

Editorial

Cynical journalism in service of the British

While Americans in general welcomed the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the time, now, 50 years later, there is no reasonable doubt that it was morally wrong. The Japanese were in fact already at the point of surrender, and Harry Truman knew it. This is a hard point for Americans to accept; and certainly the memories of the bombing are painful for Japanese. The publication in the May-June *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* of an article asserting that the decision to use atomic weapons against Japan was made well in advance of the actual bombing, can only exacerbate tensions between the two nations, especially in the present climate of trade disputes. This is particularly so because of the timing, coming as it does in the midst of the trade talks.

A press conference was held by Arun Makhijani, the author of the *Bulletin* article, to ensure the widest possible circulation of his thesis. And it was reported on by *New York Times* writer William Broad on April 18.

Makhijani headlined his article with a question, “‘Always’ the Target?” Broad upped the ante with the even more inflammatory headline: “Japan Was Always Atom Bomb Target.” The thesis being suggested is that the reason President Roosevelt created the Manhattan Project was to use atomic weapons against the Japanese, rather than as a deterrent to prevent Adolf Hitler from gaining sole control of these deadly weapon. Certainly, the obvious fact that the war in Europe was coming to a victorious close, meant that Germany would no longer be a possible target for use of the bomb. But what is implied in both articles is a cynicism which did not characterize the American military or the political policy of Franklin Roosevelt during the Second World War. It did, however, fit in with Winston Churchill’s determination to maintain Britain’s empire at all costs.

If either Makhijani or Broad were interested in historical truth, they should have revealed how President Roosevelt was working through the Vatican to try to negotiate honorable surrender terms with the emperor of Japan, and how after his death this effort was brutally sabotaged.

The final decision to drop the bombs was based on political rather than military considerations—there was no need to consider invading a Japan already on its knees. It was a terror tactic intended to force a one-world version of the British Empire on the postwar world. Truman, unlike Roosevelt, was, to a large extent, a pawn of pro-British advisers such as Averell Harriman.

Makhijani quoted from an April 23, 1945 memorandum by General Groves, who was military head of the Manhattan Project. The quotation is: “While our plan of operations is based on the more certain, more powerful, gun-type bomb it also provides for the use of implosion type bombs as soon as they become available. *The target is and always was expected to be Japan.*” A proper reading of his remark would take into account that even at the time of writing, the scientific difficulties had not been overcome with regard to the manufacture of implosion (i.e., plutonium) bombs.

Makhijani cites minutes from a military policy committee meeting in May 1943, in which a Japanese fleet concentration in the Pacific was considered to be a probable target for the new weapons. But this would have been very different from bombing a population center such as Hiroshima.

He also includes excerpts from a summary of a September 1944 meeting between Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, which included the statement: “It [an atomic bomb] might perhaps, after mature consideration, be used against the Japanese.”

Makhijani has a record as a Japan-basher. An article by him, in the April 2 *Washington Post*, claimed that Japan had secretly developed its own bomb. Its title was: “What ‘Non-Nuclear’ Japan Is Not Telling the World,” subheaded, “And How Tokyo Keeps Its Options.” Makhijani is president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, an active collaborator of Greenpeace; he has vigorously opposed the Japanese program to reprocess plutonium.

These articles can only serve the purpose of widening the rift between Japan and the United States. As historiography, they are worse than irresponsible.