

... war has been completely spoilt. It is all the fault of Democracy and Science.
WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, 1930

I quoted this in my Editorial in December 1994, as I hoped a non-lethal peacegas would inhibit all terrorist activities, which had become so frequent during the last decades of the 20th century. If such a gas existed, with the properties of a powerful anaesthetic, it would allow the reversible immobilisation of an enemy, civil or foreign, for a short period and permit the removal of his weaponry. It would have been an ideal agent during the conflicts in Serbia, Bosnia and East Timor.

A peacegas would be more effective than a water cannon, less dangerous than rubber bullets or tear gas, it could be used from a small hand spray against a single antagonist or dispersed from a helicopter against large crowds. Is this another idea from science fiction, or just one of the ultra secret, non-lethal weapons at present being investigated by the Pentagon? [See: S.Aftergood "The soft-kill fallacy" *Bull. Atomic Sci.* 1994, 50 (5), p. 40] In his article, the author gave a 'laundry list', itemising infra-sound, laser weapons, supercaustics, biological agents, acoustic beam weapons, combustion inhibitors, and mini-nuclear weapons, all apparently being researched—but not peacegas.

The idea of a peacegas is by no means new and was first suggested by H.G. Wells in his book *The Shape of Things to come*, published in 1933. He described the collapse of world economy, widespread destruction and universal poverty, followed by encouraging signs of a revival. Wells wrote: "This was organised by the 'Air Police'. It had been equipped with a new type of gas bomb, releasing a gas called *Pacifin*, which rendered the victim insensible for about thirty-six hours and was said to have no further detrimental effect."

Might this be the third accurate forecast by H.G. Wells? In 1903, in his short story *The Land Ironclads* he forecast modern tank warfare. In his book *The World set free* he correctly anticipated in 1914 an 'atom bomb' —an expression he then coined— and the many terrible consequences of its use. So far, apparently no Director of Research of a multi-national chemical enterprise has started to synthesise a rapidly acting, powerful new anaesthetic, a peacegas, which would bring him and his company great renown and great profits.

Would such a peacegas violate the Chemical Weapons Convention? [See B.H. Rosenberg, *Bull. Atomic Sci.* 1994, 50 (5), p. 44] Under this Convention chemical agents can be developed for 'law' enforcement, including domestic riot control. But a new definition of 'law' is needed, just as much as the invention of a peacegas.