

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

2005

SSRC

Atomic energy

FROM: JHW

DATE: February 6, 1947

TO:

WW	FEB 5 '47	WW
RBF		RBF
JHW		JHW
RFE	7/17	RFE
BW		BW
ME		ME
DAA		

COMMENTS:

good
Fine

carbon filed -

200

U.S. Atomic Energy Commission

Lilienthal

SUBJECT:

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ATOMIC ENERGY

At last I see a prospect of getting somewhere continuingly and constructively on the problems of the social implications of atomic energy. David Lilienthal has approached the Social Science Research Council asking whether it would not be willing to undertake the studies on social implications which he says the Commission cannot well do because of time and political considerations. Following a conference, Donald Young has written him the appended letter suggesting a joint committee between the NRC and the SSRC and the lines of work which might be undertaken. It may or may not be possible to finance this committee with Atomic Energy Commission funds. That is obviously the first line to try, but I have confidentially told Young that beyond that point, - wherever it turns out to be, - RF would be interested to discuss with him the needs and problems involved in the effective discharge of the task.

JHW

JHW

pf

C O P Y

January 28, 1947

Mr. David Lilienthal
Room 6174
New War Department Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Lilienthal:

I appreciate the opportunity you gave me in our recent conversation in your office to explain the Council's concern that research on the economic and social aspects of atomic fission should be given greater and more orderly consideration than is now the case. Your own clear interest in this problem was most stimulating. This letter is in response to your suggestion that I discuss the matter with my colleagues and bring to your attention any plan which we might develop for the cooperation of your Commission and the social scientists in American universities and research agencies.

There is no lack of interest among research economists and students of human relations in questions of atomic energy requiring the application of their several skills. They are, however, with few exceptions, at a loss to know how best to make their contributions either through new research or through the marshalling of existing knowledge within their fields to the end that the public may have the maximum possible data available in facing the issues presented by the advent of controlled nuclear fission. They need orientation and continued guidance if they are to work effectively in this new area of investigation. In the absence of any adequate source to which to turn for such orientation and guidance a very few have proceeded to do the best they could under the circumstances, but many others of outstanding professional competence have regretfully refrained from entering the field. If the Commission itself is not to undertake a program of research on the human problems of atomic energy directly under its own auspices, and one can understand why it might be reluctant to do so in spite of the advantages of such a procedure, the alternative appears to be the creation of a more or less formal arrangement for close liaison between the Commission and some ad hoc agency which will undertake the research planning role and serve as a center for information and advice.

I have found agreement among my colleagues that the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council acting jointly could provide the most suitable auspices for the establishment of a small committee to serve the needs of the Commission and of independent research institutions and personnel working in the field of Human Relations. The central function of the Social Science Research Council is the advancement of research, particularly in the less well developed areas, by such means as the recruitment and training of research personnel, the improvement of techniques of research, the planning of research projects, the stimulation of work on important projects and, in general, the assistance of individuals and public or private agencies on research problems by all feasible means. With all due modesty, it has an unmatched accumulated knowledge of research personnel and institutions in the human relations fields. The cooperation of the National Research Council with its parallel advantages in the natural sciences is most desirable in this proposed venture because

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be secured. There would be advantages in operation under private support, but there would be a serious handicap in the accomplishment of its full task if private financing deprived the committee, and particularly its staff, of some minimum of official status. The staff, for example, could hardly function well with relation to the Commission if they held merely the status of welcome guests, nor could they function efficiently under such circumstances in a liaison capacity with private research projects. If the Commission for budgetary or other reasons is unable to finance the proposed undertaking in its entirety, as might possibly be done through a contract with the National Research Council, it is at least desirable that it share expenses in some measure. It might, for example, contract with the NRC-SSRC committee for information and reports to be prepared by the committee staff working at some specified level of cooperation with the Commission staff. This would be one possible means for affording the committee staff the needed status and rapport. The nature and extent of the Commission's financial participation in the project naturally must depend on its own judgment of its needs and proper procedures, but there does seem to be some minimum amount of government support required in the interest of effecting operating relations.

There has been real enthusiasm and no basic criticism in the reactions of the social scientists to whom this proposal has been presented for discussion since my conversation with you. It was presented in broad outline to the existing SSRC Committee on Social Aspects of Atomic Energy and approved in principle by that committee. This was in consonance with that committee's previously expressed sentiment that its own work could not be advanced much further at present in the absence of effective liaison with the Commission. The current committee is so thoroughly convinced on this point that it has voted its own termination as of this coming June 30th unless unforeseen research opportunities are disclosed before then. It will, of course, be discontinued in any event if a joint NRC-SSRC committee is established as suggested above. I am confident that any program based on this suggested plan of cooperation between the Commission and the two research Councils will receive general support among research personnel.

If you find any merit in my suggestions, or if there is any alternative procedure for increasing the quality and amount of research on the social aspects of atomic energy which the SSRC might be helpful in developing, we will appreciate hearing from you concerning the next steps we should take to advance our mutual interest in encouraging and aiding social scientists to work on the problems involved.

Sincerely yours,

Donald Young (signed)

CC: WRiefler
DBronk

January 28, 1947

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of the necessity for intimate collaboration between physical, biological and social scientists. There is a further advantage in associating the National Research Council with this project because it is chartered by the Congress and has a distinguished record of service to the government in scientific matters of national concern. Informal assurances have been given by Dr. Detlev Bronk, Chairman of the National Research Council, that intercouncil collaboration in the proposal here set forth would have his full support.

The functions of the proposed NRC-SSRC committee can be outlined under five more or less exclusive headings:

1. The committee shall undertake such advisory functions within its competence as the Commission may request.
2. The committee shall serve as a liaison agency in relations between the Commission and private social research institutions and individuals.
3. The committee shall encourage the initiation of research on social aspects of atomic energy, and may serve in an advisory capacity in connection with such projects upon invitation and when feasible.
4. The committee may prepare and issue research planning memoranda and other materials designed to stimulate and aid independent research within its area of operation.
5. The committee may conduct research on high priority problems within its proper area of operation when no other suitable agency for the task is found available.

This list of functions to be performed by the proposed committee is not here offered as a definitive formulation; it is presented rather as an indication of the kinds of duties it could undertake and is intended to serve as a basis for discussion between the commission and the Councils. Possibly the proposed committee should have a narrower definition at least in its initial stage of operation.

A duty of the small staff required by the committee would be to discover and formulate questions growing out of developments in atomic energy to the resolution of which social scientists might be expected to contribute. Such questions would be brought to the attention of the NRC-SSRC committee for review, development and communication to suitable research agencies and personnel. The committee staff would also be responsible for consultation with private agencies and individuals requiring advice and information in connection with independent research on social aspects of atomic energy. Another duty would be to aid the Commission, in consultation with the committee, when information might be needed on social science matters in connection with the work of the Commission. It would not be necessary for the committee staff to have access to Commission materials of high security value. It is believed that a staff of two men would be adequate for the task as here envisaged, one with competence in the fields of economics and government, the other in the area of human relations customarily included in the disciplines of social psychology, sociology and anthropology.

The financing of the proposed committee might be either private or public. If it were to be established on invitation of the Commission it is likely that reasonable private support could

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be secured. There would be advantages in operation under private support, but there would be a serious handicap in the accomplishment of its full task if private financing deprived the committee, and particularly its staff, of some minimum of official status. The staff, for example, could hardly function well with relation to the Commission if they held merely the status of welcome guests, nor could they function efficiently under such circumstances in a liaison capacity with private research projects. If the Commission for budgetary or other reasons is unable to finance the proposed undertaking in its entirety, as might possibly be done through a contract with the National Research Council, it is at least desirable that it share expenses in some measure. It might, for example, contract with the NRC-SSRC committee for information and reports to be prepared by the committee staff working at some specified level of cooperation with the Commission staff. This would be one possible means for affording the committee staff the needed status and rapport. The nature and extent of the Commission's financial participation in the project naturally must depend on its own judgment of its needs and proper procedures, but there does seem to be some minimum amount of government support required in the interest of effecting operating relations.

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