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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: September 21, 1960.

SUBJECT:

Meeting with Professor Groth of the University of Bonn on Gas Centrifuge System, at 1717 H St. (AEC) September 21. 1960.

PARTICIPANTS: Professor Groth, University of Bonn Mr. W. Opfermann, German Embassy

Professor Beams, University of Virginia

AEC:

CORPERCION

Mr. George Kohlstad

Mr. E. Grabowski

Mr. George Marshall

Mr. L. F. O'Donnell Mr. W. Munster

Mr. F. Baranowski

Mr. William Fullerton

Department of State:

S/AE - Mr. William F. Chapin

COPIES TO:

GER - Mr. Freshman

RA - Mr. Hartman

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Amembassy, BONN

THE HAGUE

LONDON

Professor Groth, who is in charge of the gas centrifuge studies at the University of Bonn, recently came to the United States to confer with Professor Harteck of Rensmiler Polytechnic Institute, a former AEC employee who specializes in isotope separation. Before coming to the United States he also wrote to Professor Beams of the University of Virginia, who is carrying out a classified study of gas centrifuge work for the AEC, suggesting he visit Professor Beams at his laboratory. Professor Beams in reply proposed that they meet in Washington. Although Professor Beams did not say so in his letter, he did not wish to meet Professor Groth at the University since the work there was classified and there

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obviously

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could be no exchange of classified information in the absence of a classified agreement. The German Government had agreed to the meeting in Washington, with representatives of the AEC, the Department and the Embassy, but Professor Groth

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

obviously did not expect a meeting of this nature.

Most of the questions from AEC representatives concerned various problems of classification for the German Government, although Professor Groth was only partially informed about the general problem.

Professor Groth said he did not believe it was possible for either his group or Professor Byerle to continue centrifuge studies at the universities if the work were classified. He thought the only way the work could be carried out would be through the formation of a new organization composed of his and Professor Byerle's staffs working directly under the German Atomic Energy Ministry. He added there were two possible approaches to classification-imposition of state or industrial secrecy. He believed that from the political point of view it would be more desirable to apply industrial rather than state classification. The former procedure would permit communication of certain information to interested people abroad if clearance was given by the Economics Ministry. He professed no detailed information about the procedure, but understood that it would be the responsibility of the German Atomic Energy Ministry to request the Economics Ministry to impose classification upon such information as it thought was sensitive. Professor Groth added that he thought DEGUSSA would not continue to work on the centrifuge problem if state secrecy was imposed, although the company might continue it if industrial classification alone applied.

Referring to his own work, Professor Groth said that he had instructed his staff to continue its studies, but to publish nothing and to show no outsiders what was being done. He said this would work as a temporary expedient, but added that the imposition of any type of classification would deter first-rate young scientists from continuing work in this field, since the making of their reputations depended in large measure on the articles they published.

Professor Groth said that a considerable number of requests from foreign sources had been received by his group for information concerning gas centrifuge equipment. He mentioned in particular India and France and said that no answers were being given for the time being to these letters. Professor Groth doubted whether there was any eagerness on the part of German manufacturers to build gas centrifuge equipment, since German industrial capacity was now heavily strained, and thought that the current interest in classification would not stimulate any desire to proceed with the manufacture of such equipment. He added that earlier he was considering the possibility of having such equipment manufactured in the United States under special license.

Professor Groth thought it was a bit late to impose secrecy on the centrifuge development, but conceded there was some marginal utility even at this time in classifying the work as a means of preventing the spread of weapons capabilities.

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