

ERICE 1983

Reagan, Teller, Wood Intervene for Mankind

At a conference held in Erice, Italy, Aug. 20-23, 1983 titled, "Technological Bases for Peace" Dr. Edward Teller, Dr. Lowell Wood, and President Ronald Reagan forcefully brought the concept of the SDI program to the participants, including the Soviets. The majority of scientists attending the event were by no means advocates of the SDI. But everything changed when President Reagan sent a telegram to the conference, which gave Teller and Wood the context in which to intervene and transform the gathering.

President Reagan wrote, "As this annual meeting at Ettore Majorana commences, I extend my encouragement to the distinguished scientists from many nations who have come together to discuss problems connected with the dangers of nuclear conflict and the ways in which such conflict can be avoided.

"War is the scourge of nations, and nuclear war would be the scourge of mankind. The citizens of the world face no more urgent challenge than the prevention of war. As scientists and teachers, you hold a special responsibility to use your wisdom and influence to help develop and use the knowledge that will lead to an age of true security against the threat of nuclear war.

"For nearly four decades, the increasingly destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons have domi-

nated issues of national security. But in the past year we have seen the possibility that we may be able to change that increasingly unstable situation.

"First, we are engaged in very serious negotiations with the Soviet Union on the means of achieving substantial, equitable, and verifiable reductions in our nuclear arsenals and on measures to build the mutual confidence and understanding necessary to reduce the risk of nuclear war.

"Second, if we succeed in applying the fruits of scientific and technical advances to develop a new generation of defensive systems, we may be able, at long last, to make nuclear war impossible.

"Our hope for the future is not just to halt the growth and the spread of nuclear arsenals, but to reverse such trends. We owe that legacy to the children of the world, and I commend your continuing effort to find realistic ways to make it possible."

The impact of Reagan's message resulted in an unexpected breakthrough, given that Soviet President Yuri Andropov had already categorically rejected Reagan's proposal. A commission of 100 U.S. and Soviet scientists was constituted to investigate the feasibility of beam-weapon defense, and to conduct a computer analysis of the effects of nuclear war. Italian newspapers described the Soviet agreement to participate in the commission as "a sudden change in the attitude of the Soviet delegation." It was, indeed the first public agreement by any Soviet officials (the Soviet delegation was led by Academician E.P. Velikhov, the leading Soviet scientist in the field of particle beam technology) to discuss beam weapons with the United States.