

Memorandum of meeting, October 17, 1945, Miscellaneous
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17 October 1945

Dr. Oppenheimer, Dr. Fermi, Mr. Harrison, General Groves, General Royall, and Lt. Arneson met with Secretary Patterson from 2:30 to 3:30 P.M. to discuss the growing disaffection of the scientists to the Johnson-May bill and to consider means of securing their support. Dr. Oppenheimer stated that he thought the differences in viewpoint among the scientists were not major. He very much preferred to talk with Szilard, Anderson, and Urey before they testified on Thursday to try to get some basic agreement on the bill rather than run the risk of a public wrangle with them at the Hearing.

Secretary Patterson pointed out that those scientists who are opposed to the bill did not realize that by delaying action and raising all sorts of objections to the present bill they may very well end up with a much more stringent measure than is now before the Committee. The temper of Congress and of the country is in the direction of even more controls and the preservation of the so-called "secrets". As to the argument that the international control situation should be considered first, Secretary Patterson pointed out that this was an impossibility, that domestic control was imperative before we would be in a position to consider the international questions involved. He pointed out further that the President and the Secretary of State would be more alive to the need for international arrangements than Congress.

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Dr. Fermi expressed concern about the muzzling of private research which he saw inherent in the bill in its present form. To this point Gen. Royall replied that he thought there were adequate safeguards now in the bill to prevent the Commission from interfering with private fundamental research which did not constitute a national hazard, but that certain clarifying amendments which would put the matter more positively had been drawn up and would be presented to the Committee. These amendments were adapted from the suggestions made by Dr. Dubridge and his associates and would be presented to the Committee by Gen. Royall on Friday when it meets in executive session. In so doing, Gen. Royall said he would tell the Committee that these amendments were very much wanted by the scientists, that they would go a long way toward getting the support of the scientists, and that the War Department had no objection to them.

It was agreed that Dr. Oppenheimer should talk to the scientists who planned to testify against the bill and try to head off a public dispute. It was felt by all present that the proposed amendment would help in doing this and that Dr. Oppenheimer should discuss these amendments with them. If it were not possible to secure a relatively united front with these scientists, Secretary Patterson felt that Dr. Oppenheimer should be prepared to testify on Thursday.

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The meeting then adjourned to Mr. Harrison's office where the amendments were considered in detail. It was generally agreed that the amendments were a major improvement in the bill and would help meet the more reasonable objections that had been raised by the scientists.