

Dr. E. Fermi
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and it is hard for me to give very sound advice on what to do. I think that there is at least one quite well defined radio-chemical problem, which is the separation of the beta-strontium from other activities. It is my impression after talking it over with Teller, that this is not a very major problem except in so far as provision would have to be made for carrying it out by remote control at the actual site of operations. I do not see how this can be done without letting a number of people into the secret of why we want the strontium. I should therefore like to ask you what you think the latest safe date is for the solution of this and other problems. It seems to me that we have a much better chance of keeping your plan quiet if we do not start work on it until it is essential to do so. If, in your opinion, the time for such work is now, I believe that you should discuss it with Allison and Franck and on their advice, if absolutely necessary, with Compton, and that perhaps this group of people will be enough to get the work done without more wide-spread discussion. In a general way I think we have better facilities here for keeping things of that kind within a well defined group, namely, the scientific personnel of the laboratory, than exists in other places. On the other hand, I do not think that we are equipped to tackle the problem with anything like the expedition that you can in Chicago.

To summarize then, I should recommend delay if that is possible. (In this connection I think that we should not attempt a plan unless we can poison food sufficient to kill a half a million men, since there is no doubt that the actual number affected will, because of non-uniform distribution, be much smaller than this.) If you believe that such delay will be serious, I should recommend discussion with a few well-chosen people. Finally, I should postpone this action until I have had an opportunity to reopen the question with Conant and if possible to obtain information on the decision of the General Staff.

Things here are going quite well and we are still remembering with pleasure and profit your fine visit. I hope that you can come again late in June, and that we shall have at that time some less programatic problems to discuss with you.

With all warm greetings,

Robert Oppenheimer

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