

American Legion demands museum whitewash Hiroshima bombing

by Carol White

The Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum has become a focal point of what is fast becoming a national scandal. A mounting pressure campaign led by the American Legion, with congressional support, is forcing museum administrators to transform an exhibit commemorating the end of World War II in order to fit a more comfortable view of how it came to pass that the United States dropped two atomic bombs on an already-defeated Japan. At issue are 1) whether or not an invasion of mainland Japan would have been necessary to bring the war to an end; 2) the actual estimate of casualties should such an invasion have occurred; 3) why Harry Truman decided in favor of dropping the bomb.

What is left out of the present controversy is the most important part of the whole story, which Bertrand Russell revealed in an article which he wrote for the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Sept. 1, 1946): The decision to proceed with developing an atomic bomb was made by a group in Britain, led by Russell, to use the bomb as a terror weapon to coerce Americans and the rest of the world to accede to a world federalist dictatorship. Readers may wish to refer to our July 1, 1994 cover story, "British Geopolitics and the Atomic Bomb," co-authored by Lyndon LaRouche and Carol White, and a follow-up story, on July 29 by me: "Russell, Conant, and the Hiroshima Bombing." LaRouche wrote a more extensive treatment for the Schiller Institute's journal *Fidelio* (Fall 1994).

Why the bomb was dropped

It is useful to compare three statements: the opening paragraph of LaRouche's article in *Fidelio*; the remarks of American Legion National Commander William M. Detweiler, quoted in a National Air and Space Museum release, on Sept. 22; and Russell's most revealing admission of the uses to which the bomb would be put once its potentialities had been demonstrated.

LaRouche: "See in your mind's eye a B-29 bomber aircraft, called the 'Enola Gay,' flying to its hellish appointment, that horror-stricken summer's day in 1945. Why did the United States government drop the only two nuclear-fission weapons in its arsenal upon those two virtually defenseless population-centers in Japan? The U.S. government lied when it said this was necessary to save perhaps a million

or so U.S. soldiers' lives. Before the dropping of what quickly came to be described in awe-stricken tones as 'the bomb,' the Emperor of Japan was already negotiating surrender with the Truman government, through Vatican channels, on the same terms Japan's surrender was accepted after the bombs were dropped."

Detweiler: "More than anything else, our disagreements center on the estimate of the number of lives saved by the use of atomic weapons in 1945. Was it 30,000, or was it 500,000 potential invasion casualties? To the museum, this seems to be a matter of some significance, a matter of relative value to the decision. To the American Legion, the use of the weapon against a brutal and ruthless aggressor—who had vowed to fight and die down to the last schoolchild and was organized to do just that—to save 30,000 American lives was as morally justifiable as to use it to save half a million. In fact, for any government with the means to end the slaughter on both sides not to use those means would be morally indefensible." According to the museum release, the legion has threatened to force the exhibit to close, if it does not meet its approval, and, to quote Detweiler: "We want this exhibit to succeed, but we insist that it be accurate, that it present the service and sacrifice of America's veterans as the legislative charge to the Institution mandates, and that the role of the Japanese as the cause of the conflict be fully detailed. Failing that, we will not hesitate to exercise the options available to us to actively oppose the exhibit."

The American Legion has chosen to not address the salient, well-documented point, that the Japanese had been trying to use the good offices of the Vatican for at least six months to negotiate an end to the war which would not entail a summary abolition of the imperial dynasty. They had appealed to the Soviets in a similar vein. In any event, the invasion, were it to occur, was planned for no earlier than November (due to early fall weather conditions on the mainland). Why, then, was it necessary to bomb Nagasaki only three days after the Aug. 6 bombing of Hiroshima? Was Nagasaki bombing moved up from Aug. 10 to Aug. 9 to avert a *premature* unconditional surrender?

Russell: "It is entirely clear that there is only one way in which great wars can be permanently prevented, and that is the establishment of an international government with a

monopoly of serious armed force. . . . An international government, if it is to be able to preserve peace, must have the only atomic bombs, the only plant for producing them, the only air force, the only battleships, and generally whatever is necessary to make it irresistible. . . . The international authority must have a monopoly of uranium, and of whatever other raw material may hereafter be found suitable for the manufacture of atomic bombs. It must have a large army of inspectors who must have the right to enter any factory without notice; any attempt to interfere with them or to obstruct their work must be treated as a *casus belli*. . . . The international government . . . will have to decide all disputes between different nations, and will have to be bound by its constitution to intervene by force of arms against any nation that refuses to submit to the arbitration. Given its monopoly of armed force, such intervention will be seldom necessary.”

‘The Last Act’

The exhibit, planned to open next May in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, has the title, “The Last Act—The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II.” As originally planned, the exhibit would have explored some of the backdrop to the war of the Pacific, in the context of British and French imperialism in the region. A partial reconstruction of the Enola Gay would be on view. Background on the Manhattan Project, including the 1939 letter from Albert Einstein to Franklin Roosevelt, are included; and a photographic and video display on damage the bomb wrought. It would conclude with a discussion of the Cold War. In August, the museum announced that an additional “introductory unit” was being added, tentatively titled “The War in the Pacific: An American Perspective.” This has still not satisfied critics.

Over Oct. 9-10, the Sunday *New York Times*, and then the *Washington Post* weighed in with opinion columns taking opposite sides. Kai Bird in the *Times* gave a fair representation of the truth, in contrast to the version by Jonathan Yardley in the liberal *Post*, who does register some embarrassment about his strange bedfellows, but then jumps on the bandwagon, demanding that criticisms of the use of the bomb be expunged from the exhibit. The momentum behind the battle cry is such that efforts by the museum directors to propitiate their critics and revise the exhibit, to even knowingly falsely accede to the ridiculous estimate that 1 million lives were *saved*, have been to no avail.

Bird makes a competent case, indicting the lie that a million lives were saved by the bombings. He cites a number of sources who confirm that this was a complete myth concocted by Henry Stimson in the February 1947 issue of *Harper's Magazine*, in order to whitewash the atrocity. Furthermore, he rightly deplores the fact that the Smithsonian has begun to back down under pressure, which has gone to the point where the museum will remove more evidence that the Japanese were on the point of surrender, and publish

Stimson's lie as fact.

Bird points to numbers of historians who have refuted the lie that a million lives were saved by the bombings. Worst-case military estimates at the time were that only 46,000 lives would have been lost should an invasion have been necessary. More to the point, the Japanese were at the point of surrender. Bird cites entries from Truman's diary showing that he was well aware of this.

‘Japan would have surrendered’

The original exhibit contained an account of how Gen. Dwight Eisenhower had urged Secretary of War Stimson against using the bomb, for the reason that Japan was already defeated, but this anecdote has been removed from the exhibit under pressure.

According to Bird, J. Samuel Walker, chief historian for the U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has written: “The consensus is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan. It is clear that alternatives to the bomb existed and that Truman and his advisers knew it. . . . The hoary claim that the bomb prevented 500,000 American combat deaths is unsurpassable.”

That Japan was ready to surrender before the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was also the evaluation by the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. In a 1946 report cited by Bird, the survey said: “Certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November, 1945, Japan would have surrendered even in the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”

Bertrand Russell, Leo Szilard, and Neils Bohr had already enlisted the support of Robert Oppenheimer and James Conant, well before the summer of 1945, in their determination that the bomb project continue to a successful demonstration of its power; and that this demonstration be carried out over a highly populated area in Japan.

As we have documented in *EIR*, not only were fears that the Germans planned to build their own nuclear weapon unsubstantiated, but this fact was known to the Allies in the early phases of the war. While the official justification for the Manhattan Project was to have an Allied deterrent to prevent Adolf Hitler from holding his enemies hostage by threatening to deploy his bomb against Britain, such thinking was never a determining factor in the deliberations of policymakers such as Roosevelt, Churchill, Russell, Stimson, or Conant. Whatever Roosevelt may have intended, for the others, the bomb was the preferred weapon to shape the postwar world in order to achieve their world-federalist nightmare of the future.

For Harry Truman, manifestly ill equipped to deal with the problems of shaping the postwar world, the possibility of “showing” the Soviets was too tempting for him to allow mere humanitarian considerations to deter him from using atomic weapons against the Japanese.