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Notes of a Meeting on the Smyth Report in the Office of the
Secretary of War 11:30 A.M. to 1:15 P.M., 2 August 1945.

Present: The Secretary of War
Mr. Harvey H. Bundy
Dr. James B. Conant
Sir James Chadwick
Major General Leslie R. Groves
Mr. George L. Harrison
Mr. Roger Makins
Dr. Richard C. Tolman

Col. W. H. Kyle, Recorder.

The Secretary of War stated that General Groves' report had produced a tremendous effect on the President and the Secretary of State at Potsdam. Mr. Stimson had read it aloud to them and to the Prime Minister and Lord Cherwell the following day. President Truman told Secretary Stimson that the report had really pepped him up.

The Secretary said that this meeting was called to hear the views of those present concerning the Smyth report and added that he had an idea of the rules under which it was drafted but would like to hear the pros and cons as to the publication.

Dr. Conant stated that the Smyth document had been close to his heart for a long time and he wanted it released at the proper time for two reasons: (1) the uniqueness of the subject matter, and (2) in order to accomplish the project, it had been necessary to mobilize a great number of scientists, manufacturers, contractors, bomb and fuze experts, and a large number of companies, and there would necessarily be a tremendous amount of information getting out to the public.

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Dr. Conant stated that he had been listening to various people talking about the project and had to go to the country to get away from it; rumors were building to a crisis and the situation was explosive.

Dr. Conant mentioned radar as a somewhat similar case. There was a tendency for information to leak about radar and a series of publicity articles disclosing too much information had been released. He explained that if we gave out only these scientific data in addition to the Secretary's release he believed that we could hold the fort. He added further that if the picture were revealed in any less degree, there would be greater danger to security. Dr. Conant was of the opinion that if the Smyth document were released the contractors and the newspapers would be satisfied, but if it were not released a serious situation might develop.

Secretary Stimson stated that he had heard through General Groves how the rules for the Smyth document had been formulated and asked Dr. Chadwick how he felt about them.

Dr. Chadwick stated that it was difficult to understand our problems in this country. In England, even with the same number of people interested, Dr. Chadwick said "We would not do it," and then asked: "Where should we draw the line?" Mr. Stimson commented that when General Groves' conservatism broke he had to take notice.

Dr. Chadwick stated that the situation would vary in different countries. He compared the Smyth document to clues in a detective story and stated that with the various clues given in the document a great

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deal would be deduced and that this would give away something to the other countries.

Dr. Conant then asked: "How much are we going to give Russia for example?" Dr. Chadwick's reply was "Very little." Dr. Conant stated that by putting out the Smyth Report we could hold the line and added that anyone could get the information contained in the report with very little money in less than three months.

Mr. Bundy asked whether the information in the report merely could be deduced by a competent scientist or whether it would surely be deduced. Dr. Chadwick replied that if a man was competent it would almost surely be deduced, and although the Russians were not comparable in ability, they do have access to competent scientists.

Dr. Conant gave two examples of how some of the information could be put together. He mentioned a young student who went into only one aspect of the subject and was able to put two and two together. He also mentioned a fairly good physicist who had been able to guess the whole thing, even more than has been put into the document.

Dr. Chadwick then spoke about the separation of "25" and said that two or three methods are bound to work. He added "How much are we going to give away to hold the rest?" Dr. Conant replied ". . . the bare fact that electro-magnetism or diffusion worked -- that is all they need to know." He then mentioned the owner of a large chain of newspapers who already knows so much that Dr. Conant had to turn him away when he

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started to ask questions. Dr. Chadwick admitted that we can't keep those two facts.

Secretary Stimson stated that the problem had worried him more since he had been in contact with the Russians. He stated that the Russians have their strong points but they differ greatly from us in certain fundamental characteristics. How far this applies to their scientists Mr. Stimson said he did not know but that he did know that the Russians have no free speech. Mr. Stimson added that people who lived under suppression can not be as mentally alert or possess as much initiative as those who live in a land of free press and free speech.

During the discussion about the Zenon poisoning crisis, General Groves stated that he had some feeling that it might be better to eliminate this detail but that he did not think it made much difference.

Dr. Conant referred to the Russian Intelligence Service and Secretary Stimson stated that in technical matters they might not be effective. Mr. Stimson added that he had started out entirely with the hope of the possibility of future international control but no country infected with the OGPU could be part of an effective international control. Mr. Stimson said that he had come back much more conservative than General Groves had been and that he was quite pessimistic as to the future.

Mr. Stimson then asked to hear from Mr. Tolman and Mr. Makins. Reference was made to Section 4 in the memorandum from Mr. Tolman which

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has to do with pile poisoning. General Groves stated that this information had leaked out and was in New York within twenty-four hours and had probably reached Europe very quickly. General Groves also stated that an industrial corporation would have run the pile twenty-four hours a day to get all they could out of it but that in Chicago the scientists against his orders had been satisfied to run it in shorter shifts and had failed to discover the poisoning.

Dr. Chadwick then stated "I would agree that there is nothing in it that they (the Russians) could not get."

Mr. Bundy stated that he understood that the situation was that, whether we release the report or not, when the bomb goes off the Russians can get the information.

Mr. Bundy then asked whether it was true that if the Russians were proceeding without the material in the report they would be getting false answers and have to sort it out and thereby be delayed.

Dr. Conant replied "Not at that level; there is quite a lot of misinformation in the document and it also contains some obsolete plans."

Dr. Chadwick stated "That is not true. We have no new plans. If you build a new electro-magnetic plant you have to duplicate the present one." He then referred again to the detective clues and said that the Russian Intelligence would be able from the report to sort out the true and the false.

Mr. Tolman expressed the view that we would lose more by having more valuable information leak if the report is not published, to which

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Dr. Chadwick replied that that was entirely a matter of judgment."

Dr. Chadwick expressed his view that some of the facts were fundamentally interesting to physicists and that they would be passed on anyway.

Dr. Conant stated that this document is as far as we should go.

Mr. Bundy mentioned the time element with respect to the Russians and stated that it might not be so important in later years but that it was vital now.

Dr. Conant said that we should keep the Russians slowed down as much as possible and this document would do that. He also mentioned the political pressure that would be built up if the Smyth document were not released and the tremendous commotion which would follow. He pointed out that there were a thousand scientists in "Y", 20 of whom were British, which meant that two countries were involved. He thought that the most critical information came from "Y".

General Groves replied that the information on the bomb is the most secret and that every physicist would think of the gun method first.

Mr. Stimson then stated that he thought this was the distinction that we should make: (1) assume that Russia could work out the theoretical plan which was a field in itself; (a) keep the latter field (the industrial effort by General Groves and the industrial experts) secret. The Russians are necessarily slower in their way of life. Mr. Stimson said that he hoped we would give information of the first and not the

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second type but wondered if we were not giving away some of the second. General Groves stated that nothing on the second was involved.

Dr. Conant and General Groves both said that you could say that nothing has been given away that would make a formula work.

Mr. Stimson said that the Russians do not have the spark of initiative and that he wanted to hold the spark of initiative.

General Groves stated "That is held."

Dr. Chadwick asked "Do you think so in regard to the pile?"

General Groves replied "I think so."

Then Mr. Stimson said "Let us have the benefit of the doubt."

Mr. Makins said that Sir John Anderson was convinced of the necessity of putting out a report but that he was concerned about the cumulative effect. The question is whether to let others do their own evaluating of data or whether we should give them an authoritative document.

Mr. Stimson said that if none of the second type of information were revealed he would agree to the release of the document.

General Groves said that the Smyth document would be similar to instructions given people going west years ago when they were told that they should go to a water hole about 30 miles away and that if it was dry they should go to one about 10 miles beyond that.

General Groves expressed the view that the alternatives were the kind of description such as they would get in the Smyth document or a thousand papers published with a lot more information. He referred to

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the present censorship rules and certain words that could not be used. He said that once the words "atomic energy" were used that the lid would be off. If the newspapers are not given something that a normal college graduate could write, the situation would be very difficult.

Dr. Conant felt that TIME Magazine could find out everything in the report within a short time.

Mr. Stimson asked Dr. Conant whether we could hold TIME. The answer was that he thought so as long as we played ball with them.

General Groves stated that if more was published than was given out it would then be a breach of faith.

Mr. Stimson stated that the publication of the report had to wait until the President got back and that he would have to give the President his recommendations.

Dr. Conant replied that it would be unfortunate if there were a delay.

Mr. Harrison stated that the Interim Committee knew that a report was to be published. He added that Secretary of State Byrnes and Assistant Secretary of State Clayton assumed there would be a release but probably had not expected it to be so large.

Dr. Conant said "We appear to give minimum reasons for the expense involved in the project."

Mr. Harrison then asked Dr. Chadwick if he could certify that the document came within the rules as agreed by the Combined Policy Committee and Dr. Chadwick stated that he had not read the final draft.

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Mr. Makins said that Sir John Anderson had agreed to a release but that he had some doubts as to this document, not because of any particular item but because of the cumulative effect. Mr. Makins stated that this was a primary matter of the Secretary of War's judgment and that his personal view was very important. Mr. Makins said that on his side the matter had to be referred to the new Government and that this was being done today.

Mr. Harrison said that there were two questions: (a) whether we should publish it or not and (b) whether we had the right to publish it. He pointed out that the time schedule was such that this point should be decided soon.

Dr. Chadwick said that he had one more question: "Is it either this or none?" and added: "London accepts a statement."

Dr. Conant mentioned the fact that there was no time to effect any major revision on a trans-Atlantic basis.

General Groves said it was his opinion that if we did not use the Smyth report we would start a scientific battle which would end up in Congress.

Dr. Conant again called to attention the fact that he believed that with this report the line could be held and that without it a great many statements will have to be perpetually denied. He described the chaotic condition that we would be in, in his opinion, if it were not published.

The Secretary of War said that he was practically prepared to

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accept it with one doubt -- Zenon. He said "I will be giving my consent on the faith of my advisers."

General Groves said that if we had to wait for the President to return we might be in an embarrassing position. Mr. Stimson replied that he thought General Groves had underestimated the first two statements that were to be given out.

Dr. Conant said that if we publish the first two statements without something to back it up South Carolina would take the credit, Dakota would take the credit, Congress would take the credit, and so on.

Dr. Conant said that we should tell the press that we will give them a release in 48 hours.

Mr. Stimson then asked about the consent of the other party. He stated that the President would want to be satisfied that the Quebec Agreement had been kept. Since the Prime Minister and the President had discussed it, we could not afford to take a step which would be challenged by the British Government.

The Secretary then asked Mr. Makins for his opinion and he replied that "If you tell Dr. Chadwick and me that this is your judgment, I can't say what the answer would be, but I can get it in 24 hours. Your judgment gives great weight to it."

Dr. Chadwick then stated that Sir John Anderson had said "This is primarily a United States responsibility."

Colonel W. H. Kyle, Recorder

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