

MEMORANDUM ON BILL S 1720
by Leo Szilard

January 8, 1946

As far as the National Science Foundation is concerned, the situation in Washington seems to be such that any reasonable proposal, if supported by the scientists, will receive favorable consideration. It also appears that within the next few weeks the fate of the Foundation may be decided. How to allocate money for science and research is of course a difficult question; and undoubtedly a smaller or larger part of this money will be wasted under any scheme of allocation. It would be well worth spending a few percent of the total appropriation for good administration of the science foundation and particularly for a wise allocation of the funds which will be made available.

At the out-set we are faced with a dilemma: if we have part time boards, particularly a part-time board on which members serve for a long period of time, we will have the "brass hats" of science sitting on the board. On the other hand, if we have a full-time board on which the members serve for a long period of time, or if we give too much influence to permanent employees of the Foundation, we will not get men who are themselves actively engaged in scientific work and therefore we will not get men who know what science is about.

If we wish to have the collaboration of men who are actively engaged in scientific work in their own field on a full-time basis, we cannot ask them to serve longer than for one year, since for most of them it would be difficult to obtain a leave of absence from their own institution for a longer period of time now would they remain scientists if they stayed away for long. It would be possible, however, to utilize such men by letting them serve for three years, two years part-time, the third year full-time.

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A Bill, S 1720, representing the new form of the Kilgore Bill, was introduced recently by Kilgore, Fullbright, Saltonstal and Johnson of Colorado. It would seem that if this were amended as set out below, it would be possible to have men who are actively engaged in scientific work take the responsibility for allocating the funds for research work in their own fields. On the other hand, the way the Bill is written at present, the men who are actively engaged in research work will have very little influence and will not feel very much responsibility for the general operation of the National Science Foundation.

As it stands at present the Bill provides for at least eight and at most eleven divisions, under an administrator who appoints the directors of these divisions. Each division has a part-time board, the members of which serve for three years. The part-time boards are appointed by the administrator, with the approval of the chairmen of all of these boards and of nine additional men-- "the board" appointed by the President. Since all board members serve only for three years on a part-time basis, the influence of the administrator and the divisional directors appointed by him will be very great and the influence of the scientists will be very small.

The influence of the men who are actively engaged in scientific work could be secured by prescribing in the Bill something of the following sort:

Each of the following divisions for (1) mathematical and physical sciences, (2) biological sciences (3) social sciences (4) health and medical sciences (5) engineering and technology, shall have a board of six members who, apart from a transition period, will serve for three years, i.e., each of them will serve for two years on a part-time basis and a third year on a full-time basis.

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The members serving on a full-time basis will reside in Washington and at any time ten such members will serve their full time year.

The Bill could provide that these ten men from the overall Board of the Foundation in place of "the Board" of nine part-time men now provided for by the Bill. Subcommittees of the Board could serve as advisory boards to the division of scientific personnel and education and also to the division of publications and information, but not to the division of national defense. The advisory board to the division of national defense could remain unchanged as specified in the present version of the Bill, since the above considerations which induced us to suggest changes do not apply to it.

The members of the divisional boards would be appointed by the President which means that after a transitional period the President would have to appoint each year ten new members to the boards of the National Science Foundation.

It is my understanding that while in general the Bureau of the Budget would have objections to a large number of presidential appointments being involved, in this special case, since the term of appointment is only for three years and since the men appointed are scientists, whose appointments have hardly any political implications, such objections as the Bureau of the Budget might have, could presumably be overcome.

Szilard

September 30, 1946

To: L. Hurwicz, E.P. Wigner, J. von Neumann, H. Bethe, and E. A. Shils.

This is to advise you that a second version of "Market Economy Free From Trade Cycles" is now being prepared and will be mailed out to you in due course of time. The first version has mistakenly stated that the Central Bank may purchase red dollars and distribute these red dollars by means of a national lottery among the population. According to the second version, while the Central Bank may purchase red dollars, it may not distribute them but will hold them and sell them later when the demand for loans increases. This is somewhat similar to the open market operation of the Federal Reserve Bank, except that its effect is rather different in the two-currency system from its effect in the conventional system.

Sorry to bother you with this, but I did not want to wait with this correction until the second version is ready for mailing.

Sincerely,



Leo Szilard