

CONFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT

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Working Paper on Chemical Warfare Agents and the Commercial Chemical Industry

1. Chemical agents, the effects of their use in warfare, and the possibility of subjecting such agents to arms control have been studied extensively in recent years. The reports of the United Nations Secretary-General, World Health Organization, and SIPRI have received worldwide attention. In addition, studies of this problem have been conducted by individual nations. The United States Government completed a thorough review of this subject in the Fall of 1969.
2. In considering the possibility of negotiating a new arms control agreement for chemical weapons, one of the areas which must be studied and understood is the relationship between the production of chemical agents for war and the production of chemicals for peaceful purposes by the commercial chemical industry. The chemical industry was in its infancy during World War I, when chemical warfare was first employed. Even so, in that conflict more than 100,000 tons of chemicals were produced for use as weapons, and 1,300,000 deaths and casualties were reported from the use of poison gas. Since World War I, many additional countries have developed a chemical industry, and the chemical production facilities of the more advanced countries have increased tremendously. In the 50 years since the end of World War I, for example, gross production of the worldwide chemical industry has increased in value from an estimated \$5 billion to \$150 billion, approximately a 30-fold increase. Between 1959 and 1969, world output of chemicals increased from an estimated \$60 billion to \$150 billion, and the magnitude of increase is continuing to accelerate.
3. Many of the chemicals which caused death and casualties in World War I are today produced in large quantities for industrial use. These chemicals might have military utility for states which may be unable, or might not desire, to manufacture or import modern nerve agents. For example, among the choking agents, which resulted in more than 80 per cent of the deaths by gas in World War I, phosgene is currently produced in a number of countries. Annual production figures are unknown, but in at least some of these countries, annual production is thought to exceed 100,000 tons.