A CHALLENGE TO CIVILIZATION

By Dr. NIELS BOHR
COPENHAGEN

The advance of physical science which has made it possible to release vast amounts of energy through atomic disintegration has initiated a veritable revolution of human resources, presenting civilization with a most serious challenge. Man's increasing mastery of the forces of nature, which has provided ever richer possibilities for the growth of culture, may indeed threaten to upset the balance vital for the thriving of organized communities, unless human society can adjust itself to the exigencies of the situation. The great technical developments of the last century already deeply affected the social structure of every country but, evidently, we have now reached a stage which calls for a new approach to the whole problem of international relationship.

The formidable means of destruction which have come within reach of man will obviously constitute a mortal menace to civilization unless, in due time, universal agreement can be obtained about appropriate measures to prevent any unwarranted use of the new energy sources. An agreement to this purpose will surely demand the abolition of barriers hitherto considered necessary to protect national interests but now standing in the way of common safety against unprecedented dangers. In fact, only international control of every undertaking which might constitute a danger to world security will in future permit any nation to strive for prosperity and cultural development without constant fear of disaster.

Whatever renunciations as regards customary prerogatives such regulation will involve, it should be clear to all that, in contrast to other issues where
Science 102 (2650), 363-386.