fighting and to maintain internal order. (And, of course, five days after the bombing of Hiroshima, his position was in fact assured by the president.)

That the documentary record shows little direct challenge to the idea the atomic bomb would be used is understandable, once one grasps the implications of these facts.

The decision to delete assurances for the Emperor from the Potsdam Proclamation was one relegated to political authority. Once the president had made his choice on this matter—and since it was known that therefore the fighting would now unquestionably continue—the basic military options were narrowed to two: The only choice now was to use the bomb or go forward with an invasion.



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz

The second and more fundamental choice was the decision not to offer Japan assurances for the Emperor. Once this decision had been made—and the Japanese were allowed to believe the Emperor might be removed and possibly hanged as a war criminal—it was obvious to all concerned that the fighting would continue.

In this area there was, in fact, a certain “momentum” at the top levels of the U.S. and British governments—but it was moving powerfully in a direction quite opposite to the automatic use of the bomb. As we have seen, the president was advised to clarify the surrender terms on more than a dozen occasions—and by virtually the entire U.S. and British leadership. The sole exception among presidential advisers was James F. Byrnes.



Hirohito (Emperor Showa) - As emperor during the Shōwa era, Hirohito oversaw the rise of Japanese militarism, Japan's expansionism in Asia, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb

## - Gar Alperovitz



A huge motorized Soviet convoy advances across the Grand Khingan Mountain Range in south central Manchuria.

The third fundamental choice has now also been fully documented. It was the decision not to test the impact of the Russian declaration of war—indeed to weaken the military challenge posed to Japan by attempting to put off an event which all understood would have extraordinary impact. This decision, too, was made at the political level.

In connection with recommendations to modify the terms, as we have seen, virtually all the president's advisers except Byrnes were essentially in accord. However, no one really wanted the Russians in the war if it could be concluded without them. (Indeed, some, like Grew—and probably Forrestal—had urged a change in terms precisely because they thought this on its own could end the fighting before August.) Hence, on this issue there was very little reason to wish to challenge the president and Byrnes—despite the fact that intelligence and other advice even before the Emperor's intervention strongly suggested "the Russian option" seemed likely to end the war alone or as part of the "two-step logic" in combination with a modification of the surrender terms.

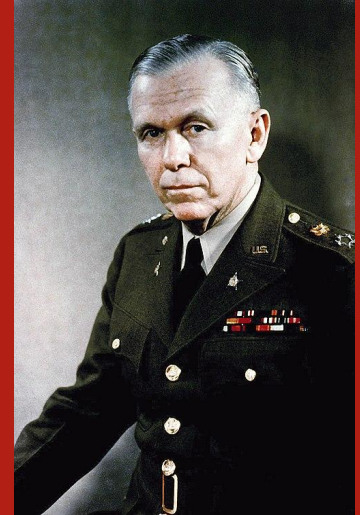
The sense of a process seemingly governed by a silent momentum—of no



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz

The fact is if the war could have been ended by clarifying the terms and/or the Russian shock, there would have been no lives lost in an invasion. Fighting was reduced as both sides regrouped, and the most that may be said is that the atomic bombs may have saved the lives which might have been lost in the time it would have taken to arrange the final surrender terms.

That saving lives was not the very highest priority, however, seems obvious from the three choices made in July: If one really wished to end the war as fast and surely as possible—and save as many men as possible—then as Marshall had pointed out as early as June, the full force of the Russian shock plus assurances for the Emperor could not be left out of the equation.



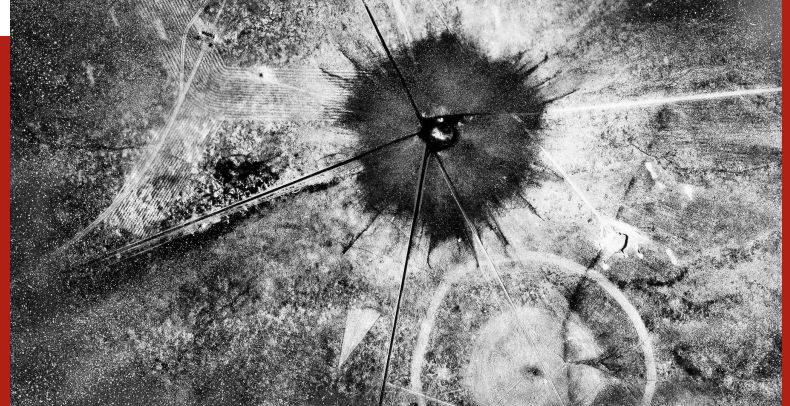
George Marshall -  
Secretary of  
Defense in 1945



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz

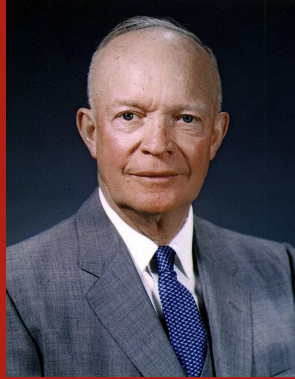
Modern evidence—reinforced, again, by the information which has been discovered in the course of research for this book—suggests not only that the president and Byrnes knew Japan was on the verge of surrender, but that once the new weapon had been successfully tested, rushing to end the war before an expected mid-August Red Army attack was indisputably a major concern.

"I have become death, the  
destroyer of worlds" Robert  
Oppenheimer said this after the 1st  
A bomb was tested successfully at  
Trinity Site, New Mexico





# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz



Dwight D.  
Eisenhower - 1st  
Supreme Allied  
Commander  
Europe and 34th  
President

The judgments expressed by the various military leaders also help clarify this issue. Most important is the fact that the dramatic bombing of Tokyo and many other major Japanese cities occurred before information was received showing the Emperor's intervention to attempt to end the war. What men like Eisenhower and Leahy were saying was not only that it was both ineffective and wrong to target what were primarily civilian population concentrations, but that to do this when the Japanese seemed plausibly on the verge of surrender was an uncalled-for violation of traditional norms.<sup>7</sup>



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb - Gar Alperovitz

The most important points concern Byrnes' attitude and his influence on the president—especially when compared with virtually all the other top advisers (and Churchill). Some matters are no longer in doubt:

First, in general Byrnes clearly saw the weapon as important to his diplomacy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

Second, of particular significance are features of the context established during the two weeks in Germany. It is no longer seriously disputed that Byrnes and the president took a hard-line position on a variety of issues during the Potsdam discussion because of—in anticipation of—the atomic bomb. This fact itself set the terms of reference for the next stage of



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb

## - Gar Alperovitz

decision-making: Having developed a negotiating position based upon the expected force of the new weapon, to have immediately thereafter taken action to avoid demonstrating its power obviously would have been extremely difficult, consciously or unconsciously.

Third, it was in this specific context—and at this specific time—that Byrnes arranged for the elimination of language offering assurances for the Emperor.†

Fourth, it is beyond question that once the atomic bomb was successfully tested, Byrnes saw it as a way to end the war before the Red Army entered Manchuria—and urgently attempted both to get a surrender and to stall the Russians.

Finally, the evidence from Walter Brown's journal illuminates a slightly different diplomatic factor—agreement that Japan was looking for peace but fear that the war might end in a manner which would make Moscow the peacemaker.





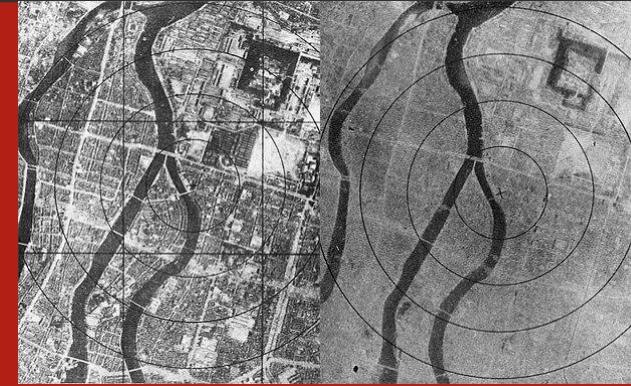
# The Truth about Hiroshima and Nagasaki



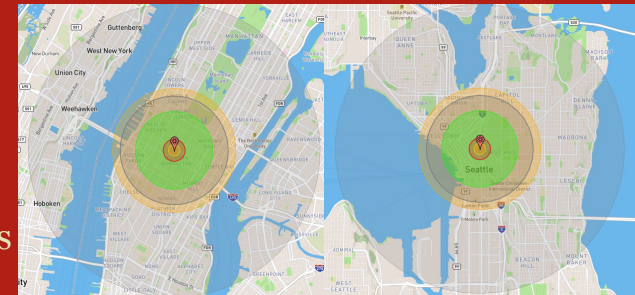
# The Atomic Bombings

## Hiroshima

- On August 6th, 1945, at 08:15 Hiroshima time, a enriched uranium fission bomb called “Little Boy”, was dropped from the Enola Gay B-29 Bomber over Hiroshima. It detonated at about 2,000 meters above the city.
- The intended target area was the Aioi Bridge in the middle of the city, but winds caused the bomb to detonate over Shima Surgical Clinic. It detonated with a force of ~16 kilotons of TNT, or about 15,000 tons of TNT. 1 mile in all directions was completely destroyed, and fires spread for about 4.6 miles.
- Over 140,000 people were killed by this bomb, including in the months following the attack. Over 60% of the city was destroyed. Wood and paper homes were vaporized and only concrete buildings built to withstand earthquakes remained, albeit heavily damaged.



Hiroshima before and after



Blast compared to NYC and Seattle

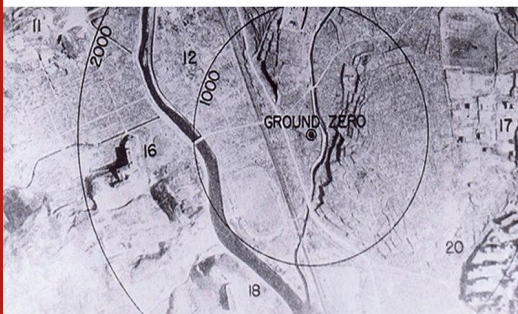


# Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima

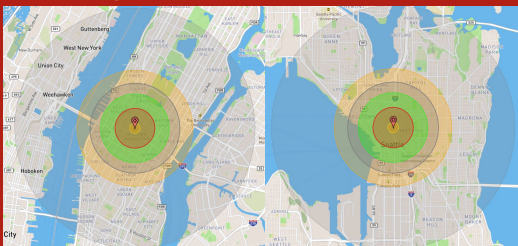




# The Atomic Bombings



Nagasaki before and after



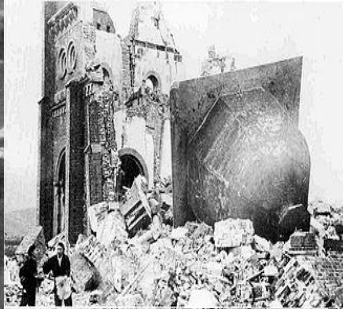
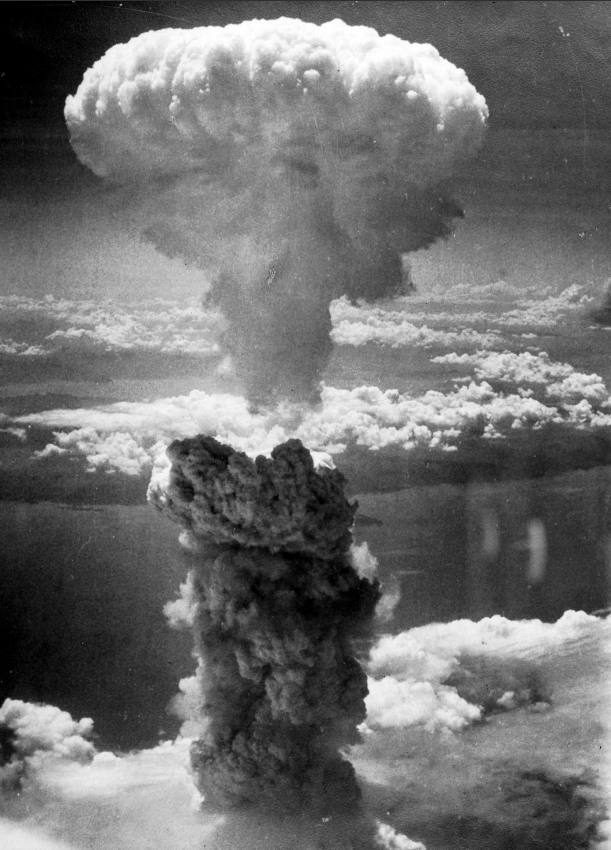
Blast compared to NYC and Seattle

## Nagasaki

- On August 9th, 1945, the B-29 bomber Bockscar flew to Kokura, Japan, the intended target for the bomb. Kokura however was clouded by clouds and smoke from a firebombing at Yahata the previous day. These conditions saved Kokura from an atomic bombing.
- The secondary target, Nagasaki, was flown to and at 11:01 Japanese time, the plutonium bomb known as “Fat Man” was released after a break in the clouds, and detonated at 11:02 with a force of ~21 kilotons of TNT, or 21,000 tons of TNT. Total destruction occurred for 1 mile in all directions and fires spread ~2 mi south.
- Over 80,000 people were killed in the attack and much of the valley was destroyed. Ironically, the explosion occurred over the Urakami Tenshudo Catholic Church, the largest Catholic Cathedral in Asia.



# Atomic Bombing of Nagasaki





# Wilfred Burchett's Report on Hiroshima

## The Atomic Plague

**'I Write This as a Warning to the World'**

**Doctors Fall as They Work**

*Poison gas fear: All wear masks*

*Express Staff Reporter Peter Burchett [sic] was the first Allied staff reporter to enter the atom-bomb city. He travelled 400 miles from Tokyo alone and unarmed carrying rations for seven meals – food is almost unobtainable in Japan – a black umbrella, and a typewriter. Here is his story from –*

HIROSHIMA, Tuesday.

**In Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly – people who were uninjured by the cataclysm – from an unknown something which I can only describe as atomic plague.**

Hiroshima does not look like a bombed city. It looks as if a monster steamroller had passed over it and squashed it out of existence. I write these facts as dispassionately as I can in the hope that they will act as a warning to the world. In this first testing ground of the atomic bomb I have seen the most terrible and frightening desolation in four years of war. It makes a blitzed Pacific island seem like an Eden. The damage is far greater than photographs can show.

When you arrive in Hiroshima you can look around and for 25, perhaps 30, square miles you can hardly see a building. It gives you an empty feeling in the stomach to see such man-made devastation.

In these hospitals I found people who, when the bomb fell, suffered absolutely no injuries, but now are dying from the uncanny after-effects.

For no apparent reason their health began to fail. They lost appetite. Their hair fell out. Bluish spots appeared on their bodies. And the bleeding began from the ears, nose and mouth.

At first the doctors told me they thought these were the symptoms of general debility. They gave their patients Vitamin A injections. The results were horrible. The flesh started rotting away from the hole caused by the injection of the needle.

And in every case the victim died.

That is one of the after-effects of the first atomic bomb man ever dropped and I do not want to see any more examples of it. But in walking through the month-old rubble I found others.

Then they found another extraordinary effect of the new terror from the skies.

Many people had suffered only a slight cut from a falling splinter of brick or steel. They should have recovered quickly. But they did not. They developed an acute sickness. Their gums began to bleed. And then they vomited blood. And finally they died.

All these phenomena, they told me, were due to the radio-activity released by the atomic bomb's explosion of the uranium atom.

## Water Poisoned

They found that the water had been poisoned by chemical reaction. Even today every drop of water consumed in Hiroshima comes from other cities. The people of Hiroshima are still afraid.

The scientists told me they have noted a great difference between the effect of the bombs in Hiroshima and in Nagasaki.

Hiroshima is in perfectly flat delta country. Nagasaki is hilly. When the bomb dropped on Hiroshima the weather was bad, and a big rainstorm developed soon afterwards.

And so they believe that the uranium radiation was driven into the earth and that, because so many are still falling sick and dying, it is still the cause of this man-made plague.

At Nagasaki, on the other hand, the weather was perfect, and scientists believe that this allowed the radio-activity to dissipate into the atmosphere more rapidly. In addition, the force of the bomb's explosion was, to a large extent, expended into the sea, where only fish were killed.

To support this theory, the scientists point to the fact that, in Nagasaki, death came swiftly, suddenly, and that there have been no after-effects such as those that Hiroshima is still suffering.

[*The Daily Express*, London, 5 September 1945.]



# Wilfred Burchett's Report on Hiroshima

General MacArthur had imposed restrictions on journalists' access to bombed cities, and had censored reports of the destruction caused by the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Civilian casualties were downplayed and the deadly lingering effects of radiation were dismissed. *The New York Times* published a front-page story with the headline 'No radioactivity in Hiroshima ruin'. Military censors suppressed a story about the bombing of Nagasaki submitted by George Weller of the Chicago Daily News.

US military encouraged the journalist William L. Laurence of *The New York Times* to write articles dismissing the reports of radiation sickness as part of Japanese efforts to undermine American morale. Laurence, who was also being paid by the US War Department, wrote the articles the US military wanted even though he was aware of the effects of radiation after observing the first atomic bomb test on 16 July 1945, and its effect on local residents and livestock.

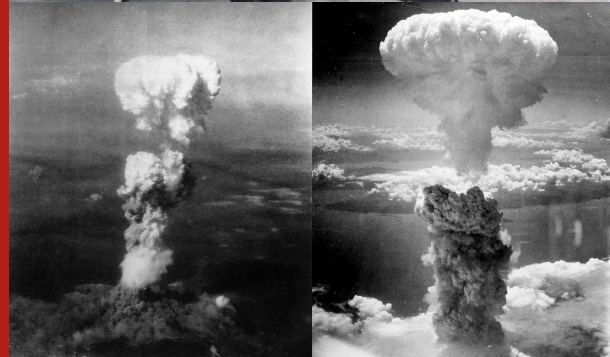
Burchett's report was the first in the Western media to mention the effects of radiation and nuclear fallout and was a major embarrassment for the US military. In response, US officials accused him of being under the sway of Japanese propaganda. Burchett lost his press accreditation and he was ordered to leave Japan, although this order was later withdrawn. In addition, his camera, containing photos of Hiroshima, was confiscated while he was documenting persistent illness at a Tokyo hospital. The film was sent to Washington and classified secret before being released in 1968.



# Why did we drop the A-bombs on Japan?

## Preemptive Nuclear War

- As the Second World War approached its end, FDR died in April of 1945 and the Nazis surrendered in May of 1945, the imperialists in the United States and United Kingdom were already looking to subvert the diplomacy made with the USSR during the war and was preparing to fight a war with the Soviet Union following WW2, and to use the end of WW2 to do so.
- Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed with nuclear weapons to test them on a civilian center. Cities like Tokyo or Osaka were ash at that point, but an untouched city like Hiroshima would provide the US with a civilian center to assess the impacts of an atomic weapon on.
- Leslie R. Groves, the director of the Manhattan Project, ordered a post-attack assessment report, which confirmed Hiroshima was chosen because it was “relatively untouched by previous bombing, in order that the effect of a single atomic-bomb could be determined.”

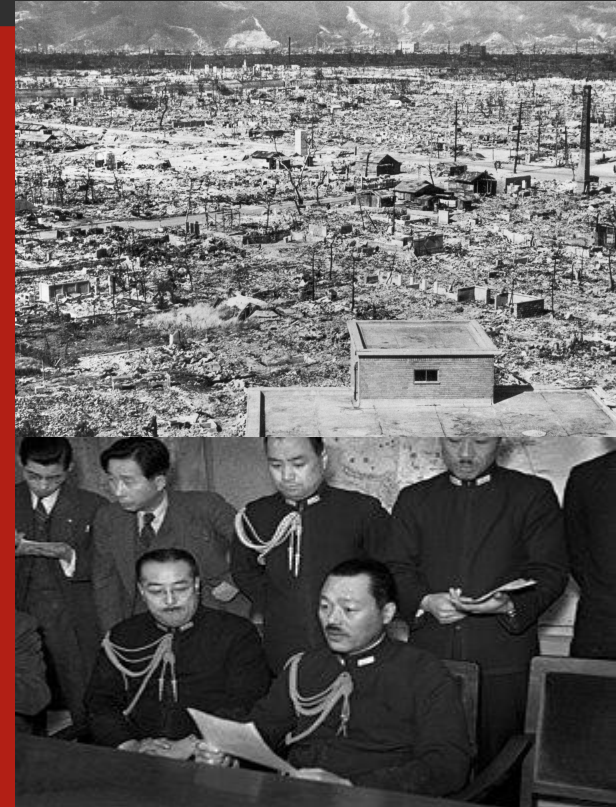




# Why did we drop the A-bombs on Japan?

## No Military Significance, No US-led Victory

- The military significance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was very low. In Hiroshima, there was the Second General Army Headquarters and Chugoku Military Police Headquarters and only ~7k-20k troops were killed in this attack. Nagasaki had Mitsubishi factories, including arms manufacturing, but only ~9,000 troops were killed in this attack.
- Neither bombing brought about the Japanese surrender, even with atomic blackmail following Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nor did they noticeably impair what was left of the Japanese war machine.
- Japan was trying to figure out a way to surrender to the Soviets before Hokkaido was invaded and the foundation of Japan was broken. They were losing the war and had suffered catastrophic incendiary bombing in 67 cities. Losing 2 more to big bombs rather than thousands of smaller ones didn't seem to make much difference at that point.





# Truman's Justification

- President Harry S. Truman's justification for using the atomic bomb on Japan was supposedly, to save American lives and end the war quickly. He claimed that an invasion of Japan would result in massive Allied casualties, potentially exceeding half a million. The use of the bomb, he reasoned, would force Japan's surrender and avoid a protracted and bloody conflict.
- Another supposed reason was that the Manhattan Project, which developed the atomic bomb, had been incredibly expensive. Using the bomb, even with its devastating consequences, justified the enormous investment of resources.
- This justification relied on the racist narrative that dropping the bomb on a military target would not be enough to force a surrender as “the Japanese were willing to go to any lengths to save their empire.” Wars of imperial conquest necessitates racism, if Americans thought of the Japanese as just like them, they would be far less accepting of this justification.

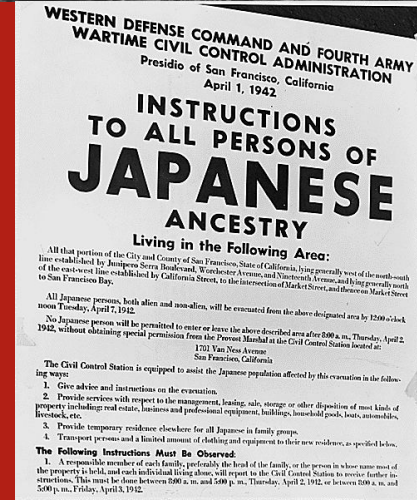
12 Oppenheimer when he went into Truman's office with Dean Acheson said to the latter, wringing his hands: 'I have blood on my hands.' Truman later said to Acheson: 'Never bring that fucking cretin in here again. He didn't drop the bomb. I did. That kind of weepiness makes me sick.'

Jean-Jacques Salomon *Science et Politique* (1970).



# Racism Towards Japanese People

- This justification relied on the racist narrative that dropping the bomb on a military target would not be enough to force a surrender as “the Japanese were willing to go to any lengths to save their empire.” Wars of imperial conquest necessitates racism, if Americans thought of the Japanese as just like them, they would be far less accepting of this justification.
- Soldiers who fought in the Pacific during WWII would use racist terms to refer to different groups of Asian people - even their own allies, the Chinese.
- At this time, Japanese people in the United States were being systematically targeted and put into internment camps following Executive Order 9066. Ordinary Japanese people, even those who had no political or military connections or affiliations, were viewed as potential spies who could not be trusted.





# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb

Gar Alperovitz

... The question was what to do about Russia.

The answer given by the president and his advisors is not in doubt. As previously noted, documents made public in 1960 show that on July 23rd, 1945, Truman had sent a cable drafted by Byrnes [James Byrnes, Secretary of State] Chiang Kai-shek requesting that he not make any further concessions to Russia.

As Byrnes subsequently explained, the goal was:

“...to encourage the Chinese to continue negotiations after the adjournment of the Potsdam conference. I had some fear that if they did not Stalin might immediately end the war...On the other hand, if Stalin and Chiang were still negotiating, it might delay Soviet entrance and the Japanese might surrender. The president was in a cord with that view. ”

Byrnes said he was most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians got in, with particular reference to Dairen and Port Arthur [ both cities combined and are now known as Luda. The Soviet Union turned Dairen over to the Communist Chinese Party in 1950 asking no recompense]. Once in there [the Soviet Union], he felt it would not be easy to get them out. With all this in mind, Byrnes was in favor of Soong's [Chinese Foreign Minister] return to Moscow, which he proposes to do in order to keep the conversation on this subject going.

Now, apparently worried that Stalin might become impatient with the continued stalling, or that Soong might yield, on August 5th, 1945, Truman and Byrnes sent further instructions to Averill Harriman [Secretary of Commerce] requesting that “no agreement be made involving further concessions by China.”

The first days of August now took on the air of a frenzied race for time. As Soong prepared to meet with Stalin on August 7th, the specially trained 509th Composite Group of the 20th Air Force waited for the weather to clear over target cities in Japan. The July 25th order to General Spatz had set the bombing for “after about” August 3rd.

How long could the Red Army be stalled on a Manchurian border? If the weather cleared, long enough for the weapon to be used against Hiroshima on August 6th?

Many scholars have studied these papers and have found them particularly illuminating in connection with Byrnes' strategy towards the Russians during the Potsdam conference.

Three days prior to the bombing of Hiroshima Walter Brown [associate of Byrnes] noted:

“Aboard the USS Augusta/

President, Lahey, JFB [Byrnes] agreed Japan looking for peace. President afraid they will sue for peace through Russia instead of some country like Sweden.”



# The Decision to Use the Atom Bomb

Gar Alperovitz

## How some of the nation's top military leaders viewed the use of the atomic bomb:

“I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to the Secretary of War, Henry Stimpson, my grave misgivings, first, on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly, because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon. Who's employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

General, United States army

“The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. And being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the dark ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children.

William D. Leahy

Fleet admiral, United States Navy

Chief of Staff to President Truman

“It always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bond, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse.”

Henry H. Arnold

Commanding General

United States Army Air Forces



# Public Opinion

- This justification is still taught in schools to this day.
- In a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, 56% of Americans said the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was justified, while 34% said it was not. Unlike in the 2025 survey, the 2015 survey question did not include an explicit “Not sure” response option.
- As previously suppressed information has been made public, the public opinion has begun to shift, especially in the past few years.
- The movie “Oppenheimer” was released last year, covering the life of scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer during the time of the Manhattan Project, the dropping of the bomb and the framing of Oppenheimer as a communist and Soviet spy. This film may have influenced public opinion, showing glimpses of the US government’s callousness in bombing innocent civilians.

## 35% of Americans say the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified; 31% say they were not

*% of U.S. adults who say the United States using the atomic bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 was ...*



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Refer to the topline for full question wording.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 2-8, 2025.

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# Discussion & New Members Introductions



# New Member Introductions

- What is your name, pronouns and state (or country/territory)?
- Where do you work? Is it unionized?
- How did you find out about the People's School?
- What do you think about tonight's class?

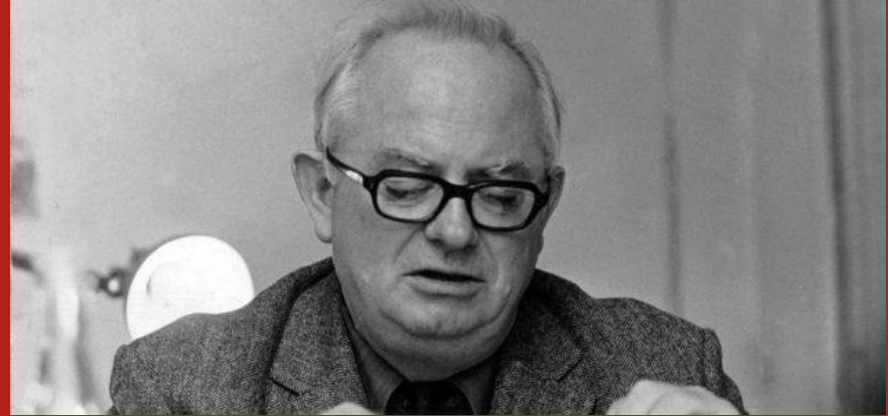


# Atomic Aftermath & The Present Day Nuclear Threat



# Excerpts From “Democracy With a Tommy Gun” by Wilfred Burchett

Walking through those Hiroshima streets one had a feeling of having been transplanted into some death stricken other planet. There was nothing but awful devastation and desolation. Lead-grey clouds hung low over the waste that had been a city of more than a quarter of a million people. Mists seemed to issue forth from fissures in the soil. There was a dank, acrid, sulphurous smell, and people hurried past without pausing or speaking to each other, white masks covering mouths and nostrils. Buildings had been pounded into grey and reddish dust, solidified into ridges and banks by the frequent rains.



Australian Communist and Journalist,  
Wilfred Burchett



# Excerpts From “Democracy With a Tommy Gun” by Wilfred Burchett

The Domei man, who was four miles from the centre of Hiroshima when the bomb fell, described the event as follows:

"We had an alarm early in the morning, but only two aircraft appeared. We thought they were reconnaissance planes and nobody took much notice. The 'All Clear' sounded and everybody started on their way back to work. Then at 8.20 a.m. one plane came back. We thought it was another photo plane, and alarms weren't even sounded. I was just about to leave for work when there was a blinding light, as if from a giant flash of lightning. At the same time I felt a scorching heat on my face and the house dropped about me. While I was still on the ground there sounded a booming explosion as if a two ton bomb had dropped alongside me. When I looked out there was a tremendous pillar of black smoke, shaped like a parachute, drifting upwards with a scarlet thread in the middle of it. As I watched the scarlet was diffused through the smoke pillar until the whole thing was glowing red. Hiroshima had disappeared. I knew something new to our experience had occurred. I tried to phone our office, then the police and fire brigade, to find out what had happened, but I couldn't even raise the exchange."



# The Years of U.S. Atomic Monopoly

Months before the end of the Second World War British Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered the British Armed Forces' Joint Planning Staff to develop a strategy targeting the USSR. The first edition of the plan was prepared on May 22, 1945. In accordance with the plan the invasion of Russia-held Europe by the Allied forces was scheduled on July 1, 1945. The plan, dubbed Operation Unthinkable, stated that its primary goal was "to impose upon Russia the will of the United States and the British Empire."

British generals warned Churchill that the "total war" would be hazardous to the Allied armed forces. However, after the United States "tested" its nuclear arsenal in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, Churchill and right-wing American policy makers started to persuade the White House to bomb the USSR.



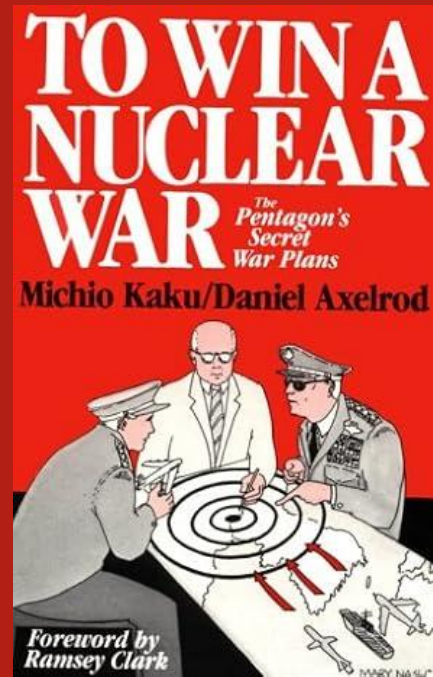
British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and American President Franklin D. Roosevelt at a special meeting of the Pacific War Council during World War Two



# Nuclear War Plans Targeting Soviet Russia

Churchill's plan won the hearts and minds of US policy makers and military officials. Between 1945 and the USSR's first detonation of a nuclear device in 1949, the Pentagon developed at least nine nuclear war plans targeting Soviet Russia. The names given to these plans graphically portray their offensive purpose: Bushwhacker, Broiler, Sizzle, Shakedown, Offtackle, Dropshot, Trojan, Pincher, and Frolic.

The 1949 Dropshot plan envisaged that the US would attack Soviet Russia and drop at least 300 nuclear bombs and 20,000 tons of conventional bombs on 200 targets in 100 urban areas, including Moscow and Leningrad (St. Petersburg). In addition, the planners offered to kick off a major land campaign against the USSR to win a "complete victory" over the Soviet Union together with the European allies. According to the plan Washington would start the war on January 1, 1957.



Recently declassified Top Secret documents trace how U.S. policy makers have threatened nuclear attack in over a dozen episodes.



## “We’re just going to have to wipe it out”

The detonation of the first nuclear bomb by the Soviet Union dealt a heavy blow to US militarists’ plans. “The Soviet atomic bomb test on August 29, 1949 shook Americans who had believed that their atomic monopoly would last much longer, but did not immediately alter the pattern of war planning. The key issue remained just what level of damage would force a Soviet surrender,” Professor Donald Angus MacKenzie

Eventually, in 1960 the US’ nuclear war plans were formalized in the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP). At first, the SIOP envisaged a massive simultaneous nuclear strike against the USSR’s nuclear forces, military targets, cities, as well as against China and Eastern Europe. It was planned that the US’ strategic forces would use almost 3,500 atomic warheads to bomb their targets. According to US generals’ estimates, the attack could have resulted in the death of about 285 to 425 million people. Some of the USSR’s European allies were meant to be completely annihilated.

“We’re just going to have to wipe it [Albania] out,” US General Thomas Power remarked at the 1960 SIOP planning conference, as quoted by MacKenzie.



# “The Cuban Missile Crisis: On the Brink of Armageddon”



The Cuban Missile Crisis, also known as the October Crisis in Cuba, was a 13-day confrontation between the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, centered around Soviet deployments of nuclear missiles in Cuba and is widely considered the closest the Cold War came to escalating into full-scale nuclear war. Khrushchev had good reasons for placing nuclear weapons in Cuba. First, he was certain a U.S. invasion of Cuba was imminent and wanted to protect the island. He was also alarmed that in the previous year, the U.S. had placed nuclear missiles in Turkey, on the border of the Soviet Union. These missiles could have delivered a nuclear warheads to many strategic targets in Soviet territory, including Moscow.

(Left) A U.S. Jupiter Missile stationed in Turkey, emblazoned with Turkish Flag.



## “Disaster Averted”



Khrushchev's intention for putting similar missiles in Cuba was to give the United States “a little of their own medicine.” Khrushchev made it known that he was willing to withdraw his forces from Cuba if the United States agreed to never invade Cuba and to remove its missiles from Turkey. Kennedy was willing to accept. With the agreements in place on October 28, Khrushchev began removing Soviet missiles, equipment, and personnel from Cuba. Although the crisis appeared to be over, there were several weeks of wrangling to assure all sides that the agreements had been upheld. The United States did not fully stand down until late November.

'Cuba is not alone!' — Soviet cartoon published during the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) showing Castro shaking hands with workers from around the world, crushing the A-bomb-toting arm of the US.



# Fighting and Winning a Nuclear War

In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration also spoke of fighting and winning a nuclear war, and the arms race was in full throttle, with each side adding more threatening strategic weapons to arsenals already brimming with tens of thousands of warheads. Deployments of intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe threatened to turn the continent into an atomic battleground. Few people remember the extraordinary levels of existential fear that gripped the public in those years and drove millions of people to support the nuclear freeze movement in the United States and disarmament campaigns in Europe. According to a Gallup poll in September 1981, 70 percent of U.S. respondents felt that nuclear war was a real possibility, with 30 percent considering the chances of such a conflict to be “good” or “certain.” U.S. President Ronald Reagan and senior officials in his administration stoked these fears with hostile anti-Soviet rhetoric and a policy of rejecting arms control in favor of more weapons.



In the 1980s, many schools continued to conduct "duck and cover" drills to prepare for a nuclear attack.



# A Million People March to Stop the Arms Race

In the face of such insanity, people took to the streets in unprecedented numbers and organized politically to demand a halt to the arms race. Many rallied to the proposal for a mutual, verifiable freeze on the production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons by the United States and the Soviet Union. The resulting movement for a bilateral nuclear freeze sparked one of the largest waves of popular protest in U.S. history. On June 12, 1982, an estimated one million people marched to New York's Central Park for a rally to freeze and reverse the arms race. The proposition to freeze U.S. and Soviet weapons was on the ballot in 10 states and the District of Columbia. Hundreds of national professional organizations endorsed the freeze, as did 25 of the nation's largest trade unions. The movement shaped popular culture, most dramatically in the broadcast of the 1983 television film on the effects of a nuclear attack, "The Day After," watched by 100 million viewers.



Demonstrators from Vermont march in New York to demand disarmament



# Two Steps Back: the ABM and INF Treaties are Nullified



President George W. Bush announcing his intentions to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) on December 13, 2001.

The now-defunct Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty was signed on May 26, 1972, and entered into force on October 3, 1972. The United States and the Soviet Union negotiated the ABM Treaty as part of an effort to control their arms race in nuclear weapons. The two sides reasoned that limiting defensive systems would reduce the need to build more or new offensive weapons to overcome any defense that the other might deploy. Without effective national defenses, each superpower remained vulnerable, even at reduced or low offensive force holdings, to the other's nuclear weapons, thereby deterring either side from launching an attack first because it faced a potential retaliatory strike that would assure its own destruction.

On December 13, 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush, announced that the United States would withdraw from the ABM Treaty, claiming that it prevented U.S. development of defenses against possible terrorist or "rogue-state" ballistic missile attacks. The U.S. withdrawal took effect June 13, 2002, and the treaty is no longer in force.



## Two Steps Back: the ABM and INF Treaties are Nullified

The 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty required the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate and permanently forswear all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. The treaty marked the first time the superpowers had agreed to reduce their nuclear arsenals, eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons, and employ extensive on-site inspections for verification. As a result of the INF Treaty, the United States and the Soviet Union destroyed a total of 2,692 short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missiles by the treaty's implementation deadline of June 1, 1991.

On Oct. 20, 2018, President Donald Trump announced his intention to “terminate” the INF Treaty, citing Russian noncompliance and concerns about China’s intermediate-range missile arsenal. On Feb. 2, the Trump administration declared a suspension of U.S. obligations under the INF Treaty and formally announced its intention to withdraw from the treaty in six months. Shortly thereafter, Russian President Vladimir Putin also announced that Russia will be officially suspending its treaty obligations as well. On Aug. 2, 2019, the United States formally withdrew from the INF Treaty.



# The Struggle Continues

In recent years the U.S. and Nato have shown an ever increasing willingness to risk open conflict with the world's two other largest nuclear powers, Russia and China. The United States, Russia, and China, hold the largest stockpiles of nuclear warheads among all nations. Russia has approximately 5,459 nuclear weapons, the U.S. has around 5,177, and China has an estimated 600, with the U.S. and Russia together possessing the vast majority of all nuclear weapons globally. The combined power of these nuclear doomsday devices is enough to end the world many times over and humanity has understood since the invention of the atomic bomb and its first barbaric use against a civilian target that in a nuclear war, the whole world loses. Already in Ukraine, the United States and NATO have come to the brink of war with Russia. Pentagon and government officials such as CIA Director Bill Burns have publicly confirmed their belief we must be prepared for war with China over Taiwan by 2027, the so-called "Davidson's Window." Communists have been in the forefront of the movement for peace and nuclear disarmament since nuclear weapons were invented. Now more than ever it is imperative we help unite the people against imperialist war, all the more so in an era when a war between nuclear powers threatens all of humanity.



Scene from "The Day After"



# Discussion & Wrap Up



# Announcements

- PCUSA Cell Chairs need to call members of their cells to remind them about attendance.
- The next issue of New Masses (2025) has begun production. If you have art you want us to feature, email it to [info@partyofcommunistsusa.net](mailto:info@partyofcommunistsusa.net).



<https://aafc.us.org/>

# Asian-American Friendship Congress

The Asian American Friendship Congress (AAFC) is an organization dedicated to struggling against racism and negative perception of Asian peoples.

We recognize that the prejudice experienced by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) is exacerbated by the corporate elites to create a wedge between working AAPI people and the rest of the American population.

We aim to educate the American people on AAPI history in order to demystify prejudices, stereotypes, and negative perceptions of the AAPI community. We also hope to foster closer bonds between the American people and the nations of East Asia and Southeast Asia. The AAFC seeks to normalize relations with these emerging Asian economies, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China.

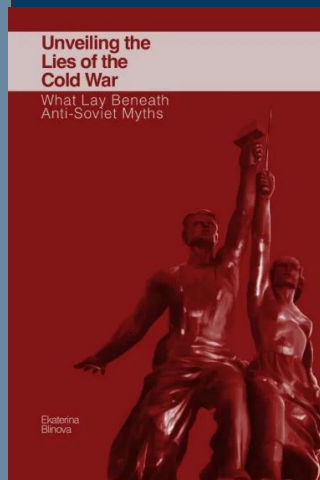
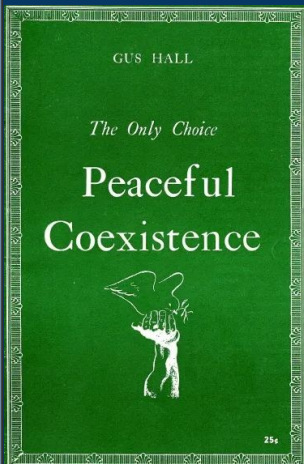
The AAFC also seeks to promote and preserve the diverse cultures which Asian immigrants have brought to our shores. These rich cultural aspects include cuisine, music, art, and languages



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## Relevant Releases



## HISTORY OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

1945-1985



New Outlook Publishers

**Selected Works of  
Henry Winston**

Volume 3

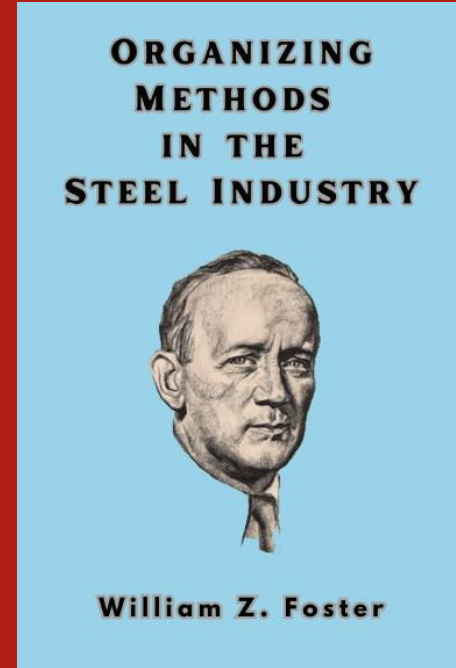


# Future NOP Class Collaborations!



We will do the following classes upcoming in collaboration with New Outlook Publishers:

- August 12, 2025 - Organizing Methods in the Steel Industry by William Z. Foster. Book can be ordered here:  
<https://www.lulu.com/shop/william-z-foster/organizing-methods-in-the-steel-industry/paperback/product-q6kndkq.html?q=Organizing+Methods+of+Steel+Industry&page=1&pageSize=4>
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# Harry Bridges School of Labor

[luel.us/laborschool/](http://luel.us/laborschool/)



The Harry Bridges School of Labor is a monthly class held 2x per month. Classes cover a variety of topics aimed at building class conscious among union members.

August's class will be a viewing of "Salt of the Earth." Class will be Wednesday August 6, 2025 at 8pm EST/6pm PST and Saturday August 9, 2025 at 7pm EST/4pm PST.





*May There Always be Sunshine - Pete Seeger*