

Secret

Oppenheimer

May 16, 1945

Dear Oppenheimer:

I am writing to explain why I wanted to see you some time ago when I telephoned to you. At that time there were indications that several important members of the Cabinet are not adequately informed of the implications which our work has for the years immediately following this war. Any reasonable analysis of the situation which will face us tends to demonstrate the necessity and urgency ~~of~~ formulating a policy in this respect at the level of the Cabinet.

I have attempted to write such an analysis and since I found that we would be in a position to place such an analysis into the hands of Roosevelt, I wanted to talk this matter over with you before taking any such step. I am inclosing the text which I had prepared and I would be glad if you could read through it. No doubt it could be improved upon.

After Roosevelt died there seemed to be no urgency for meeting with you, but I still am anxious to discuss these things with you if an opportunity arises.

I am rather disturbed by the fact that the technical development of the production of 49 is at least one year behind schedule as far as the development of modern methods is concerned and that if a race in the production of atomic bombs should become unavoidable, the prospects of this country cannot be expected to be good. In view of this situation and in the absence of a clear cut policy directed at taking specific steps in order to avoid such an armament race, I doubt whether it is wise to show our hand by using atomic bombs against Japan. I wonder what men like

Stimson and Wallace would think of this if they were fully advised of the turn which the technical development can be expected to take within a few years.

The arguments which I have so far heard in favor of using these bombs now were not strong enough to dispel my doubts. I expect that you who have been so strenuously working at the site on getting these devices ready will naturally lean towards wanting that they should be used, and I am anxious to learn your views on the subject.

I hope there will be some opportunity to see you in the not too distant future. This letter is not stamped secret but perhaps you would like to destroy it after you have read it.

Very sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

Metallurgical Laboratory

July 10, 1945

Dr. F. Oppenheimer
Box 1633
Los Alamos, N.M.

Dear Oppenheimer,

A petition has been circulating at Chicago and I have asked that a copy be submitted to you for your information. In writing you I hardly need to emphasize that such a petition does not represent the most effective action that can be taken in order to influence the course of events. But I have no doubt in my own mind that from a point of view of the standing of the scientists in the eyes of the general public one or two years from now it is a good thing that a minority of scientists should have gone on record in favor of giving greater weight to moral arguments and should have exercised their right given to them by the Constitution to petition the President.

With kind regards,

Very sincerely yours,

1155 East 57th Street
Chicago 37, Illinois

May 19, 1948

Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer
Institute for Advanced Study
Princeton, New Jersey

Dear Oppenheimer:

When I last visited New York I had dinner with Jack and Leo Hausman and two of his friends. Jack Hausman and his brother were wondering if something useful could be accomplished by applying scientific methods of investigation to the problem of racial discrimination and race relations. I had the impression that if something could be done along that line, they would be inclined to give it their financial support. I was very favorably impressed by their seriousness and intelligence.

An article which appeared recently in the New York Times supplement about you and the Institute, and in particular a paragraph in that article saying that the Institute is interested in taking up problems to which scientific methods have not been applied in the past, attracted their attention, and they asked me whether I thought that the Institute might be interested in this problem, and might do something about it. From the little I know about the operation of the Institute before you became its director I would be inclined to say that the kind of planning which such a research involves would not fit very well into the general mode of operation of the Institute. However, I know practically nothing about what your own ideas are about the operation of the Institute in the future, and therefore I told Jack Hausman that

Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer

-2-

May 19, 1948

I am unable even to guess what your reaction would be, but that I would write you so that you can think about it and give me your reaction next time I am passing through Princeton. Clearly, there is no hurry about this matter, but I will try to see you on my next trip (date not set so far) so that if it appears desirable I may arrange for you to see the Hausmans.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

LS:am

THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

*copy made 10/20/75
original in GWS folder*

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

November 9, 1950

Dear Szilard:

The luncheon with Hutchins came off as expected. Unfortunately, the other problem, which brought us together, did take most of the time; and the discussion of your proposals and what might be done about them was far too rushed.

Hutchins told me of the desire of the man called McDormell to make money available in the interests of a study of means of maintaining peace. To me this did not seem to be an important thing; but Hutchins, I believe, was rather eager to find some way of using this money. I suggested quite tentatively that a preliminary and non-committal discussion of what approach might be useful, and where the elements of hope lay, could well be held. Hutchins asked me whether we could hold such a meeting in Princeton; and I said that I supposed so, and that the Institute would be glad to act as host if that seemed appropriate. Hutchins asked me whether I would issue the invitations and serve as chairman. To the first question, I gave a tentative yes, and to the second, a pretty definite no.

We talked a little bit about people; and I mentioned one or two, and indicated my skepticism of my own ability to cover the field. As a matter of fact, my suggestions would probably not appeal to you. I think that Kennan and Lewis Douglas, who are both connected with the Institute, and who are both temporarily at least not in the government service, could be helpful.

All this seemed right to me. What worries me is that I believe that I detected an eagerness on the part of Hutchins to dump the whole matter in my lap. This impression was confirmed by a note yesterday saying merely that McDonnell was enthusiastic and desirous of giving us (?) money. What worries me now is this. As you know, I have had doubts, definitely not negative convictions, but real doubts-about the wisdom of your two-team approach. I also have been aware of the very great difficulty of getting responsible and informed people to devote their energies to an unofficial and difficult study of this kind. I do not feel capable of handling this alone. My impression is that Hutchins does not really want to have much to do with it.

The reason I write to you is that I fear that under these circumstances our pleasant talk will not have any real issue, and that far from encouraging and enlisting Hutchins, it may only have served to take him off a hook that he did not want to be on. Will you have an opportunity to explore this with him? It is not easy to do by letter. Will you let me know what your own views of the outcome of our discussion really were? You need not be assured again of my interest and my willingness to take time and trouble; but there are things that are beyond me, and to take the principal or central responsibility for this undertaking is one of them.

With every good wish,

Robert Oppenheimer

Robert Oppenheimer

Dr. Leo Szilard
1155 E. 57th St.
Chicago 37, Illinois

THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

22 February 1957

Dear Mrs. Adams:

Thank you for your letter of February 20th. I just called Mrs. Levy. She will be glad to see you when you come, and suggests that you call her. Her telephone number is ORegon 9-3620. Her husband has just had an emergency appendectomy, and there is some chance that they will be off on a holiday. In that case, I think it would be worth coming back later, unless the problem is otherwise solved. I did not ask her to commit herself, but she sounded quite interested.

Jim Perkins is a fine idea; but I have always found that the foundations--specially those with a long history--have devised absolutely foolproof systems against ever doing anything sensible. There is no harm in trying.

I shall be back from California at the time of your visit; will gladly help; and would look forward very much to seeing you if that works out.

Most cordially,

Robert Oppenheimer

Mrs. Ruth Adams
Assistant Editor
Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists
5734 University Avenue
Chicago 37, Illinois

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