

A STATEMENT ON THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

Adopted by the National Board of Directors
National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy
April 17, 1961

The Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests still represents the "world's best, last chance" to break out of the nuclear arms race. It is, therefore, vital to consider most carefully the course of the renewed negotiations in Geneva, and the positions taken by the negotiating countries.

1. The opening position assumed by the negotiators of the Soviet Union has raised new and unexpected difficulties to the progress of the talks. The Russians have welcomed and accepted in principle several of the modifications offered by the West. (See below). However, the Soviet Union has not yet brought forward any conciliatory proposals of its own. Moreover, the Russians breached an agreement made months ago at Geneva on staffing the executive of the Control Organization. They now insist upon splitting the executive into a three-man committee, each with a veto, in the same way that they are seeking to divide the office of the U.N. Secretary-General and every international agency.

While this Soviet move is in consonance with their moves in the General Assembly, the strong repudiation of their proposals in that arena should have caused them to abandon any thought of carrying them over into the test-ban negotiations. They now appear to be so deeply committed to their concept of a world divided into three rigid if imaginary blocs that their negotiators were left no alternative.

The Russians have expressed great fears and suspicions of an unitary executive which might not be impartial and could operate against their interests. This is undoubtedly the basis upon which they have raised the question, which becomes more acute as agreements affecting national security draw closer. At this point they seem willing to jeopardize an agreement, which they have appeared in the past to want very much, in an effort to approximate impartiality by the "committee" process.

The Soviet move has given new heart to the foes of a test-ban agreement in the U.S. and elsewhere who feel that the talks might well be made to founder on this point, and are pressing for an immediate showdown. It has also given credence to the popular but incorrect belief that the Russians alone have been responsible for past delays in reaching agreement, and that they have made no moves to meet Western requirements for inspection and control. Paramount among the Russian concessions have been the acceptance of two-thirds foreign personnel at control posts on Soviet soil, and the acceptance of considerably more inspection than the West had originally asked.

The Soviet proposal for a tripartite executive is clearly unacceptable to the West. It could very well become an insuperable stumbling block. The Western powers cannot possibly be expected to accept a built-in veto over the inspection mechanism. The Soviet Union might argue that since observance of the agreement depends upon voluntary adherence to it in the last analysis, the veto would not matter. However, the United States Senate would scrutinize critically any treaty containing such a veto provision. Furthermore, the Western powers cannot possibly allow such a precedent to be established -- a precedent which might be applied to the office of the U.N. Secretary-General, damaging it beyond repair as an independent, extra-national post, and bring the U.N. down to the level where only bloc politics operate.

While there is doubtless much Soviet prestige attached to their commitment on this position, the U.S.S.R. must be led to understand that there is no possibility of its success, and that they should seek ways of modifying or withdrawing their demand. At the same time, the Western powers should make every effort to allay their fears by emphasizing safeguards against onerous or unwarranted actions. There is, perhaps, a

slim possibility of compromise by agreeing upon a tripartite executive in which the individual members do not have a veto. Action would be authorized upon the concurrence of two of the three members.

2. The Government of the United States, under the new leadership of President John F. Kennedy, is to be commended for the united and vigorous position it has taken. The past administration suffered grievously from the division of opinion between major agencies on whether an inspected treaty ending nuclear weapons tests was in the interests of American security. These splits resulted in near cancellation of effective policy, and in American immobility at the conference table. There now exists an agreed and positive American policy which is also in harmony with the position taken by our British allies. The Western negotiators are now able to speak in one clear voice.

3. The United States has found it possible to offer a package of modifications to its previous stand, in an effort to demonstrate its earnest desire to reach a speedy agreement. These modifications are as follows:

(a) Agreement to meet the Russian request that the Soviet Union be allowed to inspect any nuclear devices that the U.S. may detonate for peaceful applications of atomic energy or in research to improve the detection of underground weapons tests.

(b) An offer to extend the American proposal for a 27-month moratorium on small tests to 36 months while the research program continues. The Russians had asked for a moratorium of three to five years duration.

(c) Acceptance of the findings of the joint conference on the detection of high altitude tests as the technical basis for inspecting all space tests.

(d) An offer to agree to reduction of the number of control posts to be placed on Soviet territory from 21 to 19. The two additional posts would be placed on "neighboring" territory.

(e) Agreement to accept the Soviet request for unanimity among the Big Three on the annual budget for the control organization. While this would give the Russians a veto on the total budget, it gives them none on individual items which they had also sought.

(f) Acceptance of the principle of East-West parity in the Control Body of member states that would supervise the treaty, by increasing the suggested number of members from 7 to 11 -- four each from East and West and three neutrals.

The Western powers deserve the highest praise for reopening the talks on this positive and conciliatory basis.

4. The position of France with regard to testing and to the U.N. is an increasing embarrassment to the Western allies, and a serious hazard to a successful ban. It is in the interest of the West to bring early pressure to bear on France to consider the greater good of the world, and to withhold further tests. President Kennedy should make this clear to President de Gaulle at their forthcoming discussions.

5. It is reasonable to assume that the chances to complete an agreement remain substantial. The discussions have scarcely been resumed, and, to judge from the preceding negotiations, only great patience will show if the Russians will compromise on the remaining points. The pressures which have been operative on the Russians as well as upon the West to achieve an early agreement remain, and are being intensified, particularly the inevitable spread of nuclear weapons to other countries, including China. The U.S. and Britain should in no case break off the negotiations.

6. If the Soviet Union should break off the talks, the United States should not resume testing, but should seek the earliest possible renewal of discussions. It is entirely possible that the Russians might withhold tests of their own while U.S. resumed, administering the U.S. a major political defeat, and forcing the U.S. back to the conference table under far less advantageous circumstances.

7. The test ban negotiations continue to be the most critical and hopeful front in the efforts to end the nuclear arms race under safeguarded conditions. There is no possible short-term military gain from continued testing which would match the overall gain in world security which would flow from the establishment of a world-wide inspection system ending all tests and halting the development of additional nuclear powers. Ample room for maneuver and for further adjustment by both sides remains. No effort must be spared to successfully complete the negotiations.