

**Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs
and the British Pugwash Group**

ROTBLAT CENTENARY CELEBRATION

The Royal Society, Wednesday 10 December 2008

**Progressing the nuclear disarmament agenda
Policy, diplomacy and science**

Sir Martin Rees

President, Royal Society

Welcoming Comments

I'm delighted that Pugwash has chosen to hold this meeting here at the Royal Society. Its topic is, of course, timely as well as important -- and a fitting way to commemorate Jo Rotblat.

Jo Rotblat helped to make the first atomic bomb. But for decades thereafter, he campaigned to control the powers he'd helped unleash. Until the last few months of his long life -- he died less than four years ago -- he pursued this aim with the dynamism of a man half his age, inspiring others to join the cause. It was a privilege to have known him and I'll say a few words about his life.

Jo was born in Poland in 1908. His family suffered great hardship in World War 1. He was exceptionally intelligent and determined, and managed to become a respected nuclear physicist. After the Nazi invasion of Poland, he came as a refugee to England to work with James Chadwick in Liverpool -- his wife became a victim of the Nazis.

He then went with Chadwick to work on the Manhattan Project. But in his mind there was only one justification for the bomb project: to ensure that Hitler didn't get one first and hold us to ransom. As soon as this ceased to be a credible risk, Jo left Los Alamos -- the only scientist to do so.

He returned to England; he became a professor of medical physics, an expert on the effects of radiation; and a compelling and outspoken campaigner.

In 1954, Jo met Bertrand Russell, and encouraged him to prepare a manifesto stressing the extreme gravity of the nuclear peril. Jo got Einstein to sign too -- it was Einstein's last public act: he died a week later. This 'Einstein-Russell manifesto' was then signed by ten other eminent scientists, all Nobel Prize winners. (Jo was diffident about adding his own signature, but Russell urged he should, as he might one day earn a Nobel himself.) The authors claimed to be speaking on this occasion not as members of this or that nation, continent or creed, but as human beings, members of the species Man, whose continued

existence is in doubt". This manifesto led to the initiation of the Pugwash Conferences; in the decades since, there have been about 300 meetings; right until his death, Jo attended almost all of them.

Particularly during the 1960s, the Pugwash Conferences offered crucial 'back door' contact between scientists from the US and the Soviet Union -- these contacts eased the path for the partial test ban treaty of 1963, and the later ABM treaty.

When the achievements of these Conferences were recognised by the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize, half the award went to the Pugwash organisation, and half to Jo Rotblat personally -- as their 'prime mover' and untiring inspiration.

Jo's crusade was to rid the world completely of nuclear weapons. This view was widely derided as woolly idealism. But it gained broader 'establishment' support over the years. The 1997 Canberra Commission, which involved Robert McNamara and other establishment figures', put forward step-by-step proposals for moving towards eliminating nuclear weapons completely. Its report stated that "The proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained in perpetuity and never used -- accidentally or by decision -- defies credibility". And two years ago the US gang of 4 -- Shutz, Nunn, Perry and Kissinger -- espoused a similar cause. And they were followed by a UK group.

Jo Rotblat lived long enough to gain public recognition for his exceptional achievements. (He was elected FRS at the age of 85 -- shamefully late -- and was active in the Society's affairs throughout his last decade of life). He lived long enough to see his vision become a mainstream goal. But of course we are far from its achievement. That's why this meeting is so timely, We owe it to Jo's memory to persevere with the nuclear disarmament agenda, striving -- with idealism but without illusions -- for an eventual nuclear-free world.