

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

2005
SSRC

Atomic energy

FROM: AB

DATE: December 1945

TO:

JHW		<i>JHW</i>
ME		<i>ME</i>

COMMENTS:

JUL 27 1949

SUBJECT: Atomic Energy - SSRC

The SSRC committee seems to me to be playing blind man's buff. They are not in a position to stumble along very far and they are not willing to look at any part of the problem deeply. Are we in desperate need of a clearing house for information of the kind of swapping of guesses that is now going on about atomic energy? Are we in any great need of a roster of personnel interested in the social aspects of atomic energy? Who is not?

The real questions are how do we get some groups who will go beyond the fringes of the social problems which atomic energy raises? How do we get a technically competent center able to work and recognised as worthy of working closely with natural scientists on phases of the problems of applying atomic power to uses other than war?

Inspection and control for whatever they avail are important. No one will get anywhere by talking about them or by going defeatist about them. Is there anywhere a group able to clarify the problems, methods and limitations of inspection?

What is the good of fussing around with the public response to atomic warfare? Is it not the response to the form in which the announcement was made? Had the Japanese war gone on for a year instead of a few days, how do we know what the response would be! Why did we not find out the response of the public to bombing, or any of the other horrible aspects of war?

The SSRC group seem to be each riding their old hobbies. Riefner wants a committee of distinguished citizens, Smyth (thank goodness for him) wants a committee of the most competent people available, Ogburn wants to go on studying the effects of major inventions, Brodie true to his past, is interested in innovations. All of these are laudable areas or problems for study, but they represent known past interest rather than a frontal attack on problems of a new character.

The causes of war seem to me a stale title for the study that is needed on the implications of recent scientific discoveries. Can the Council really handle the problem that its committee on atomic energy poses. It seems to me that what is needed is a small group of able social scientists, technically the most competent who would be willing if need be, to put themselves under the compulsion of silence

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about the facts of atomic energy which they must first understand if they are to peer far into the social effects. Can such a selected group work closely with natural scientists for a period long enough to give a basis for their generalizations.

I attach the Times comment on the findings of the Shotwell group. The summary raises questions upon the basis of the conclusions.

AB.

detached