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November 2, 1942

Dr. James B. Conant, Chairman
National Defense Research Committee
1530 P Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

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Dear Dr. Conant:

There are three men, not now working with us, whom we should like to have as soon as possible for the new laboratory. They are all three men whose help in planning and organizing the laboratory in the immediate future is essential to us. They will also, when the laboratory is established, play an important part in its work. It would seem clearly inappropriate for me to approach directly either the men themselves, or the directors of the laboratories in which they are working. It seems to me, and Lawrence and McMillan concur in this opinion, that our only practicable method is to ask you to request the release and transfer of the men from their present obligations, and to let us discuss our problems with them only after this is cleared. If you doubt the appropriateness of this procedure, or question the cogency of our reasons for the specific requests, I should of course be glad to discuss the questions with you in detail.

The three men are Bacher, Kurie and Herb.

1) Robert Bacher has in the past had a double connection, with the Chicago project, and with the M.I.T. Radiation Laboratory. The work at Cornell for the Chicago project is terminated. Bacher is, however, very well informed, both on the background of our work, and on its recent development; in fact, he is one of the two men at M.I.T. who has some information on the superbomb. Bacher is a specialist in neutron physics, a sound and brilliant physicist; and his personal qualities and good judgement recommend him not only for the prosecution of the work in the new laboratory, but for its preliminary organization and planning. We should welcome his help in decisions of equipment, procurement, personnel, laboratory design, and program. He is almost the only physicist in the country who could replace Fermi, if Fermi's obligations to the Chicago project should continue longer than we anticipate. Bacher's position in the Radiation Laboratory is a responsible one, and it will not be easy to obtain his release. His qualifications, and his historical connection with our project, make him our first choice, in priority and in importance.

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November 2, 1942

2) Franz Kurie is now at the Radio and Sound Laboratory in San Diego. He has worked closely with McMillan, who approached him informally about working with us. Kurie would presumably be glad to do that. Our need for Kurie is immediate. He has had experience in the planning and construction of a nuclear physics laboratory, and has been responsible for the Indiana cyclotron and laboratory. It is our plan to have him work closely with the Army's procurement officer, both in the immediate future and after the laboratory is established. He would also organize and supervise our shops.

3) Herb is now at the Radiation Laboratory, but in a position somewhat less responsible than Bacher. He has designed and operated the two Wisconsin van de Graaf's which we plan to requisition for the laboratory; and one of his immediate duties would be to supervise the removal and installation of this equipment. He is a brilliant experimental physicist, and we should plan to have him take charge of the van de Graaf laboratory.

You will want to be assured that the men now working on our project could not serve as well as Herb, Bacher or Kurie. We have no one with the qualifications of these three. The men we have are all actively engaged on specific problems, and should continue to be until their present work is concluded or they can be moved to the new laboratory. The history of their work on the project is adequate proof that they are not suited to the urgent new responsibilities.

Cordially,

Robert Oppenheimer

P. S. You will have had a copy of Smyth's letter of October 26 re Feynman. I think we had best not pursue this until a little later, but it illustrates how much we will have to rely on you for our personnel problems.

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