

Bernard Lown's initiative to found IPPNW at the height of the East-West crisis.

Copy of my german lecture at the IPPNW event "40 years of IPPNW" on June 17, 2022, in Landsberg am Lech (Dr. Ulrich Gottstein, former Vice-President IPPNW)

translated, with the help of artificial intelligence

A grateful memory of Prof. Bernard LOWN, (7.6.1921-16.2.2021), the great humanist, inventor of the cardiac defibrillator, and the initiator and co-founder of IPPNW). Peace Nobel Prize 1985

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues.

Today we are celebrating "40 Years of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)" and with it 40 years of successfully warning against the outbreak of nuclear war. Thankfully, it was prevented, thanks in part to our efforts. Whether this will continue to be successful is an open question today, as both Putin and the Russian foreign minister have recently threatened to use nuclear weapons if the US and Europe supply modern heavy weapons systems to Ukraine. This would endanger the "existence of Russia," and then, according to Russian military regulations, the use of nuclear weapons would be permitted. In other words, Putin would be prepared to launch a nuclear first strike, to which US President Biden would respond with nuclear missiles. He, too, has already had American nuclear missiles activated, citing the need for deterrence. Unfortunately, the majority of the European population is now also acknowledging this latter fact without open protest. According to "Panorama," surveys in Germany have also shown that around 64% are in favor of keeping American nuclear bombs in Büchel and agree with the purchase of the modern F35 bombers needed to drop them. Six months ago, 57-70% still wanted the nuclear bombs to be withdrawn from Germany. The unfavorable course of the war in Ukraine is clearly having an effect.

Therefore, we must once again remember the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, as we are threatened with a similar fate. At that time, a single primitive uranium bomb with an explosive power of 13 kilotons killed more than 100,000 people within seconds or agonizingly within a few hours and completely destroyed both cities. All it took was a single aircraft with a single bomb! After 1945, the world believed that major wars would no longer be possible for all time. This list shows how wrong we were:

Every year since 1945, there have been 20-25 wars, even though nuclear powers have also been involved: Think of the Vietnam War 1946-54, the Korean War 1950-53, the Algerian War 1954-62, the invasion of Cuba's "Bay of Pigs" in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the Sino-Soviet border war in 1969, and the third Indo-Pakistani War in 1971. This was followed by the civil war in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1980, with the subsequent Soviet occupation until 1989. From 1980 to 1988, the Iraq-Iran War raged, logistically and financially supported by America, followed by the Falklands War between Argentina and Great Britain in 1982, the Nicaraguan War with US involvement from 1981

to 1990, and the second Gulf War from 1990 to 1991, which the US and its allies waged against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. From 1991, the "Yugoslav Wars" raged, followed in 1999 by the Kosovo War with NATO support against Serbia, the war in Macedonia in 2001, and the third Iraq War in 2003. In 1989 and 2021, the Taliban waged war against US and NATO support. And now Russia is at war with Ukraine!.

The hostility between the US and the Soviet Union after 1945 was accompanied by an arms race involving nuclear weapons. Nuclear bomb test explosions were continuously carried out in the Nevada desert and at the Soviet test site Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan. The fact that this always resulted in heavy radioactive fallout was kept secret from the population until radioactive strontium was detected in the teeth of small children.

Then the medical conscience awoke, including that of Bernard Lown. In 1960, he had invented and published his invention of electrodefibrillation to save lives in cases of fatal cardiac arrest, which made him well known among the international medical community. Until his great medical successes, as he told me and writes in his memoirs, he had been concerned about the risk of nuclear war, but had not had time to think about the fact that it is part of a doctor's responsibility to speak out. "We can now prevent acute cardiac death in our patients, but we are helpless and remain silent in the face of the madness of politicians producing atomic bombs en masse." He therefore decided to consult with colleagues and was able to invite a small group of medical colleagues from Harvard to his apartment. This led to the formation of a permanent group of 12 doctors and medical scientists in 1961. They founded Physicians for Social Responsibility. They decided to take a close look at the basics and consequences of nuclear weapons and then inform the international medical community and the general public with a series of articles in the media. A major article in the New England Journal of Medicine entitled "The Medical Consequences of Thermonuclear War" stated that after the dropping of a 1-megaton atomic bomb on a city such as Boston, millions would die or be seriously wounded and subsequently die from radiation damage, there would be no medical assistance, and so-called civil defense measures would be useless. The article caused a stir among the American population and then also among the governments in Washington and Moscow, as Pravda had also printed the article. The first important consequence was that in 1963, Presidents Kennedy and Khrushchev signed a treaty stipulating that nuclear weapons tests could no longer be conducted in the atmosphere, but only underground ("Limited Test Ban Treaty").

I cannot go into the further very important development of the PSR, but I would like to mention a few names of historical figures. In addition to the first PSR president, Bernard Lown, there were the co-founders Dr. Eric Chivian, Herbert Abrams, Vic Sidel, Sydney Alexander, Jack Geiger, and, in particular, the Australian pediatrician Dr. Helen Caldicott, who succeeded Bernard Lown as president. She was a charismatic personality who warned specifically about the risks of nuclear power plants and gave lectures in many American and European cities, including in the Federal Republic of Germany. Her influence was one of the reasons why the first and very important regional groups against nuclear energy were formed in West Germany, for example in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, and others, most of which became IPPNW regional groups after 1982.

I now come to the second part of my speech, which aims to show how Prof. Bernard Lown, at the height of the deadly political hostility between the US and the Soviet Union, achieved an apolitical medical cooperation between American and Soviet doctors that contributed significantly to détente.

What was the threat situation like at that time, especially for us in West Germany? In 1976/77, the Soviet Union had deployed 20 SS medium-range missiles in the GDR and Poland, prompting NATO, at Helmut Schmidt's request, to station American Pershing II missiles and cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads in the Federal Republic in 1979. These missiles could reach Moscow and other Russian cities in a short flight time. This "NATO Double-Track Decision" significantly escalated the crisis. At the same time, there were 25,000 nuclear weapons in the US and USSR, of which over 7,000 were American, most of them in the Federal Republic of Germany. Nuclear mines were deposited at the German-German border, and portable nuclear devices with three times the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb were stored in special ammunition depots. They were part of the "Bundeswehr defense concept," which remained in effect until 1986. At the time, there were fears of a massive Soviet tank attack in the so-called "Fulda Gap."

In this dangerous situation, Prof. Lown decided in 1979 that the medical profession had to intervene to help prevent the outbreak of nuclear war. He invited well-known professors and doctors from Harvard Medical School and PSR to his home for a consultation. After lengthy discussions, they agreed with Lown's opinion to contact Soviet doctors. Both he and the young cardiologist Dr. Jim Muller, who had lived in Moscow for two years as a student and clinical assistant, knew Russian doctors with whom they had worked on joint cardiology projects. These included the director of the Soviet Heart Center in Moscow, Prof. Evgeni Chazov, a member of the Academy of Sciences and consulting physician to the Soviet leadership in the Kremlin. He had also met Dimitri Venediktov, the deputy health minister, who spoke English well.

In February 1979, Lown wrote a long letter to Venediktov in which he described the madness of the continuing nuclear arms race and "mutual assured destruction." If reason does not prevail over madness, "we are heading inexorably toward mass suicide. How can we doctors remain silent about this?" Lown received no reply to his letter. After months of waiting, Lown wrote a letter with the same content to Chazov. He did not respond either. As luck would have it, some time later Lown met a visiting Soviet cardiologist in his laboratory who was a lecturer at the National Cardiology Center in Moscow: She immediately agreed to deliver a letter dated June 29, 1979, to Chazov personally. In the letter, Lown proposed a conference of Soviet, American, and Japanese doctors to discuss the medical consequences of the thermonuclear arms race. "to arouse public interest worldwide." Once again, Lown received no reply, but after four months, a response finally arrived, stating that he did not support Lown's proposal but was willing to engage in further discussion.

Lown and his colleagues Eric Chivian, Jim Muller, and Herbert Abrams were not discouraged. They wrote an open letter to US President Jimmy Carter and Soviet Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev. The letter was published in the New York Times in March 1980 and signed by 700 American doctors and scientists, including seven Nobel Prize winners, as well as Lown, Eric Chivian, Herbert Abrams, and Jack Geiger, who had drafted the text.

The open letter explained in five sections that a nuclear war, even a limited one, would lead to death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, that there would be no medical help for the people affected, that civil defense measures would be futile, and that nature and the environment would not recover from radioactive contamination. There would be no winners in a nuclear war. Hence the appeal: "Stop nuclear testing, ban all nuclear weapons, and begin dismantling them. We urge you to meet with us and discuss the consequences of nuclear war. We urgently request all doctors in America and the Soviet

Union to join this appeal."

At first, there was no response from the government, but then a telegram arrived in Boston stating that a letter from President Brezhnev himself was to be picked up by Soviet Ambassador Anatol Dobrynin. Brezhnev wrote that he also saw the dangers of nuclear war and therefore agreed with the appeal. The letter reads: "You may be assured that your humane and noble activities aimed at preventing nuclear war will meet with understanding and support in the Soviet Union. With best wishes, L. Brezhnev." The letter also included an invitation to talks.

The Boston Group decided that Lown should travel to the meeting. He was met at the airport by Chazov, and talks began on Lown's plan for a Soviet-American medical organization. Chazov was unimpressed by Brezhnev's letter, surprised and initially dismissive: "He did not want to be involved in an anti-nuclear organization under any circumstances" and was astonished at Lown's naivety (memo p. 87). After hours of discussion lasting into the night, they parted ways. Lown was very disappointed, but the next morning, Chazov unexpectedly announced his willingness to support the project. Allegedly, his daughter had strongly advised him to do so, but it is possible that Chazov had received approval from the Central Committee. From then on, Chazov became a staunch and committed supporter and soon a close and lifelong friend of Lown. He arranged a meeting with the president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Prof. Nikolai Blochin, and the head of the International Affairs Department at the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Neither man understood what an anti-nuclear doctors' organization could be good for, but Chazov's willingness to participate legitimized their efforts to continue.

The small group in Boston, which continued to meet regularly at Lown's apartment, now consisted of Lown, Professor Herbert Abrams, cardiologist Jim Muller, psychiatrist Eric Chivian, and, newly, cardiologist John Pastore and internist David Greer.

Motivated by Chazov's approval, they decided to expand the group to include well-known American physicians. In June 1980, they invited 32 people to a meeting at Harvard, including the dean of Lown's Harvard Medical School for Public Health, Dr. Howard Hiatt, and Professor Alex Leaf, head of the medical faculty at Massachusetts General Hospital. It was unanimously agreed that the objectives for the organization of an American-Soviet medical cooperation needed to be discussed and defined in greater detail, and that a small meeting should therefore be held somewhere in Europe in order to be able to hold a first international congress in early 1981.

It took place in December 1980 at the Richmond Hotel in Geneva, with three Soviet and three American partners. These were Academician Prof. Chazov, Director of the Moscow Heart Center, Prof. Kuzin, Director of the Surgery Center of the Academy of Sciences, and Prof. Leonid Ilyin, Head of the National Commission for Radiation Protection and Physics in the Ministry of Health. On the American side, Lown chose two close colleagues, Dr. Eric Chivian and Dr. Jim Muller, who spoke fluent Russian. The discussions that now began initially took place in a very tense atmosphere, which almost led to failure, as Jim Muller quoted information from American newspapers that contained anti-Soviet news. Lown was able to explain and appease, and the negotiations were able to continue in a friendly atmosphere. After just under three days, there was complete agreement on the establishment of an International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) with Lown and Chazov as co-presidents, as well as the planning and execution of a first international congress.

“This meeting in Geneva was a turning point, without which there would have been no IPPNW” (Lown Memo). It had been firmly agreed that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan should not be mentioned, because otherwise the Soviet participants would not have been able to agree.

The first cross-bloc congress took place in March 1981 at the Airlie House conference center in Virginia.

Lown and his closest associates, especially Jim Muller, Eric Chivian, and Herb Abrams, succeeded in inviting prominent doctors and scientists from the US, Japan, and the Soviet Union as speakers, as well as doctors from eight European countries and two from Canada and Australia as participants, including two German doctors. I had to decline due to commitments at the

German Congress of Internal Medicine. The theme of the Airlie House Congress was limited to discussing the medical consequences of a nuclear war and the composition of IPPNW. Should it consist of individual members or country sections? After heated discussions, it was decided that affiliates could expand their activities to include nuclear energy and other projects, but that the prevention of nuclear war must remain their primary task.

In October 1981, IPPNW invited committed physicians from various Western European countries and the Eastern Bloc to a preparatory meeting for a second international congress in Ascot, near London. The lecture and workshop program and the names of the desired speakers were discussed. Lown and Chazow presented their ideas for discussion. In a personal conversation, Lown convinced me of the medical duty to help prevent an impending nuclear war, in which there would be no medical assistance. I then decided to take the initiative to found a German IPPNW section. I also had a very friendly conversation with Chazow and realized that he would be an honest and committed supporter of IPPNW, although he would have to inform the Soviet government of all activities, which did not have to be a disadvantage.

A year later, Lown succeeded in winning over his friend, Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, to the idea of a public American-Soviet television conversation. After Dobrynin's endorsement and Jim Muller's personal intervention with the “Director of International Affairs of State Television,” as well as Chazow's influence in the Kremlin, the broadcast was able to take place in June 1982. The conversation between the six doctors, broadcast live on Soviet national television during prime time in the evening and seen and heard by hundreds of millions of Soviets, lasted 60 minutes. They explained and discussed the medical consequences of a nuclear war, which could also be triggered by a technical failure. Muller's remarks in Russian were the highlight. American and European journalists were allowed to record the event so that the program, which was broadcast two days later, could not be accused of censorship. The program became a media event with widespread coverage, including in Pravda. The film was often shown in the US by IPPNW and PSR, with Muller's words: “Look, we were allies against Hitler, we are going to have to become allies against the nuclear arms race.”

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, my speaking time is up. I could only recall a limited but very decisive section of the seemingly incredible founding history of IPPNW, which, according to Lown's motto: “Only those who see the invisible can do the impossible.” It began with the commitment of Prof. Lown, the inventor of life-saving defibrillation, and a group of outstanding American colleagues, and led to the recruitment of Prof. Evgeny Chazov and his Soviet colleagues.

Forty years have passed since the founding of IPPNW, and almost 40 years since IPPNW was awarded the UNESCO Peace Prize in 1984 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 for its services to peace and those of its co-presidents Lown and Chazow.

Finally, I would like to read the statement by the co-founders of IPPNW, my friends Eric Chivian, James Muller, and John Pastore.

I dedicate my speech today to them.

"It is true that without Bernard Lown's initiative, his eloquent commitment and successful persuasion of Chazow and, through him, President Brezhnev, that nuclear war must be prevented and that IPPNW could help, the founding of IPPNW and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize would not have been possible."

"It is true that without Bernard Lown's initiative, eloquent engagement, and successful persuasion of Chazow and, through him, USSR President Brezhnev—that nuclear war must be prevented and IPPNW could help—the founding of IPPNW and the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize would not have been possible."

And finally, a quote from our honorary member, Prof. Bernard Lown, who passed away last year, from a speech I moderated at an IPPNW benefit concert in Frankfurt in November 1987:

"The hour is late. We must not close our eyes, hope for the best, and remain passive. Hope without action is hopeless. Survival requires protest, not resignation."

Let us stick to that, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Ulrich Gottstein

Anlage:

Wars involving nuclear powers from 1946 to 2021

Vietnam War 1946-54

Korean War 1950-53

Algerian War 1954-62

Cuban Invasion (Bay of Pigs April 1961

Sino-Soviet border war 1971

Third Indo-Pakistani War

Civil war in Afghanistan 1979, followed by Soviet occupation until 1989

Falklands War 1982

Nicaragua War with US involvement 1981-90

Start of the Taliban war against the US and NATO countries in 1989