

History

Compton
not sent

Aide Memoir

October 30, 1942

L. Szilard

The following is a record of some of the conversations which I had with A. H. Compton in the course of this week. This record is prepared from memory and has the purpose of clarifying my relationship with the Metallurgical Laboratory. It is meant to explain my reasons for changing this relationship and to define the basis upon which a new relationship can be built.

Monday, October 26th, Compton asked to see me. I assumed that the purpose of the interview was to discuss the organization of the engineering work since I shortly before received a memorandum from him which dealt with this subject. I told Compton that it was my understanding that Lewis from M. I. T. had been asked by him to take charge of the engineering work and that accordingly I felt that the decision of this subject might be postponed until there was a chance to see what ideas Lewis had on the subject but that I could state right away in what way I felt I could be most useful in connection with the development of the bismuth cooled power unit. This was what I proposed:

Creutz's present group should be used both for the technological work both on the bismuth cooled and water cooled power units and requests for specific work should come to him from me and from Wigner. Mr. Foote should be added to this group so that metallurgical experiments on bismuth cooling could be performed. In addition to this I wanted to have the help of from one to three engineers and two draftsmen and I proposed that I would take charge of the work of these men and prepare designs following step by step the technological work on the bismuth cooled power unit. I further proposed to keep Mr. Moore and Mr. Lewis or any of the other engineers informed of the development of these designs. This would serve the purpose that if they are able to improve on these designs or move faster towards a process design, they should be able to go ahead

and perhaps produce a finished design before I am ready to submit my own design. Nevertheless my own aim would be to end up with a process design somewhat more detailed than the Moore-Leverett design of the helium cooled unit.

Mr. Compton replied that in his opinion this arrangement would not work and that my presence in the laboratory would make it very difficult for him to organize the collaboration of the physicists with the engineers and other matters in the laboratory. He therefore asked me to leave Chicago and perhaps to go to Columbia and work there in loose connection with the Chicago laboratory. He proposed that upon the expiration of my present contract with the University of Chicago January 1, 1943 another contract would be made with me that would secure me an adequate salary. Finally, he asked me to arrange matters so as to leave the Metallurgical Laboratory within 48 hours so as to make it easier for him to reorganize the technological division and make other corresponding changes in the organization.

My reply was that my work if carried out in New York could be of very limited value only and whatever salary I received would have to be considered as a sort of a pension. Since this pension would then be paid to me for services which I had rendered in the past it would seem more logical that I should apply for a patent for the inventions which I made and which I submitted to the government before I was on the O. S. R. D. payroll and that in place of a pension I should receive a royalty from the government in consideration of the use of the inventions ^{described} designed in the proposed patent applications.

Wednesday, October 28th I saw Compton again and he proposed to let me have an independent organization for developing the bismuth cooled power unit which would be set up at Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. He said he was considering to let me have Creutz and Foote and perhaps others from the Metallurgical Laboratory and I could take on engineers and draftsmen and work on a design for the bismuth cooled power unit. I would remain on the Technical Committee and keep in general contact with various groups within the Metal-

lurgical Laboratory. He was not certain whether work on the bismuth cooled power unit would be carried on at all within the Metallurgical Laboratory.

My reply was that there are two sets of reasons why I could not accept this proposal: The first and minor set of reasons is the following: There can be put forward various reasons for my going into "exile" in the manner which he proposed, but I am unable to accept as valid any of these reasons which were put forward and which were tentatively ^{mentioned by way of gossip in the laboratory} as possible reasons for the proposed exile by various members of our project. If my presence in the Chicago laboratory caused trouble or lead to friction such trouble or friction would ^{continue} still arise since I would still take part in the committee meetings where controversial issues are discussed.

The second and major set of reasons for not accepting the proposal is the following: I understand that at various times my views prevailed on organizational question which were connected with our work and that these views were incompatible ^{with} to the way in which Compton wanted to see the work organized.

One specific example for this was the organization of the Technological Division. The creation of this division was originally proposed by me in the research committee composed of Allison, Fermi, Wigner, and myself. Compton was in agreement with the necessity of setting up such a division, but he had in mind to put Wollan in charge. For some reason or other Compton put me in charge of the Technological Division but the work of this division was then not given full support and the men taken away from this division were not replaced.

Another specific example was the unfavorable effect of my activities in the laboratory upon the functioning of an executive committee which was appointed by Compton and which was composed of Allison, Doan, Fermi, and Moore. I knew nothing of the existence of such a committee though I heard that it was planned to have monthly meetings between representatives of our laboratory, Stone-Webster, DuPont, and the Army, and that the above-mentioned members of our laboratory were designated to act as representatives of our laboratory.