

Perhaps the first is to be found in the disparity between the high hopes of 1945 and the slow progress made during the past quarter-century. We had a right to high hopes in 1945 because so much seemed possible then.

In the recorded history of man there have been many years of great moment but few, surely, of such significance as 1945. Has there been any other year in which was manifest such widespread relief and determination for a better future? Has there been any other year in which occurred events of such vivid horror, such appalling evidence of man's capacity to produce his own catastrophe? Could any other year claim all the elements of a present hell and all the ingredients for a future heaven? In 1945 man attained a kind of maturity. Not since he first fashioned rough stone tools had man possessed the knowledge and the ability to answer virtually all his needs. Not since he first associated with others in local tribes had mankind conceived the institutional structures to conduct his affairs effectively and peacefully. Not since man first struck down his brother in rage had he been able to destroy not just his neighbour or his enemy but the whole human race.

For centuries, these human capacities had been the subject of dreams or nightmares by scientists and inventors, by poets and philosophers, by warriors and madmen. But none were within the grasp of man before 1945. Then, in a few blinding weeks of inspiration, revelation and terror, man held them in his hands.

This week we have an opportunity to reflect on our use or our misuse of that knowledge and ability in the years since the Charter was signed. In doing so we shall be well advised to avoid putting too much blame either on the United Nations as an organization or on its Charter. The Charter is a remarkable political attainment. The Charter introduced into the world a minimum standard of conduct, a floor through which no state was to descend. The Charter was never intended as a ceiling on the good citizenship of nations. The failure of the United Nations so far to fulfil the promise of 1945 is no excuse for states not to live up to the spirit as well as the letter of the Charter.

For it is member states that are charged with the obligations of the Charter. It is member states that retain the primary responsibility for action or inaction by this organization. And that responsibility is not diminished simply because the United Nations is not yet as effective as the San Francisco Conference hoped it would be.

All member nations share some of the blame for this organization's weaknesses, just as we can all take part of the credit for its strengths.

A few moments ago, I spoke about the coincidences in 1945 of political achievement and scientific advance. Surely the great paradox of that time was that the founding nations failed to realize that the nuclear age had begun. This seems all the more incomprehensible today when we realize that the Charter and the bomb were being put together at the same time.

Science in the past quarter-century has so far outstripped politics that all our political institutions, above all the United Nations, have seemed less and less relevant. How else can we now look upon disarmament discussions in the fifties, for example, when bigger and bigger bombs were bursting in the atmosphere and threatening us with radiation hazard? While we struggled with age-old earthly ills -- hunger, disease, illiteracy -- science shot Sputnik into