

THE ANSWER

BY GEORGE O. SMITH

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Robert Hohmann smiled superciliously at the man before him. "You have nerve," he said. It might have been a compliment excepting that the tone of the words was definitely sarcastic. "You have the colossal effrontery to come here before me and tell me what I can do and what I cannot do."

Greg Hammond said, quietly, "Shall I repeat it? You are not to attempt the construction of the plutonium producing uranium pile."

"Or else—what?" sneered Hohmann.

"The United Nations makes no threats," said Greg. "We are not a military organization. We are the voice of the people—including yours, Hohmann. We merely set forth that which the people desire, and remind them of it. If someone—you in this case—goes against the will of the people, it will be for the people to decide his fate."

"You do not understand," said Hohmann, "nor can I possibly penetrate your illogic reasoning. The person is secondary to the State. Therefore it is for the State to—"

"The State is the result of the people," returned the United Nations representative. "Were it not for the people, there could be no State."

"Were it not for the State," thundered Hohmann in a ringing voice, "people could not exist in the luxury they have. Man would still be pitted against man and brother against brother. The State combines them into an insoluble unit."

"The United Nations combines all States into an insoluble unit," replied Hammond.

"Which believes itself capable of telling me what I can and cannot do!"

"You, as dictator, find little trouble in telling your subjects just how and what to do. You back up your demands with threats of death."

Hohmann smiled contentedly. "So, my bright young friend, you must admit that your United Nations organization is no different than Robert Hohmann, dictator. I issue orders which may conflict with the desires of some of my people. You issue orders which

occasionally conflict with some of the desires of your States. Mine in this case."

"We issue orders only when the desires of a State are directed against the common cause," said Hammond.

"A common cause decided by people other than those who will benefit from my act," snapped Hohmann.

"This gets us nowhere," said Hammond with an air of finality. "You are, therefore, directed to cease in your plan to construct the plutonium producing uranium pile."

"The trouble with democratic organizations," said Hohmann sourly, "is that they will go to any lengths to preserve their people. Even to the point of permitting, under democratic principle, the existence of an organization directed against the democracy itself. This, they claim, shows the true strength of democracy, since if it stands even when permitting an outfit to bore from within against it, it is therefore strong. A single man is worth more than the seat of government! Ha! Well, we shall start our uranium pile, and we shall produce plutonium. And by the time your democratic organization gets through arguing, voting, and deciding what to do about us—then preparing for it—and finally acting, we can and will be unbeatable. As for you, who have the temerity to come here with your toothless demand, you shall be hostage, a worker willing or unwilling in the initial plutonium separation plant!" Hohmann turned to the guards and said: "Remove him!"

Greg Hammond was led from the large hall amid the jeers of Hohmann's cohorts. As he left, a discussion started upon the construction of the illegal uranium pile.

Hammond went quietly. He knew that he had the backing of the world, and the world would not let him down. He was convinced that Hohmann's remark was right. Greg Hammond was more valuable than government itself—and government would not let him die.

Hohmann was no fool. The dictator knew that he was bucking the combined resources of the world, and it worried him somewhat, even though he put up a brave front and daily told his people that the United Nations would not act against him.

The espionage that went on reported that little was being done. Hohmann trebled the external espionage, and multiplied the internal agencies tenfold. He was taking no chances. Materials shipped into his country were followed to the addressee, who was then investigated. Every mail carrier and delivery boy was a member of Hohmann's Intelligence Group. Shipments of manufactured articles were stopped or diverted; Hohmann knew that the plating on a cigar lighter might contain fissionable material.

But there were no moves on the part of the United Nations that Hohmann's Intelligence Group could detect.

And it was the lack of action—even lack of anything other than denunciation—that worried him into calling a Security Meeting.

His hall filled to overflowing with higher-ups, Robert Hohmann faced them and said:

"We are here because of a singular lack of activity on the part of those who have reason to fear us. Reprisals may come in many ways, some of them must be new and terrible, even though they are now undetectable. The problem of the pushbutton war is known to

all—why drop bombs when bombs may be shipped in among the incoming merchandise, assembled in a tall tower, and touched off by radio. We, therefore, must locate the manner of the reprisals."

Worried faces nodded.

"This is no war of nerves," thundered Hohmann. "It is possible to cause mental confusion in someone by merely ignoring his overt act—he eventually spends more time worrying about what you intend to do about it than he does in preparation. This will not work. Admittedly we have multiplied our Intelligence Group in an effort along this same reasoning. The lack of action on the part of the United Nations has caused some concern. But we are not an individual, and we can divert a carefully calculated number of workers to investigate while the rest of us can prepare for war. The problem, again I must admit, has achieved a rather overrated proportion, hence this meeting."

Professor Haldrick looked up at Hohmann and said, quietly, "In other words, Führer Hohmann, even though you state that the so-called war of nerves cannot succeed, we are meeting to solve that very problem?"

Hohmann hissed at Haldrick and snarled for the professor to be quiet.

"Now," said Hohmann, "what has been occurring lately that might possibly be construed as being out of the line of ordinary happenings?"

General Friedrice shrugged. "I must admit that the mail has increased markedly since Hammond's incarceration. Letters pour

in from all over the world to this government bureau and that government agency. They plead, they cajole, and they call names."

"I can imagine your fear at being called names," laughed Hohmann.

"Indeed, we are cringing abjectly," replied General Friedrice, who would have had to reduce his figure by at least seventy pounds before he could possibly cringe without hurting himself. "We find ourselves in a rather strange circumstance, however. These letters are, of course, saved. This makes for too much paper work."

"We can take care of that," said Hohmann idly.

"I know. But that is the only thing I know of," said Friedrice.

"Enough," said Hohmann. "This is another example of the confusion-method. Our enemies hope to worry us by doing nothing—which is expected to make us fear something ultra-secret. Well, to a certain extent they have worried us. Not to any dangerous point, however, for we are too strong to be defeated by a mental condition. This overbearing arrival of letters is another thing. All letters must be opened and read, for some of them do contain much valuable information. They must all be saved and filed, for unless we have previous letters from some correspondent, we cannot know by comparison, whether a future letter containing information is false or true. A letter giving information that comes from a known correspondent who is helpful in the past will be treated with more respect than the same information coming from someone who has written reams of misdirection, falsity, and ranting notes depicting dire results if we do not release Hammond and behave ourselves."

Hohmann shrugged.

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