The Beginning of my Correspondence with Bertrand Russell about Peace

Shigetoshi Iwamatsu
Sir:
Thanks very much for your recent letter in which you opposed the nuclear tests, and for a copy of the protest which you sent to the President of the United States. On the subject of nuclear tests, I have recently been sickened beyond measure by the hypocrisy of the power politicians. When the Soviet Union decided to resume its nuclear tests, the leaders of the West spoke in terms of the mass murder by the radioactivity which the tests involved and of the Soviet Union’s disregard for human rights all over the world. I agreed with them. Their silence when they themselves decided to do the same makes the very words and sentiments which they used completely meaningless. I hope that the Nagasaki Council Against A. & H. Bombs will continue their work in opposing nuclear weapons and nuclear tests.
If there is any help I can give, please write without hesitation to me.

Yours faithfully,
Bertrand Russell

The above letter, dated April 4, 1962, is the first one which I received from Bertrand Russell. The shock which it gave me was so great that I will never forget it as long as I live. It is on the basis of this letter that I began to respect him as my teacher and "conscience", and determined to participate in every activity for peace with him.

The reason I was so impressed by this letter is that it satisfied my earnest desire for peace directly and fully.
On the ninth of August, 1945, I suffered from the Atomic Bomb in Nagasaki at a nearby place, which is only 1300 metres from the epi-centre. I would have been killed by the radioactivity of the bomb, if I had been irradiated directly without the screening effect of a wall of a factory at that place, or I would have been killed by the radiation of the atomic heat, if I had not been hidden by the wall.

I was "mobilized" as a "student" to work to produce the military fish-bomb at the factory of the Mitsubishi Weapons-Producing Company, where the fish-bombs which were used to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 had been produced. At that time in Japan, it was the most important demand and the supreme order for the "civilian front" of the militaristic and aggressive Japan Imperialism to produce as much military equipment as possible.

At 11:02 a. m. on that day, a great many people suffered from the Atomic Bomb——a lot of boys and girls of the primary and high schools, students of colleges and universities, a lot of drafted workers who were requisitioned by the government apart from their own families living in every part of Kyūshū island, and a lot of Korean and Chinese people who were compelled to be taken from their own mother countries, which had become great victims of Japanese Imperialism. We, the sufferers, wandered about the Matsuyama, Urakami, and Ohashi districts which had changed into a burning "hell" which was full of agonizing cries. I, myself, witnessed the many dead who died instantly or gradually, crying for water——corpses with the bowels out, corpses with fractured bones, and corpses with charred skin or barked skin. Much misery of many victims is, even now, fresh in my memory. As a surviving sufferer, I thought it was my bounden duty to work
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good to them. I had always been moved by the idea that I should appeal to the people about the cruelty and threat of the A. & H. Bombs, and should make the cry to ban the nuclear weapons into a common world demand.

In order to behave consistently according to this idea, it was necessary for me to undergo long suffering in my own inner life. I had to absolutely deny and eliminate the imperialistic militarism, imperialistic view of history, ultra-nationalism in my own inner life, which had been inculcated in my mind when I was a pupil in primary and high schools. For me this inner struggle was very painful, wretched and miserable.

Throughout the long desperate fight, hardly sleeping well at night, I dissipated my own energy and was so exhausted that I could not rise up. It was in the autumn of 1961 that I set myself to become active in the work of the anti-nuclear and peace movement.

At that time, the race of nuclear weapons tests, which had become intensified again, challenged me to resolve that it was the time to do my duty and to discharge my obligation as a surviving A. Bomb sufferer, although I was quite unsociable, over-prudent, and liked to stay at my study. I took part in the organization of the peace-movement — Nagasaki Council Against A. & H. Bombs —, as an individual, without regarding my own disability and incompetence.

The next year — in March, 1962 —, I was elected as a member of the standing committee in charge of propaganda campaigns.

I determined, as a director in charge of propaganda campaigns, to execute several tasks which I set for myself who was
one of more than half a million A. Bomb sufferers. My task was to make the Council Against A. & H. Bombs in Nagasaki — the Bombed city as well as Hiroshima — a “point of origin” promoting the world wide anti-nuclear-war movement, through the information about the horrors and ravages of the atomic bomb, horrors beyond any description, as concretely and minutely as possible. I began to work very hard, hoping that I could make the stagnant Council into the active World Council.

Day and night, I typed English letters.

There were three kind of letters which I wrote — (1) letters protesting against the sovereigns of the countries which had just tested nuclear weapons, (2) letters calling for the international solidarity of peace activists, and (3) letters contributing to the information media, such as newspapers and magazines.

The first kind of letters were mostly addressed to President Kennedy (March 19, April 26, June 7, June 21, October 27 of 1962). The others were addressed to Prime Minister Khrushchev (June 21, July 25 of 1962), Prime Minister Macmillan (June 21), and President De Gaulle (June 21).

I will quote my letter to President Kennedy, March 19, as an example.

Sir:

It is reported that, in your letter to Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda dated February 28, 1962, and in your speech on March 2, you expressed the decision to resume nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere, in case of the Soviet Union’s refusal to accept the nuclear test ban treaty.

On the basis of our never-to-be-forgotten tragic experience in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 16 years ago and in Bikini 8
years ago, we believe that it is our high duty to oppose continually both nuclear weapons testing and nuclear war, and that this duty is imposed on us by mankind who has built up an innumerable and valuable cultural inheritance, not to be destroyed. You emphasized the necessity of general and complete disarmament in your speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, 1961, and in your letter to him you assured Prime Minister Ikeda that you would continue to press vigorously for disarmament. We are unable to understand the reason why you, fostering such an idea, decided to resume the nuclear tests in case of the Soviet Union’s refusal to accept the treaty, prior to the dis- armament conference in Geneva. Further, you stated that, as one of the reasons for the resumption, it was necessary to increase the free world’s ability to survive and to respond to a nuclear war. We believe, however, that a nuclear war will exterminate mankind.

Finally, we will never approve of the resumption, even if the tests are to be conducted under conditions which restrict the radioactive fallout to an absolute minimum. Because we are well aware of the inhumanity of the “ashes of death”.

Therefore, we make a strong protest against your present decision to resume testing, and demand earnestly, Sir, that you will exert all possible efforts to bring about an agreement for general and complete disarmament.

Very truly yours,

*   *   *   *
Notwithstanding all protests, the U. S. resumed the nuclear tests in the early morning of 26 of April (Japanese time). On that day, I instantly wrote a protesting letter to the White House, as follows:

Sir:
We have already sent you a letter, protesting against your recent decision to resume nuclear testing. Nevertheless, you have resumed the nuclear testing this morning. It is really regrettable that you have done such a thing. We strongly demand again that you do promptly stop the meaningless nuclear testing. It is nonsense that you should want to be the only survivors of war. We wish you would coolly and wisely realize it is only through peace that mankind can prosper.

We believe that our demand represents the earnest will of the citizens of Nagasaki, the nation of Japan, and the people of the world. We should like to expect that bona fide you will respect this very will.

Very truly yours,

* * * *

In spite of all strong protests, the U. S. continued the nuclear testing, and especially carried out a series of inner space tests over Johnston Island. My letter, dated June 7, addressed to President Kennedy, severely criticising such escalation of the U. S. nuclear testing, strongly demanded that Kennedy promptly stop the testing, as follows:

Sir;

We have been protesting against the nuclear testing and the
preparation for future war by any country, on the basis of high humanism, which humanity has ever built up in its history. Nevertheless, you have tested over and over again since April 25. Moreover, you have commenced a series of high-altitude nuclear tests over Johnston Island. Now, the world, including scientists, strongly opposes your undertaking.

We strongly demand again that you should understand it very foolish to develop this formidable weapon for carnage without regarding human happiness and learning, and that you should promptly stop every nuclear test.

Very truly yours,

* * * *

My second kind of letter, calling for international solidarity, were not so many, in spite of my recognition of the importance of solidarity, because it was very difficult for me to find the addresses of the activists. Among those letters, there was included my letter to Bertrand Russell.

It was urgently necessary to have friendly relations with the peace workers in the world, as long as peace is the largest problem for all human beings and wars were being conducted or being prepared for all over the world. Moreover, Nagasaki is one of the cities having suffered from the atomic bomb and its innumerable citizens were cruelly killed, whose bones were melted into tiles and pebbles.

But in Japan, it was a general habit for the renowned persons, even if peace-loving ones, not to answer to the nameless people. They are used to rationalizing their not answering to the
nameless people on the self-seeking standpoint. They might think they were too much absorbed in their work to think of others. They might, also, think the letters from those whom they didn’t know, were absolutely not worthy of answering. As I knew the general attitude of Japanese famous men towards us people, I had no expectation of receiving a reply from a person of world-wide fame. I did write a letter to Russell without expecting his answer. It was on March 26 that I sent a letter.

Unexpectedly, a letter of Russell, that "famous philosopher" (at that time I knew almost nothing more than that about him), did arrive for me.

I was amazed, at first, by the fact that he answered me. Secondly, I was amazed by the contents of his message. His standpoint was stated vigourously and clearly in his pithy expression. I was very glad to have directly known his idea of pacifism, which had been vaguely reported by the western newspapers. I read his letter again and again, and at last I could repeat it from memory. Under these circumstances I was bewitched by Russell.

My first letter to Russell, March 26, to which he replied, was as follows:

Dear Earl Russell:

We esteem it a great honour to send a letter to you. We know well that you are a philosopher in the classical sense. We have great respect for your immense and multi-farious learning and writings. We have, furthermore, a high regard for your ardent pacifism. It is on the peace of the world that we are going to write to you. We gathered and organized the councils against A. and H. bombs about 7 years ago, for the purpose of bringing
about peace and happiness by means of destroying the nuclear weapons race and nuclear war. It is not only the weapons race but war itself, as you say, that we should destroy. These organizations were established all over Japan on the basis of the never-to-be-forgotten experience which we had had in Hiroshima and Nagasaki 17 years ago, in Bikini 8 years ago.

Hundreds of thousands of persons were killed and wounded by the A. Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We witnessed a great many dead, being burnt by heat rays and radiation rays. We witnessed, also, a great many people seriously wounded by the same rays. After suffering agony, many of them died. Some of the survivors are in bed, suffering from an atomic disease, at the "Atomic Bomb Hospital", but they can ill afford their living expenses, because their livings are not guaranteed by public finance. Other persons, including us, are even now afraid lest they should be attacked with an atomic disease.

We hope that we shall exert efforts, in cooperation with you and many other pacifists in your country, to bring about world peace. Would you kindly let the pacifists know about our existence and activities? And would you mind informing us of the addresses of the main peace-loving organizations, if anything should not interrupt you?

A few days ago, we sent a letter to the President of USA, protesting against his decision to resume nuclear weapons testing. A copy of the letter is inclosed.

Yours very truly,

* * * *
The "inclosed" letter in this was that addressed to President Kennedy, March 19, above mentioned.

I will write about my contributing letters to the editors of the information media. Believing that it was necessary for me to arouse public opinion to opposing nuclear weapons through awakening the interest of the media itself in the nuclear problem and then through the media attracting the readers' attention to it, I sent letters to many newspapers and magazines in the world. I was informed of their addresses by the favour of the "Mainichi" and was given general advice about contributions from Mrs. King, who came to Nagasaki for attending the World Conference.

The number of my letters to the media was 69, most of which were to the U. S. A. The others were to England, Australia, Argentine, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Arab Union, France, West Germany, Holland, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the Soviet Union.

I had, of course, no optimistic prospect that my letters would be published in every country. I had, rather, a reverse view. But I had an urgent sense of mission that I must continue to publicize the opposition to the A. & H. Bombs widely and repeatedly even with the obstacle of the different languages, even if there were only a slim chance of my letters being published.

In fact, most of my letters were ignored. The New York Times, London Times, and Saturday Review (in New York) sent me euphemistic refusal letters. Their attitudes were less objectionable than those which gave me no answer. All my contributions, however, were not neglected.

The "Los Angeles Times" printed my letter, April 27, in its issue of May 6, the "New York Post" inserted the same letter
in its issue of May 7, and "Daily Star" of Toronto, Canada inserted my letter, May 7, in the issue of May 25. Some readers responded promptly to me, after having read my letters. Some of them sent me their good wishes which expressed their fraternal solidarity to fight against the nuclear testing and others, on the contrary, protested my letter opposing nuclear tests with prejudice and anger.

I have no space to introduce the letters expressing fraternal solidarity here.

Three persons wrote to me protesting to our appeal against nuclear testing in resentment. I paid a special attention to these letters. That is because I thought I could not obtain any means to make the American people themselves act to stop the nuclear testing, unless we answered the opinions described in their letters, which, I thought, were common among the majority of the American people. I thought it was urgently necessary for us to persuade them out of their opinions.

One of those letters came from a Mr. Kendall. The essence of his letter is as follows:

We read your letter in the May 6 issue of the Los Angeles Times on your protest of our (the U. S.) nuclear testing and how, quote: "furious you Japanese are with anger at us" unquote. You also ask us why we don't listen to your voice as the God of Peace? (Your voice for the last 75 years has been the voice of the God of War? Against Russia, Korea, China, England, Dutch, Philippine, etc., etc., not excluding the U. S.)

We herein give you our family’s opinion and we are sure this opinion is shared by many Americans.

It makes no difference to me or mine if we are killed by
nuclear weapons in a war; death by any weapon whether nuclear, guns, knives, microbes, or starvation is just as definite and undesirable and we are just as dead. As far as we are concerned, any weapon which prevents war is justified, but to prevent war one must be the strongest with the best weapons and be able to deliver them; this is our deterrent philosophy (the motto of our Strategic Air Command is "Peace is our Profession"). Any weapon which ends a war the quickest, that is, in the shortest period of time, is desirable and our will to use such weapons is mandatory. Any war of any kind is abhorrent and terrible and should be prevented if possible; but, not at the cost of our freedoms. If a war is unpreventable then any weapon is justifiable to end the war as quickly as possible, but with victory required in order to maintain our constitutional republican form of government and self-determination for the free world.

To us here in the United States of America, slavery is far worse than death from war. Death from war caused by defending our freedom is definitely more desirable than the chains of slavery, of surrender and loss of all of our cherished freedoms, the degradation of us as human beings, the slow death of starvation, prison camps, executions, etc., that goes with slavery under Communism.

You Japanese people should never forget Pearl Harbor; we won’t. What has happened before could happen again with the Communists instead of Japanese. The freedoms we in the United States of America enjoy today were bought with much blood and treasure time after time; these freedoms are not
ours by gift or free by reason of birth, they are ours only as long as we are willing to fight and die for them. You Japanese people now enjoy freedoms you never had before only because we the United States of America won that terrible war you started at Pearl Harbor. If you Japanese had won, I shudder to think of the "Peace" or "freedoms" you would have let us have — peace and freedoms such as you gave the Koreans or the Chinese. If Communist Russia wins over the world (and it is these same nuclear weapons you are protesting that prevents them from winning) we can guarantee you, the Japanese people, that you will know what living under slavery will be like. You would find that slavery under Communism would be worse than you treated the Chinese, Koreans and all other peoples you conquered, if that is possible.

We suggest that you look at the freedoms allowed under Communism and the freedoms allowed the rest of the free world and then ask yourselves which system you would rather live under. The freedoms of the world outside Communism is granted to the people of the world only by the deterrent power of the United States of America and its willingness to use this deterrent power to guarantee these freedoms. The United Nations guarantees freedom to no one, it is dominated by the Communist countries and socialist (Communist leaning) neutrals ................. To maintain our leadership in nuclear weapons or any other war potential we must test and test and test, whatever testing is necessary regardless of the cost or temporary inconvenience, so that we, you, and the rest of the free
world will not be forced against our wishes into the slavery of World Communism.

To Mr. Kendall, I wrote my letter explaining about my pacifism. I would like to present my letter here, and would like to go further into my explanation, but space does not allow me to do so.

(June 15, 1975)