

**AGAINST A STEAMROLLER:  
DAVID LILIENTHAL, THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION, AND  
THE CONFLICT OVER MILITARIZATION DURING EARLY COLD  
WAR**

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of  
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
In  
History

By  
Stephen Michael Schumacher

2004



**SIGNATURE PAGE**

**THESIS:** AGAINST A STEAMROLLER: DAVID  
LILIENTHAL, THE ATOMIC  
ENERGY COMMISSION, AND THE CONFLICT  
OVER MILITARIZATION DURING EARLY  
COLD WAR

**AUTHOR:** Stephen Michael Schumacher

**DATE SUBMITTED:** \_\_\_\_\_

Department of History

Dr. Zuoyue Wang  
Thesis Committee Chair  
History \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Stephen F. Englehart  
History \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. John A. Moore, Jr.  
History \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

When David E. Lilienthal, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, lost his battle to stop the development of the hydrogen bomb in 1950, he used the term “steamroller” to illustrate the overwhelming forces which opposed him. Throughout his term as AEC chairman (1946-1950), Lilienthal fought the “steamroller” that came to represent not only the drive toward the hydrogen bomb but a militarization of American society in general. Beginning with his early skirmishes with General Leslie R. Groves, continuing with his successful campaign to keep the nation’s atomic arsenal in the custody of a civilian agency and concluding with his failed efforts in combating the H-bomb, Lilienthal persistently challenged militarization at every turn. But Lilienthal’s battles against militarization were not limited to his AEC days. Both before and after his AEC chairmanship he took stances which went against the grain of militarization. Historically, Lilienthal’s stringent and sustained opposition to the “steamroller” of militarization helped pave the way for the questioning of military technology during the counter-culture movement in the 1960s and 1970s. He remains one of the most notable but least heralded individual examples of American anti-militarization in the twentieth-century.

## CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
2	Pre-AEC	6
3	The Custody Battle	20
4	The Groves Battle	31
5	The Hydrogen Bomb Battle	47
6	Conclusion	66

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States has evidently embarked on the road of militarization. Indications include ongoing military efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, President Bush's 2004 budget proposal seeking a seven percent increase in military spending, *Time* magazine naming the American soldier as its 2003 person of the year, and legislation like the Patriot Act that used national security to justify restrictions on civil liberties. The militarization of American society is not new, however. Historians such as Michael Sherry have long interpreted America's past century as one dictated by militarization, a process in Sherry's words, "by which war and the national security became consuming anxieties and provided the memories, models, and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life."<sup>1</sup> Sherry's twentieth-century definition of militarization remains an applicable description of the "process" again "consuming" the U.S. However, as protests against the Iraq war in the U.S. and abroad demonstrate, there are counter currents to militarization. And although the Beats and the Hippies fostered the nation's most publicized twentieth-century counter cultures to militarization, there were also less-heralded attempts by scientists and those inside government. One of the most notable yet historically overlooked twentieth-century efforts against militarization was led by David E. Lilienthal, the famed New Deal director of the TVA and the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

---

1. Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), xi.

When the gruesome details of the atomic carnage leveled on Hiroshima and Nagasaki first began emerging publicly, those fearing military control of the atom started speaking out. Already in early January of 1946 *Washington Post* reporter Marquis Childs had written a series of articles underscoring two sentiments concerning the atom: “One was the fear of military control; the other was a deep personal antagonism for General Groves,” director of the Manhattan Project that made the bomb.<sup>2</sup> Few government officials better exemplified those with these twin concerns than Lilienthal. Beginning with his remarks against military secrecy of the atom at the Chicago conference in September of 1945, Lilienthal was determined to wrestle control of American nuclear policy from the military and General Groves. In 1946, he advocated the establishment of an international body to control the “dangerous atom” through the drafting of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report. Then, in 1947, when he became chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), he battled the military’s attempt to take over the custody of the atomic arsenal. He also played a leading role in forcing the resignation of General Leslie R. Groves and fought against the development of the hydrogen bomb. Even after he left the AEC in 1950, he continued to work for the prevention of nuclear proliferation.<sup>3</sup>

---

2. Richard G. Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson, *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission*, vol. 1, *The New World, 1939/1946* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), 486.

3. In his journal Lilienthal often references the “peaceful” atom and “dangerous” atom. “Dangerous” signifies all atomic applications designed to enhance the military while “peaceful” infers those non-military atomic applications.

Despite the significance of Lilienthal in the fight against militarization (and of that cause in his life), many historians, including Sherry, have failed to appreciate Lilienthal's role in their studies of American militarism.. Instead Sherry's thesis on the militarization of U.S. society in the twentieth-century focuses on a symbiosis between civilian and military officials in the post-war period of 1945-1953: "Civilian leaders shared outlooks and duties with military leaders," notes Sherry. "Few officers were more alarmed about the Soviets and the nation's security than [James] Forrestal; few matched physicist Edward Teller's zeal for nuclear weapons; few championed air power better than Secretary of the Air Force Stuart Symington."<sup>4</sup> And as historians have neglected Lilienthal in a more specific anti-militarization context, largely, that have also failed to chronicle his life.

The only comprehensive study of Lilienthal was written by political scientist Steven M. Neuse. Strongly influenced by Louis Hatz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Neuse's biography principally views Lilienthal as a "quintessential twentieth-century liberal moralist," who as a New Dealer "epitomized...optimism, inventiveness, and pragmatic drive as he sought to enlarge and empower the public realm at the expense of narrow private interest."<sup>5</sup> Nowhere in his final analysis of Lilienthal's legacy does Neuse make reference to his anti-militarization efforts and his only mention of the AEC concerns corporate attempts at privatizing the atom: "His confidence in the people's judgment in the

---

4. Sherry, *In the Shadow*, 140.

5. Steven M. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal: The Journey of an American Liberal* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 319, xx.

AEC days was an important counter in the battle against forces that sought to privatize discussion about the atom.”<sup>6</sup> More important than Lilienthal as “counter” to the privatization of the atom was Lilienthal as “counter” to the militarization of the atom. Lilienthal’s anti-militarization labors deserve far more prominent billing on his historical epithet than Neuse or anyone has yet to acknowledge.

And, again, foremost motivating Lilienthal’s anti-militarization was his distrust of the atom being controlled by the “military mind.” Throughout Lilienthal’s second journal volume spanning 1945-1950, there are many references to his misgivings of the atom juxtaposed with the “military mind.” Of this dangerous mentality, in November of 1947, Lilienthal writes, “It is extraordinary, though, how freely the Armed Services make the most bloodthirsty statements about their preparations, with no one so much as raising an eyebrow.”<sup>7</sup> Even better encapsulating Lilienthal’s worries is a journal entry in December of 1947, in which Lilienthal remarks, “I know it is better that one feels as I do should have a hand in this business [atomic energy], as a deterrent to the kind who rather likes the idea of the biggest act of killing in all time—making Attila the Hun seem like a piker.”<sup>8</sup>

Much of the evidence used to defend the thesis that Lilienthal was an eminent historical figure in the counter currents to U.S. militarization is supported

---

6. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 324.

7. David E. Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 1, *The Atomic Energy Years, 1945-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 263.

8. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 276.

by Lilienthal's second journal volume titled *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal: The Atomic Energy Years, 1945-1950*. Autobiographical writings, as central sources, may not always be deemed credible by historians. Neuse, whose biography also chiefly uses Lilienthal's journals as sources, believes that Lilienthal's first four journals covering from 1919-1959 are dependable. "The first four volumes, covering his life through July 1959, are probably devoid of calculation as any public diaries, and certainly so than most autobiographies," he argues.<sup>9</sup> In defending the journals' credibility Neuse points out that Lilienthal never discussed making the journals public until 1957: "Much of the credibility hinges on whether or not Lilienthal intended to make the work public. The record seems clear that he thought little until the late 1950s of doing anything with his secrets."<sup>10</sup> It wasn't until 1957, at the urging of his son-in-law, that Lilienthal met with two Princeton historians and one librarian to talk about whether the journals were of public interest. And it wasn't until 1959 that Lilienthal actually wrote a publisher about the possibility of publishing the journals.

Lastly, if historians have ignored his anti-militarization pains, primarily as AEC chairman, what did Lilienthal make of his efforts in battling the Pentagon? As early as July 1947, it was believed at the AEC the "peaceful" atom, that of alternative power source, was years or maybe even decades away from being realized. Therefore, much of the AEC's energies were to be spent on military applications of the atom. Potential then existed for the military to run roughshod

---

9. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, xvii.

10. *Ibid.*, xvi.

over the AEC. However, with Lilienthal at the AEC's helm this proved not to be the case; as it did for succeeding chairmanships. In 1963, over a decade removed from his AEC chairmanship, Lilienthal wrote that the civilian AEC had been gobbled-up by militarization, that the AEC had become, basically, a military subsidiary:

The role of the AEC as a special civilian custodian and watchdog [of nuclear weapons] has evaporated. The AEC functions chiefly as a designer, developer, maker, and tester of atomic weaponry...As the reason for sharp separation between civilian and military atomic roles has faded, so the distinctive role of the AEC has changed. The AEC as weaponeer has in fact become very much part of the military establishment, serving the needs and goals of that military establishment as defined by the military.<sup>11</sup>

As much as the later literature of counter culturists like Theodore Roszak, Charles Reich or Herbert Marcuse denounced the military-industrial complex, it is doubtful whether anyone could have done more to restrain militarization than Lilienthal. More clear is that from 1946-1950, Lilienthal was determined to keep the AEC as independent from military influence as one could.

## **Pre-AEC**

---

11. David E. Lilienthal, *Change, Hope, and the Bomb* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 115-116.

David E. Lilienthal was born July 8, 1899, in Morton, Illinois. He spent the majority of his childhood and adolescence in Indiana where he remained to attend DePauw College. After DePauw, Lilienthal entered Harvard Law School. While at Harvard, he was heavily influenced by law professor Felix Frankfurter who helped spark Lilienthal's interest in labor law. Graduating from Harvard in 1923, Lilienthal joined the law firm of well-known Chicago labor attorney Donald R. Richberg. During his stint with Richberg, Lilienthal gained national attention for successfully arguing a utilities case before the U.S. Supreme Court. The case in turn attracted the interest of Progressive Wisconsin Governor Philip LaFollette who appointed Lilienthal to his state's utilities commission in 1931. Lilienthal left the commission in 1933 when A. E. Morgan offered him one of three directorship positions at the newly created Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). From his position as director of dams, Lilienthal assumed chairmanship of the TVA in 1941.

Seeing firsthand how the TVA was able to transform the depressed Tennessee Valley, Lilienthal soon became an outspoken champion of teaming big government with technology. In 1944, he authored *TVA: Democracy on the March* which Neuse called "arguably the finest example of political rhetoric in the century."<sup>12</sup> With characteristic New Deal optimism, the book lauded the partnership of technology and democracy: "I believe that through the practice of democracy the world of technology holds out the greatest opportunity in all of history for the development of the individual, according to his talents, aspirations,

---

12. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, xviii.

and willingness to carry the responsibilities of a free man.”<sup>13</sup> *TVA* also emphasized the need for internationalism in the post-war period and popularized the term “grass roots democracy.” With the ending of the war and the military continuing to shroud the atom in secrecy, Lilienthal drew on the themes from *TVA*, especially relative to “grass roots democracy”—that of an active and knowledgeable democratic citizenry—in advocating atomic openness.

Lilienthal’s first atomic grievance with the military came in late September of 1945, at a two-day conference he attended on atomic energy control, inspired by physicist Leo Szilard and hosted by the University of Chicago. By Lilienthal’s own account, his remarks at the conference were enthusiastically praised by other attendees. On September 21, 1945, the conference’s concluding day, Lilienthal commented in his journal that his words had “created quite a stir...I got fervent approval and handshakes from a curious assortment of men.”<sup>14</sup> Lilienthal attributed the favorable response to his belief that atomic secrecy should not and could not be tolerated:

Toward the close of yesterday’s session I said I had the impression that intelligent discussion of these grave policy issues were inhibited by the Army’s restriction, exemplified by the Army’s effort to obstruct the holding of this very meeting; and I thought most of the efforts toward the censorship of the scientist is nonsense...Unless people are properly

---

13. David E. Lilienthal, *TVA: Democracy on the March* (New York: Harper and Brothers), xxii.

14. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 642.

informed of the facts, the resulting public policy regarding the atomic bomb will neither be sound nor enduring.<sup>15</sup>

That Lilienthal insisted on atomic openness is not surprising. He had already spelled-out such themes in *TVA*. Neuse wrote that the conference was “the opening to the future he [Lilienthal] had been looking for.”<sup>16</sup> With Chicago serving as the starting block, Lilienthal began a long career of challenging the military. And his Chicago argument against atomic secrecy transitioned into his next atomic endeavor, the Acheson-Lilienthal Report.

Pressured by Congress and an approaching June meeting of the United Nations Commission on Atomic Energy where the U.S. was to declare its official position regarding international atomic energy, on January 7, 1946, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes called Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson with an assignment. Byrnes informed Acheson that he was naming him to chair a committee which was responsible for preparing a report outlining the nation’s policy regarding the international control of atomic energy. Serving under Acheson on the committee included: General Leslie R. Groves, head of the Manhattan Engineer District (MED); Vannevar Bush, former Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development; James B. Conant, President of Harvard; and James J. McCloy, former Assistant Secretary of War. Acheson was

---

15. Ibid.

16. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 168.

troubled by both the enormity of the assignment and his ignorance of the subject matter.

To calm his boss's anxieties, Herbert Marks, Acheson's assistant, recommended that the committee be supplemented by a consulting panel which could investigate and report all pertinent information to the committee on a more full-time basis. Marks, who had worked under Lilienthal at the TVA, suggested Acheson place Lilienthal as the panel's chairman. Acheson agreed and after a short deliberation Lilienthal accepted. Other consulting panel members were: Chester I. Barnard, President of the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company; Robert J. Oppenheimer, the physicist who headed the Los Alamos laboratory that assembled atomic bombs during WWII and then a professor of physics at U.C. Berkeley; Harry A. Winne, Vice President of General Electric; and Charles A. Thomas, Vice President of Monsanto Chemical Company.<sup>17</sup>

From early conversations with Acheson, Lilienthal became aware that General Groves was still dictating the country's atomic foreign policy: "The War

---

17. Ibid., 169. Neuse is more specific when addressing the panel's selections noting that Lilienthal suggested Barnard's name and Groves favored Winne for the panel. Before working on the Acheson-Lilienthal Report it is evident that Lilienthal and Barnard had associated during the Chicago conference. Lilienthal writes that after he had spoken one of those who congratulated him was Barnard. See Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 642. The association between Lilienthal and Barnard became stronger. On November 9, 1949, when President Truman asked Lilienthal if he had anyone in mind to replace him as AEC chairman, the first name Lilienthal mentions is Barnard: "He [president] said, 'have you thought anything further about someone to take your place?' Well I hadn't, but I described Chester Barnard. Yes, he knew him. Wasn't he much pretty on the right? Yes I said, in a way he is, as a telephone executive, but he has independent views, approved my book on TVA, etc." Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 595.

Department, and really one man in the War Department, General Groves, by the power of veto on the grounds of ‘military security,’ has really been determining and almost running foreign policy.”<sup>18</sup> Most troubling for Lilienthal about Groves was the general’s persistence that the atom be kept a secret. On January 16, the day he called Acheson to accept the consulting panel’s chairmanship, referencing the Chicago conference, Lilienthal again takes aim at Groves and military secrecy in his journal:

If my hunch, expressed in the opening hours of the Chicago conference, that in the real sense there are no secrets...would be supportable by facts, then real progress would be made. For then it would be clear that the basis of the present policy and commitments made on the Army-sponsored thesis that there are secrets. And since it is in the Army’s hands (or, literally, Gen. Groves) to deny access to the facts that would prove or disprove this vital thesis, there has been no way to examine the very foundation of our policies in the international field.<sup>19</sup>

---

18. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 10. The journal entry also reveals that, according to Lilienthal, it was Acheson’s persuasion that finally spurred Truman and Byrnes to counter Groves’ unfettered power over atomic policy—the report was an attempt to wrestle back power from Groves. Curiously, Lilienthal’s explanation of the report’s origin is left out of the official history of the AEC. The AEC historians simply contend that it was Byrnes’ desire to have a committee begin formulating U.S. policy for the June U.N. meeting.

19. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 11-12.

Continuing his rant, Lilienthal asserts, “An amazing situation. For Gen. Groves determines whether a fact can be divulged, to anyone, by anyone.”<sup>20</sup> Before even sitting down to begin work on the report it was obvious that Lilienthal had targeted Groves. To Lilienthal, the general’s great power in influencing atomic foreign policy and insistence on atomic secrecy personified everything that went against his grass roots democracy. However, the general had some of his own early qualms as well.

From the Acheson committee’s inception Groves had gripes. Gregg Herken pointed out that on the mission of the committee “The single prominent naysayer was Groves.”<sup>21</sup> Groves’ first contention was over the committee’s decision to form a consulting panel. Of the panel’s creation, in his memoir, Groves’ argues, “I objected on the grounds that at least three of us—Conant, Bush and I—knew more about the broad aspects of the problem that the Secretary wanted us to study than any panel that could be assembled. Besides, I had access to all the scientific assistance that might be needed on any particular point.”<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, Groves was overruled on the matter and the panel was formed. When later commenting on individual members of the consulting panel, Groves is noticeably cool in his analyses of Lilienthal and Barnard’s qualifications, claiming, “As far as I know Mr. Lilienthal and Mr. Barnard had little or no

---

20. Ibid.

21. Gregg Herken, *Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 164.

22. Leslie R. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 411.

knowledge of the subject matter whatsoever.”<sup>23</sup> Continuing in the vein that Lilienthal lacked an atomic background, Groves went even further in a later interview claiming the TVA chairman relied too heavily on Robert Oppenheimer for advice: “Lilienthal got so bad he would consult Oppie on what tie to wear in the morning.”<sup>24</sup>

The consulting panel began to seriously work on their report in late January. With consensus having been reached among panel members that an international agency should be responsible for controlling all atomic material which could produce weapons, the panel disbanded on February 1, Lilienthal assigning each panel member a different section to draft. Reconvening on February 12, the sections were molded together forming the basis of the panel’s future report. For Lilienthal, the most significant aspect of the preliminary report was the creation of a civilian international agency which was to govern both “dangerous” and “peaceful” atomic applications. Meeting again on February 25, the panel spent the next ten days shaping the report into something they felt was presentable to Acheson’s committee. Finally comfortable, Lilienthal’s panel submitted their report to Acheson and his committee on March 7. Describing the setting that day outside a window where the report was to be read, Lilienthal observed, “And moving by, from time to time, outside the garden terrace were

---

23. Ibid. Groves’ quotation may stem from his knowledge of a pre-panel association between Lilienthal and Barnard. Referring back to Neuse, Lilienthal suggested Barnard and Groves favored Winne for the panel. For Groves to lump Barnard together with Lilienthal was most likely guilt by association.

24. Peter Michelmore, *The Swift Years: The Robert J. Oppenheimer Story* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1969), 127. “Oppie” was the nickname of J. Robert Oppenheimer.

workmen, the people who had the most at stake, and to little to say as to whether someday the order is given and an atomic bomb, perhaps a thousand times greater than Nagasaki, starts on its way against other workmen.”<sup>25</sup> The report called for the establishment of a civilian international Atomic Development Authority (ADA) which was to control all “dangerous” applications of atomic energy. Likewise, all national work in these “dangerous” areas was to be banned. That a civilian-international ADA was to assume custody of the “dangerous” atom from the military was pleasing to Lilienthal but not to Groves.

After reading the report, according to Lilienthal, “General Groves made some shallow comments about how he could circumvent the plan, but he didn’t get very far—my fellow-members had at him with the facts in a vigorous way.”<sup>26</sup> More serious was Bush’s concern that there wasn’t a transition plan for transferring domestic control to the ADA. Meeting again on March 16, having had time to amend the report to address the committee’s initial concerns, the panel was disheartened when learning that Bush and Groves still believed the report’s transition plan still not specific enough. Lilienthal was particularly distraught, writing, “I don’t know when I felt more miserable, all our work might be wasted, and some cheap alternatives offered, for reasons that would be cowardly and could only lead to the certainty of atomic warfare.”<sup>27</sup> A stalemate persisted until the next day. Incredibly, Acheson attributed the eventual compromise to the intervention of his secretary. Sensing that tempers were reaching a breaking point,

---

25. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 29.

26. *Ibid.*, 27.

27. *Ibid.*, 29.

the secretary whispered to Acheson that perhaps he should have the group take a coffee break. Acheson later said that his secretary's intervention was a "brilliant contribution."<sup>28</sup> The break afforded Acheson the opportunity to take the conflicting parties aside until agreement was finally reached and that afternoon a final draft was agreed to.

The report's internationalism delighted Lilienthal. Its opening words stressed international cooperation, that the U. S. would "seek by all reasonable means to bring about international arrangements to prevent the use of atomic energy for destructive purposes."<sup>29</sup> Acheson was also happy with the report. After having read it for the first time, Acheson said aloud "This is a brilliant and profound document."<sup>30</sup> More importantly, the president was satisfied. Later in his memoirs he wrote that "The board [Acheson Committee] did an outstanding job."<sup>31</sup> Not sharing as much enthusiasm for the report was Groves who years afterward called it the "liberal position" and acerbically described it as an attempt by the "United States to proceed in full confidence in the Russians and with good toward mankind."<sup>32</sup> But for the time being the general was forced to concede defeat, as Lilienthal gloatingly notes, "And at four o'clock this afternoon the entire Acheson Committee (not excluding General Groves) had signed a letter of

---

28. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Signet, 1969), 211.

29. U.S. Department of State, *A Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy* (Acheson-Lilienthal report) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 1.

30. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 27.

31. Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman*, vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1956), 6.

32. Groves, *Now It Can Be Told*, 410.

transmittal of the report to Secretary Byrnes.”<sup>33</sup> Although the Acheson-Lilienthal Report was not a guarantee that international cooperation could be agreed to, it did give many hope, particularly Lilienthal, that at least the U.S. was starting on the right course: “Whatever happens, the misery and the exhausting work of the past two months could be counted as my contribution toward something better in the world than perhaps we must look forward to.”<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately for Lilienthal, much of his optimism for international atomic cooperation was soon deflated by news that Byrnes had named Bernard Baruch, former chairman of the War Industries Board during WWI, to be the U.S. delegate serving on the U.N. Atomic Energy Commission. Indignant over Byrnes’ choice, Lilienthal asserted, “When I read this news last night, I was quite sick. We need a man who is young, vigorous, not vain, and whom the Russians would feel isn’t out simply to put them in a hole, not really caring about international cooperation. Baruch has none of these qualifications.”<sup>35</sup> Acheson was equally displeased by the news. In his autobiography he wrote that Baruch’s major duty was “the task of translating the various proposals stimulated by the Acheson-Lilienthal report into a workable plan.”<sup>36</sup> On the surface Baruch’s translation task seemed innocuous enough. Still, like Lilienthal, Acheson objected to Byrnes’ choice: “I protested, distrusting Mr. Baruch’s translation and dissenting from Mr. Byrnes and the generally held view that this so-called

---

33. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 29.

34. *Ibid.*, 30.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 212.

‘adviser of me’ was a wise man.’ My own experience led me to believe that his reputation was without foundation and in fact entirely self-propagated.”<sup>37</sup>

According to Lilienthal, soon after his decision even Byrnes admitted that Baruch had been “the worst mistake I have ever made.”<sup>38</sup> The *New York Times* disagreed with Lilienthal and Acheson calling Baruch “a good appointment...and the appropriate choice for this task which carries with it so heavy a responsibility.”<sup>39</sup>

Following the public announcement of Baruch’s appointment came more bad news for Lilienthal. Speaking about who he planned to consult with, Baruch told reporters that “On the manufacture we will look to General Groves and those in American industry who have made a huge success of the use of atomic energy.”<sup>40</sup> Herken writes that Baruch looked to Groves for more than just manufacturing advice, that Baruch’s “principal ally...was Groves, whom the septuagenarian had appointed his ‘interpreter of military policy.’”<sup>41</sup> Baruch presented his plan, which had a more assertive tone towards the Soviets than had the Acheson-Lilienthal Report, to the U.N. Commission on Atomic Energy June 14. The general was satisfied with the Baruch Plan’s tweaking of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report. When addressing the National Safety Council in October, Groves remarked, “The risk of living without this contract [Baruch plan] is greater than living by it...The safeguards which are proposed in the plan

---

37. Ibid.

38. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 59.

39. Editorial, “A Good Appointment,” *New York Times*, Mar. 19, 1946, 22.

40. “Baruch is Named to UNO Body,” *New York Times*, Mar. 19, 1946.

41. Herken, *Brotherhood of the Bomb*, 166.

submitted by the United States are positive.”<sup>42</sup> But they weren’t “positive” to the Soviets who rejected the plan on June 24.

Some historians have argued that American leaders were not surprised by the failure of the Baruch Plan and have even proposed that it was intended to fail. Both P.M.S. Blackett’s *Fear, War, and the Bomb* and Joseph Lieberman’s *The Scorpion and the Tarantula* “contended that American leaders never expected the Soviets to agree to an international agreement.”<sup>43</sup> Barton Bernstein asserts that Groves thought the Baruch Plan was “properly tough-minded and likely to be unacceptable to the Soviets.”<sup>44</sup> If American leaders truly intended the Baruch Plan to fail, would there have been a different scenario if the Acheson-Lilienthal Report had been presented instead? Or going back even further, as Neuse poses, what if there hadn’t been “restrictions added to the consultant’s report [Lilienthal’s consulting panel report] by the Acheson and Baruch’s groups”? Would the Soviets have been a tad more willing to open serious diplomatic dialogue?<sup>45</sup> In the end, Neuse views Lilienthal’s consulting panel as overly optimistic internationalists and the Soviets as have been given no other option but to say no:

He [Lilienthal] and his fellow consultants were part of a large group of Americans who wanted to believe that cooperation would open the Soviet

---

42. Bert Pierce, “Groves Supports Baruch Plan,” *New York Times*, Oct., 10, 1946, 7.

43. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 177.

44. Barton Bernstein, “Reconsidering the ‘Atomic General,’” *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 3 (July 2003): 916.

45. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 176.

Union and reduce its isolationism. That, perhaps, was why the Acheson-Lilienthal Report seemed one of willing and hope—willing the creation of an international body to control the dreadful threat, and hoping the Soviets would accept a proposal that met U.S. security needs but neglected their own.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, compounding Lilienthal's frustrations was word from Oppenheimer that Baruch was pushing Groves' name for the new AEC. Although on most fronts the news was unwelcoming, not all was lost for Lilienthal. His internationalist ADA hopes had been vanquished by Baruch and Groves but there was still hope to be salvaged in Connecticut Senator Brien McMahon passage of the Atomic Energy Act (AEA) of 1946.

President Truman signed the AEA into law on August 1, 1946; the new law's centerpiece being the AEC—a domestic ADA of sorts. On the one hand, it was to be a civilian agency to govern the nation's atomic energy. On the other, it still sought military involvement by providing for a Military Liaison Committee (MLC) which was to bridge the Pentagon and civilian agency. Even before the law was signed into effect by the president, Lilienthal was eyeing the AEC's chairmanship. In late July he writes, "My mind is now made up: If I am offered the chairmanship...I will accept; indeed, now I want the appointment."<sup>47</sup>

However, his mood swung considerably a few days later after learning that

---

46. Ibid., 177.

47. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 74.

Conant was the frontrunner, sourly remarking, “Conant is being pushed by the Army, particularly Groves, as he is very close to Groves, who is determined to continue to run things.”<sup>48</sup>

Lilienthal was ultimately the president’s third choice to head the AEC with Conant and Karl Compton, president of MIT, having already turning down Truman’s overtures. Lilienthal and his commissioners were first announced to the press on October 28, 1946.<sup>49</sup> After the official press conference inside the White House had ended, the five men moved outside to answer questions. The mood was jovial: “Lilienthal light-heartedly jibed that they were the ‘homeless five’ and ‘the quintuplets in a quandary,’ and began talking about the great American problem—house-hunting.”<sup>50</sup> All joking soon ended for Lilienthal in January with the start of his grueling confirmation hearings. Not only did congressional challenges quickly arise, but more serious to his AEC chairmanship was to be the challenge of militarization.

### **The Custody Battle**

As they did Baruch, generally, newspapers greeted Lilienthal’s appointment favorably. The *New York Times* called Lilienthal an “admirable

---

48. Ibid., 82.

49. Joining Lilienthal on the commission were Bill Waymack, former editor of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, Robert Bacher, a Los Alamos physicist; Gordon Clapp, TVA General Manager; Sumner Pike, former Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman; and Lewis L. Strauss, former aide to Herbert Hoover.

50. Anthony Leviero, “Lilienthal Heads Atom Body; Control Passes From Army,” *New York Times*, Oct. 29, 1946, 3.

selection” believing him to be a man of “ability, integrity, clear vision and quick imagination, excellently prepared by years of distinguished public service for this important new role.”<sup>51</sup> When power was officially transferred from Groves and the military to Lilienthal and the civilian AEC on midnight of January 1, 1947, an editorial in the *New York Times* used the occasion to laud civilian and democratic principles, noting, “Surely we are not behaving like a Government or a nation which wishes to terrorize mankind... We believe the quality of its operations [AEC] will be such as to create confidence, not merely among Americans, but among citizens of other countries who do not willfully bind themselves.”<sup>52</sup> The niceties were to end with Lilienthal’s confirmation hearings.

What originally appeared to be a quick confirmation for Lilienthal soon became bogged-down by Republican attacks which branded Lilienthal as a Communist and New Dealer. The *New York Times* reported, “Two weeks ago it was believed generally at the Capitol that, while there would be opposition [to Lilienthal], it would be overridden swiftly. The issues in the fight have swung largely from ‘the Communist line’ to ‘New Dealism.’”<sup>53</sup> Lilienthal briefly considered resigning but was buoyed by the steadfast support of the president who called the Communist charges “absolutely unfounded.”<sup>54</sup> More serious than the Communist or New Deal charges was Arthur H. Vandenberg’s, powerful

---

51. Editorial, “To Control The Atom,” *New York Times*, Oct. 29, 1946, 22.

52. Editorial, “Civilians Take Over Atom,” *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1947, 26.

53. C. P. Trussel, “President Denies Lilienthal is Red; Endorses Fitness,” *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1947, 1, 4.

54. Ibid.

Republican Senator from Michigan, challenge to the AEC that the MLC be given open access to the AEC. At a January 27 hearing Vandenberg said to Lilienthal, “It won’t be satisfactory if a single door is closed to the Military Liaison Committee—the responsibility is too great.”<sup>55</sup> Republican Senator Eugene D. Milkin then asked Lilienthal whether the MLC would be present at all AEC meetings, “that it was the intent of Congress that this be done.”<sup>56</sup> If there were any initial hopes that the AEC might be able to bypass heavy military participation concerning the atom, then the hopes had been premature and overzealous.

Even before the confirmation hearings became more spirited there was already evidence which suggested that the military hadn’t planned to roll over to the AEC. On December 4, 1946, Bill Waymack, newly nominated member of the AEC, met with Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson and Groves. Following the meeting, Waymack alerted his colleague and AEC chairman-designate David E. Lilienthal about his unease for future relations of the civilian AEC with the military. “We pull at a worm, like a robin, and the whole earth explodes and out comes a two-headed elephant,” he told Lilienthal. “This gives a fellow a case of cerebral hernia.”<sup>57</sup> Articulating Waymack’s sense that the military issues were perplexing for the civilian mindset was Neuse’s observation that “Appointed by

---

55. Harold B. Hinton, “Military Liaison of Atom is Urged,” *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1947, 16.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 115.

the president to a civilian agency, they [AEC commissioners] found themselves overwhelmed by military issues.”<sup>58</sup>

That military issues were to predominate the AEC was further driven home to the commissioners by the AEC’s General Advisory Committee (GAC)—a group of scientific experts formed to assist the commissioners with scientific and technologic issues. On July 29, 1947, the GAC informed the commissioners that atomic power was years away from being realized. Lilienthal’s response to the news was heartfelt: “Had quite a blow today. The GAC drafted a statement that, as written, not only discouraged hope of atomic power in any substantial way for decades, but put it in such a way as to question whether it would ever be a consequence. This pessimism didn’t come from nobodies, but from a top group—Oppenheimer, Conant, Rabi, Seaborg, etc. I can’t believe it’s true.”<sup>59</sup> Fairly early on in his AEC chairmanship, Lilienthal was well aware that many of his AEC duties were to focus on military applications of the atom.

Meanwhile, across the Potomac, there was increasing momentum among Pentagon officials that the military, not the AEC, should re-assume custody of the country’s atomic arsenal—in contrast to the practice then prevailing. In doing so, they made use of section 6 (a) (2) of the AEA which stated, “The President from time to time may direct the Commission [AEC] (1) to deliver such quantities of fissionable materials or weapons to the armed forces for such as he deems necessary in the interest of national defense or (2) to authorize the armed forces to

---

58. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 198.

59. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 229.

manufacture, produce, or acquire any equipment or device utilizing fissionable material or atomic energy as a military weapon.”<sup>60</sup> Not surprisingly, before the AEA had even been passed, it was Groves who was busy scheming in favor of military custody. In a January 1946 memo the general “argued that the military could not rely on civilian scientists when it came to preparing bombs for possible use.”<sup>61</sup> Also not surprisingly, Groves was the first to suggest that the military ask the president to place all weapons under the custody of the armed forces during an August 13, 1947, meeting of the MLC. “The trouble with Groves’ suggestion was that it threatened to raise all the old clichés about civilian or military control of atomic energy,” wrote Hewlett and Duncan.<sup>62</sup> The suggestion soon became the military’s official position but Groves resigned months before the issue was settled.

Lilienthal and the AEC formally learned of the military’s challenge on November 12, 1947, when General Lewis H. Brereton, chairman of the MLC, sent Lilienthal a proposal that “in order to insure all interested agencies of the Armed Forces are prepared to use the available bombs, it is necessary that they

---

60. Senate Special Committee on Atomic Energy, “Atomic Energy Act of 1946,” in Robert C. Williams and Philip L. Cantelon (eds.), *The American Atom: A Documentary History of Nuclear Policies from the Discovery of Fission to the Present, 1939-1984* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 84.

61. Robert S. Norris, *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, The Manhattan Project’s Indispensable Man* (South Royaltown: Steerforth Press, 2002), 491. Memo from Groves to Brig. Gen. C. C. Alexander titled “On the Effect of Atomic Energy on the Army of the Future”—written on January 8, 1946.

62. Richard Hewlett and Francis G. Duncan, *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission, Atomic Shield, 1947-1952, Volume II* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1969), 137.

have actual custody of the completed weapons.”<sup>63</sup> Brereton invited the AEC to comment on the proposal but Lilienthal’s only comments were to his journal: “The notion that the military vs. civilian issue is settled grows more and more untenable. Groves is hard at it, of course, but it goes way beyond him. My feeling is that somehow we had better postpone and temporize, avoid a big row for a time at least, but we may not be able to. The ‘custody’ [of weapons] issue may be the detonator.”<sup>64</sup> Lilienthal’s tactic of not commenting on the custody issue lasted only one week when Admiral Thornwald A. Solberg, member of the MLC, broached the topic with the AEC chairman. Lilienthal told Solberg that he did not give credence to the military’s argument that it would not have instant access to nuclear weapons in a time of emergency or adequate experience handling them.<sup>65</sup>

Although the military challenge was a serious one, Lilienthal had a potent ally in the president. In a *New York Times* paraphrased article of a 1946 presidential press conference, Truman said that “he felt the Manhattan Project...should be turned over to a civilian control when Congress fixed the

---

63. Milton E. Key, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Atomic Energy), “History of the Custody and Development of Nuclear Weapons, July 1945 through September 1977,” Mar. 30, 1978, 7, from The George Washington University’s National Security Archives, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/19991020/04-01.htm>, accessed on March 22, 2004.

64. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 262.

65. See Key, “History of the Custody,” 7, for the discussion between Lilienthal and Brereton.

necessary responsibility for the control of the new force.”<sup>66</sup> At another press conference on March 14 the president again expressed his confidence in a civilian agency: “It is a mistake to believe that only the military can guard national security. The full responsibility for a balanced and forceful development of atomic energy...should rest with the civilian group directly responsible to the President.”<sup>67</sup>

After Brereton’s letter and the Solberg discussion, the custodial issue seemed to be placed on the backburner. The GAC talked about the matter in early February of 1948, and concluded, because of technical issues, that the AEC retain custody. Not until early March, when Lilienthal was startled by comments made by the president during a White House meeting, did the topic garner his more serious attention. After mentioning the custodial matter to Truman, the president answered, “Yes...the military had spoken to him about it; looked as if they had a point...He said we would talk about it some other time, and agreed that before we acted we would talk to him further.”<sup>68</sup> The remarks caught Lilienthal off-guard. Nothing said by the president in the past indicated that he seriously considered transferring custody to the military. The president’s comments coupled with events two weeks later greatly discouraged Lilienthal.

While vacationing in Captiva, Florida, listening to a March 25 Edward R. Murrow broadcast, Lilienthal learned that the custodial issue was being raised in

---

66. Samuel A. Tower, “Truman for Civil Control over Atomic Energy in US,” *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1946, 1.

67. Truman, *Memoirs*, 7.

68. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 306-307.

the Senate. Murrow reported that “Senator Bridges said today that the country should return atomic energy to the military, this was one of the most important issues facing the country.”<sup>69</sup> This hit Lilienthal particularly hard. That night he “slept badly...Bridges and all the rest paraded through my dreams.”<sup>70</sup> Bridges’ report was followed by even more dreadful news. On April 9, he learned that an actual legislative bill was being introduced by Senator Wherry to return custody to the military. However, lacking sufficient support, Wherry backtracked. Calling Lilienthal’s secretary, Wherry said the bill “was not intended to be a reflection on the commission...He told Miss Henderson [Lilienthal’s secretary] he certainly didn’t want to get into another fight with David Lilienthal.”<sup>71</sup>

In his next meeting with the president on May 17, Lilienthal and Truman didn’t speak specifically about the topic it seemed to be on both men’s minds. When the subject of atomic weapons was brought up by the president, Lilienthal reassuringly told him “Mr. President, you couldn’t have picked a less bloodthirsty six men if you tried for a long time.” “That’s why I believe in a civilian Commission,” responded Truman.<sup>72</sup> The statement came at a critical juncture for Lilienthal. Only one month later, seemingly having the president’s support, Lilienthal and the military’s long-overdue custody meeting took place. In the discussion, Lilienthal made it apparent to the military that the AEC “would not agree to a joint recommendation [by the AEC and MLC that weapons be

---

69. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 308.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 312.

72. *Ibid.*, 342.

transferred] to the President... This was done very solemnly indeed, but without heated exchanges of any kind, and with expressions in my part of respect for their opinions and motives.”<sup>73</sup> With no consensus having been reached the two groups decided to have the issue arbitrated by the president.

In the period leading up to the White House meeting, all signs pointed to civilian control. A day after the AEC and MLC had met on June 18, the president told Secretary of Defense James Forrestal that “As long as I am in the White House I will be opposed to taking atomic weapons away from the hands they are now in, and they will only be delivered to the military by particular order of the President issued at a time they are needed.”<sup>74</sup> And on July 10, Lilienthal discovered from AEC Director of Budget Jim Webb that Secretary of State George Marshall was against military custody. About Marshall’s position, Webb alerted Lilienthal “Don’t tell anyone this, because his military friends don’t like the idea, but he is against it, and especially is against it now. And I don’t believe the President will approve it.”<sup>75</sup> Even with these encouraging developments, Lilienthal took no chances and remained resolute in his opposition to the military. At a June 30 meeting with new MLC chairman Donald F. Carpenter and other military officials, Lilienthal argued that “the military would continue to push for a shifting of the line, saying next that it would be better if those who had to use the weapons designed them, then when they got that, they should make them, etc.”<sup>76</sup>

---

73. Ibid., 362.

74. Ibid., 377, as told by Truman aid Clark Clifford to Lilienthal.

75. Ibid., 384.

76. Ibid., 375.

With Lilienthal and the military not budging an inch in their positions, a meeting between the two parties was scheduled for July 21 at the White House which Lilienthal dubbed the “showdown” in his journal.<sup>77</sup> Detailing the momentous atmosphere of the meeting, Lilienthal noted, “It was an important session, and a kind of seriousness hung over it that wasn’t relieved a bit, needless to say, by the nature of the subject...I rather think it was one of the most important meetings I ever attended.”<sup>78</sup> The president nodded at Forrestal to begin the discussion. With the military well represented, Forrestal invited Lilienthal to first begin stating his case but the AEC chairman declined the offer believing the military should start because they were the party advocating the change. With the meeting’s protocol settled, MLC chairman Carpenter read a letter prepared by the military which was followed by additional letter readings by the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force, along with the Joint Chiefs. Lilienthal glanced at the president and noticed he wasn’t responding at all well to the readings. When Carpenter began reading additional viewpoints, the president interrupted him, saying, “curtly and not pleasantly, ‘I can read.’”<sup>79</sup>

After the military had finished, sensing the president’s agitation at the letter reading, Lilienthal spoke succinctly and extemporaneously, first citing section 6 (a) (2) of the AEA and then emphasizing that “the division of responsibility between civilian and military provided for under the existing

---

77. Ibid., 387.

78. Ibid., 388-389.

79. Ibid., 389.

arrangement had worked in the past; that it was working now.”<sup>80</sup> When Lilienthal concluded, the military picked up where they had left off. Secretary of the Air Force Stewart Symington told the president the he had just visited Los Alamos and Sandia and observed that “Our fellas at Sandia think they ought to have the bomb. They feel they get them when they needed them and they might not work...Our fellas need to get used to handling it.”<sup>81</sup> Then Forrestal interjected, adding, “You know how important it is to get used to handling a new weapon.”<sup>82</sup> Lilienthal saw Army Secretary Kenneth C. Royall “looking glummer and glummer.”<sup>83</sup> Finally breaking into the conversation, Royall argued, “We have been spending 98 percent of all money for atomic energy for weapons. Now if we aren’t going to use them, that doesn’t make any sense.”<sup>84</sup> But the president “had more than enough” of the meeting and told both parties that he needed more time to deliberate on the matter.<sup>85</sup> Commenting on the military’s presentation of its case in his journal, Lilienthal wrote, “If what worried the President, in part, was whether he could trust these terrible forces in the hands of the military establishment, the performance these men gave certainly could not have been reassuring.”<sup>86</sup>

---

80. Ibid., 390.

81. Ibid., 390-391. Sandia is where the Air Force Special Weapon Program (AFSWP) was headquartered.

82. Ibid., 391.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 650.

86. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 391.

The president's deliberation was short. Only two days after the White House discussion, during a Cabinet meeting, the president announced that the AEC was to retain custody of the nation's atomic weapons. The next day the White House announced in a public statement: "Since a free society places the civil authority above military power, the control of atomic energy properly belongs in civilian hands."<sup>87</sup> Although his international aspirations for civilian control of the "dangerous" atom had ended in defeat, he could find solace in this victory which upheld a main tenant of the AEA—civilian custody of the country's "dangerous" atom. Lilienthal could have catered to Brereton's November 12, 1947 proposal, choosing not to stand in the way of the nation's militarization. But he accepted the additional and immense burden of taking on the military establishment because in his own words: "This is a very important event."<sup>88</sup>

Returning to the two themes of Childs' articles, not only was there fear of military control of the atom, there also loomed General Groves. Like he was to Lilienthal on the Acheson-Lilienthal Report and Baruch Plan, the general remained a thorn in Lilienthal's side during his AEC chairmanship. Both Lilienthal and Groves' idea of the atom's Cold War role for the U.S. starkly contrasted. While Groves advocated isolationism, atomic secrecy and military custody of the atomic arsenal, Lilienthal favored internationalism, atomic openness and civilian custody of the nation's nuclear weapons. Yet there was one similarity that linked each man: both Lilienthal and Groves possessed large egos.

---

87. Ibid., 392.

88. Ibid.

In the end, even in Washington where there are large egos aplenty, there wasn't room enough for both men to cohabitate. As Groves' biographer William Lawren asserts, "The general was in large part a victim of his ego."<sup>89</sup>

### **Groves Battle**

Quite by coincidence, the same day Lilienthal had been calling for atomic openness in Chicago, General Groves was in New York rallying for atomic secrecy. The general was the guest of honor at New York City Hall where outside the building 5000 well-wishers had greeted his arrival. Inside, Mayor LaGuardia and three hundred city dignitaries honored the general for his leadership on the Manhattan Project. After the city hall ceremony, Groves used a luncheon and press conference as public platforms to advocate atomic secrecy. Speaking at the Waldorf Astoria, Groves emphasized that "the War Department is not giving out any more information" until legislation was passed that gave another agency custody over atomic energy."<sup>90</sup> The next day's headline in the *New York Times* proclaimed "Keep Bomb Secret, Gen. Groves Urges."

Exactly when Lilienthal and Groves grew to despise one another is disputed. It was apparent, as Neuse observes, that "both Groves and Lilienthal had outsized egos and they had already developed an adversarial relationship"

---

89. William Lawren, *The General and the Bomb: A Biography of General Leslie R. Groves, Director of the Manhattan Project* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1988), 285.

90. "Keep Bomb Secret, Gen. Groves Urges," *New York Times*, Sep. 22, 1945, 3.

while working on the Acheson-Lilienthal Report.<sup>91</sup> Lawren goes back further, speaking of an incident in 1942 when then TVA chairman Lilienthal refused to meet with Groves outside of TVA office hours. From then on, Lawren claims, Groves always sent a representative to speak with Lilienthal if the MED had to conduct business with the TVA. But this event is not corroborated in either the Neuse or Norris biography and is not listed in Lilienthal's journal. In fact there are no references to Groves in Lilienthal's journal accounts from 1939-1945. Lilienthal does later record an incident, told to him by General George C. Marshall, involving Groves, Marshall and the allocation of monies which is similar to Lawren's account of bruised egos.<sup>92</sup> Lilienthal called Marshall's account a "delightful story." It is evident that Lilienthal relished the chance to strike Groves down. And the newly appointed chairman's first strike against the general was literally crippling.

When the military first nominated Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth D. Nichols to become the AEC's Director of Military Applications, they expected his confirmation to be a foregone conclusion. Nichols already enjoyed a healthy relationship with the AEC during the AEC-military transition period and was the War Department's only nominee for the position.<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately for Nichols, he

---

91. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 183.

92. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 200. Marshall tells Lilienthal a story of how he made Groves wait in his office while he wrote out a check for flower seed amounting to \$3.94 while Groves came to Marshall requesting millions of dollars for a new defense program.

93. See Hewlett, *New World*, 649, for Nichols' relationship with the AEC. The "transition period" refers to then the MED and Groves turned over control of

also enjoyed a close relationship with Groves having been the general's "right arm on the Manhattan Project."<sup>94</sup> To Lilienthal the men's friendship was reason alone to block the nomination. But Nichols and Groves' close association wasn't adequate justification for Lilienthal to base his case against Nichols to his fellow commissioners. He needed something more substantive, ultimately arguing that Nichols lacked the necessary experience the position required.

In a December 1946 meeting between the AEC commissioners consensus was reached that the new Director of Military Applications "would be expected to concentrate on military planning and policy formulation rather than operating problems," qualities which precluded Nichols. On December 21, Lilienthal met with Secretary of War Robert Patterson and explained that "The Commission had now concluded that our division heads should essentially be staff officers, planning, developing, and integrating program, evaluating it, rather than operating people...Nichols was an able supervisor of contracts for construction and production, but had no experience in the development of weapons nor in military planning."<sup>95</sup>

Patterson pleaded with Lilienthal but to no avail. On January 31, 1947, Colonel James McCormack was named the new Director of Military Applications. Although Lilienthal explained to Patterson that the AEC's decision was based on

---

the atomic program to the newly established AEC which was legally enforced at 12:00 A.M. on January 1, 1947, 3.

94. Ibid.

95. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 121.

Nichols' inexperience, it probably had more to do with Lilienthal not wanting Nichols, who he probably deemed Groves' lackey, in such an influential position. The decision backfired.

Announcing McCormack's new post the *New York Times* reported that "The Commission [AEC], while extremely complimentary to Colonel Nichols' accomplishments, apparently felt that for this important post it should exercise a strong degree of independence, so Colonel McCormack was selected."<sup>96</sup> In his journal Lilienthal called his new director "wonderful."<sup>97</sup> Not quite as wonderful for Lilienthal was the same day news he was to receive from Patterson who alerted the AEC chairman that he was pondering appointing Groves to the MLC and sought Lilienthal's advice. Needless to say, Lilienthal was "flabbergasted." "This is pretty bad; it will start the whole civilian vs. military issue all over again. Let's hope something happens to save us somehow," he wrote in his journal. By blocking Nichols, Lilienthal thought that he had neutralized some of Groves' atomic influence and had no inklings that his efforts might have the opposite effect and push Groves into an even more active atomic role as MLC member. Lilienthal described Groves' appointment as happening under "peculiar circumstances," but there was nothing peculiar about it.<sup>98</sup> For Groves, the MLC appointment made sense. If Lilienthal thought his mandate was strong enough to block Nichols, then the general had to get more directly involved in challenging

---

96. Sidney Shalett, "Col. McCormack, 36, Appointed to Key Position on Atomic," *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1947, 3.

97. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 136.

98. *Ibid.*, 139.

AEC position. Groves had worked too hard and accomplished too much to let Lilienthal's atomic ideology, which differentiated too much from his own, run amok in Washington. In his AEC fight against militarization perhaps Lilienthal had been a bit too greedy and miscalculated in his opposition to Nichols.

Still, Groves was deeply despondent over the Nichols' decision. Only two days after Lilienthal informed Patterson that Nichol's nomination was dead, Groves was admitted to the Army's Pratt General Hospital in Miami on January 23. Particulars of the hospitalization were sketchy. A one paragraph story in the *New York Times* noted, "Hospital attaches said they knew only that he was at the hospital 'for rest and treatment.'"<sup>99</sup> And the Norris biography adds no further details of the hospitalization. During the hospitalization period, Groves' confidant Robert Lapp noted that the general and Lilienthal "were not on friendly terms—to put it mildly... This is was most unfortunate since General Groves was by this time a most unhappy and rather lonely figure in Washington."<sup>100</sup> Groves' despondence is best evidenced in a letter he wrote to Bernard Baruch in which the general expresses pessimism over the MLC's impotency, frustration over Nichols' failed nomination and serious thoughts of resigning from the military:

I would be at the mercy of a commission, which has already pointedly avoided using the men who are most experienced in the field of atomic energy. This has been particularly emphasized by the appointment [to the AEC] of a young officer from the General Staff as the Director of Military

---

99. "General Groves Ill," *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1947, 10.

100. Robert Lapp, *Atoms and People* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 80.

Applications, instead of Col. Nichols...As I told you, I will not make any definite decision as to my future until my return from Florida some time next month, but I can see no alternative except to retire from the army.<sup>101</sup>

The letter written from Groves to Baruch was composed in the Miami hospital where the general remained for six weeks. Even after returning to Washington, he took an additional four weeks of sick leave. Certainly having to cede his atomic control to Lilienthal and Nichols' failed nomination didn't make for a healthy disposition.<sup>102</sup>

When Groves joined the MLC in March of 1947, Lilienthal's worries that the general could pose a significant threat to the civilian AEC were somewhat abated by his discovery of a new ally in General Eisenhower, who, now as the Army's Chief of Staff, was well versed on the complaints which enveloped

---

101. Norris, *Racing*, 486.

102. Although Groves was not enamored with his new position on the MLC, Sherry seems equally unimpressed by the civilian-centered AEA of 1946, writing, "It was not much of a victory for civilian control, however, because it still provided for a powerful Military Liaison Committee." (Sherry, *In the Shadow*, 137) Bernstein also qualifies the MLC as being "powerful," and calls Groves' position on the MLC "important." (Bernstein, *Reconsidering the Atomic*, 914) But Groves' letter seems to indicate otherwise, that the true power was at the AEC's behest. Years later when Groves testified at the Oppenheimer hearing, as the general's examiner was listing Groves post-war military credentials only the AFSWP is cited, not the MLC. Instantly recognizing the omission and not wanting it to be absent in the official record, Groves began his testimony by addressing the oversight, "I think you should add that during the period from about March of 1947 until my retirement on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 1948, I was a member of the Military Liaison Committee to the Atomic Energy Commission." U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer: Transcript of the Hearing Before the Personnel Security Board* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 163.

Groves. In June of 1946, Eisenhower received a letter from Iowa Republican Senator Bourke Hickenlooper advising the general not to be swayed by mounting pressure against Groves: “I shall feel strongly critical if, either because of expedience or pressure, General Groves is rewarded for his service by replacement or removal.”<sup>103</sup> In his response to Hickenlooper, Eisenhower asserted, “Actually I am delighted not only that you wrote me on a matter of such importance, but because your idea of General Groves’ abilities coincides exactly with my own.”<sup>104</sup> But Eisenhower grew increasingly tired of Groves’ antics as did others in the Pentagon. Speaking on Groves’ alienation from other high ranking officers, Lapp remarks, “the General managed to irritate many of his fellow-star bearing officers. At least six generals in the military disliked Groves so much that they went to considerable lengths to prepare a sharp bed of thorns for him there.”<sup>105</sup> Not only was Eisenhower to be an ally against Groves, Lilienthal had sympathy from others inside the Pentagon.

Lilienthal first met Eisenhower after a speech the AEC chairman delivered on April 19, 1947, to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE). When Lilienthal finished speaking, as he describes in his journal, Eisenhower pushed his way toward him.<sup>106</sup> Conversing in what Lilienthal characterized as a “low” and

---

103. Louis Galambos (ed.), *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, vol. 7, *Chief of Staff* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), 1105 (notes).

104. *Ibid.*, 1104.

105. Lapp, *Atoms and People*, 80.

106. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 171. Eisenhower’s concern for nuclear issues became a legacy of his presidency. “No President worried more about the dangers of initiating or stumbling into nuclear conflict, claims Sherry. Sherry, *In the Shadow*, 194.

“intent” voice, Eisenhower told the AEC chairman “I want you to know I am on your team—I mean I am on your team. You can count on me.” And Eisenhower’s words seemed to be insincere. Only a week later, McCormack reported to Lilienthal that in a speech delivered to the Secretary’s of War and Navy, the Joint Chiefs and their planning staffs, with Groves in attendance, Eisenhower “went out of his way to comment enthusiastically about my ASNE speech.”<sup>107</sup> Lilienthal welcomed the McCormack’s news: “Choosing that particular place and with General Groves there seems rather significant. I hope to have a long talk with Eisenhower about this business before long.”<sup>108</sup>

The long talk came at a July 5 luncheon. Lilienthal’s journal describes the talk as covering a broad array of topics but the most “interesting” was Groves, who Eisenhower had much to say about:

After you spoke to the newspaper editors last April I told you at the head table you could count on me. I mean just that. I understand Groves, and I know what a problem he is. He is a problem for us over here, too. He was czar during the war, and everything is a comedown for a man of his type. Yes, it is true he has a lot of enemies over here, because of the way he rode on everyone during the war. There are ways of getting things done that don’t require humiliating people and making enemies of them. Say, I know what I am talking about; I worked with Montgomery! And Patton was much the same. But we got the good out of them without hitting them

---

107. Ibid., 174.

108. Ibid.

over the head. I had the authority to run them over rough-shod. Groves will never understand about these two things, he was that way before he was put in charge of this atomic project. Let me make this clear: we put him on that Military Liaison Board for two reasons. That it didn't seem wise to antagonize those people who think he is the last word; and in the second place we ought to use him as long as he has anything to contribute; ought to pump him dry. But if at any time he causes you trouble, let me know, or just say a word to General Brereton and we will take him off. Hope that is clear.<sup>109</sup>

Besides Eisenhower, others inside the Pentagon were interested in the Groves matter as well. Also taking notice was Forrestal who seemed to be more partial to Groves than Eisenhower. Just two days after the Lilienthal-Eisenhower luncheon, "Forrestal," as Walter Millis, editor of Forrestal's diary, paraphrases a July 7<sup>th</sup> entry, "indicated that he thought it 'most regrettable' that the abilities of Major General Leslie Groves...were no longer being employed in this field."<sup>110</sup>

Although the general had his share of enemies, civilian and military alike, there were still also a number of people who endorsed or at least empathized with his plight. Instead of showing empathy to Groves, Lilienthal showed scorn.

---

109. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 217-218. When Eisenhower said "those people who think he is the last word," he was probably partly referring to politicians like Hickenlooper.

110. Walter Millis (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), 291.

When hearing that Groves might be scheduled to testify in late July before a Joint Committee on Atomic Energy (JCAE) hearing investigating security breeches at the AEC, Lilienthal spiritedly asserted, “If he [Groves] appears, there will be fireworks and a busy weekend—perhaps. For he will, for once, have some things to explain. They will have him on the defensive. After sniping at us, sneering at us and running us down, he may find this will be a somewhat different role. We have taken all the kicking around we intend to take.”<sup>111</sup> But to Lilienthal’s amazement, less than two months after uttering these strong words, there seemed the distinct possibility that Groves’ “sniping” and “sneering” were to permanently cease. In mid-September, Brereton informed Lilienthal that Eisenhower planned to relieve Groves of his AFSWP command. Additionally, Eisenhower wanted to know whether leaving Groves on the MLC was “workable” and “agreeable.”<sup>112</sup> Brereton recommended that Groves stay on the MLC but Lilienthal naturally disagreed.

However, Lilienthal’s brief reason for optimism was quickly extinguished by the news he received in an October 15 meeting with Army Secretary Royall. Lilienthal described the AEC as “being bowled over” after learning from Royall that Groves was to remain on the MLC.<sup>113</sup> Lilienthal immediately phoned Eisenhower to voice his displeasure at the decision. Eisenhower told Lilienthal that it would be “an indefensible position if we didn’t use him [on the MLC], as he is the best equipped man in the Armed Forces, and we couldn’t stand before

---

111. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 217-218.

112. *Ibid.*, 236.

113. *Ibid.*, 247.

the public, etc., etc.”<sup>114</sup> Lilienthal was unsympathetic to Eisenhower’s reasoning and at one point interrupted the general to say that the AEC and military “were building toward an impossible operating situation.”<sup>115</sup>

Greatly perturbed by the turn of events, Lilienthal notified Royall that a presidential intervention might soon be necessary to rectify the AEC and military’s deepening chasm. Royall then insinuated to Lilienthal that perhaps the AEC chairman’s qualms with Groves were prompted by Lilienthal’s personal disdain for the general. It seemed Royall had struck a chord with the accusation. Riled, Lilienthal issued this rebuttal:

I said that any implication that this was merely a personal disharmony was quite erroneous; that the situation as we had pointed out as a Commission to Secretary Patterson months ago was this: that the country had decided on a civilian Commission and the President had selected five men to administer the law; that the Commission was entitled to have everyone in the Government proceed on the assumption that a civilian Commission was responsible, and that this particular five-man Commission was responsible and that therefore everything should be done by the Armed Forces and others to facilitate atomic energy development on those assumptions; that General Groves had not accepted those assumptions—that is, he disagreed with the law, and he had no confidence in the men named to administer the law, and furthermore conducted himself in a way that

---

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid., 248.

carried out his fundamental disagreement and opposition to the Commission.<sup>116</sup>

In the midst of dramatically heightened tensions between the civilian agency and the military, Groves was left on the MLC. But Lilienthal's sustained campaign to oust Groves had another effect: it prompted one of Groves' former war associates and fellow Acheson committee members to intervene in the matter.

Eventually it was the efforts of James Conant which were to doom Groves. Conant's "admiration of Groves' brusque, assertive leadership of the Manhattan Project, did not extend to the general's tactics or to his views on atomic weapons in peacetime, particularly his insistence on military custody," noted Conant biographer James Hershberg.<sup>117</sup> To fortify his position against Groves, Conant enlisted the support of McCormack, Vannevar Bush and Oppenheimer. In a letter written by Conant to Oppenheimer appealing for backing, Conant was direct in his analysis of the situation, simply advocating that Groves "should be eliminated by all means from this picture."<sup>118</sup> On January 17, 1948, he, Oppenheimer and Bush met with Forrestal. The official topic of the men's discussion concerned the bettering of relations between the AEC and military.<sup>119</sup> Forrestal told the threesome that his staff had been giving him the same advice that the three were

---

116. Ibid., 250. The Patterson citation refers to January 31 when the War Department head first alerted the AEC that Groves may be placed on the MLC.

117. James G. Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993), 357.

118. Ibid.

119. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 155, details the meeting. Of course Groves was a major part of the bettering of relations discussion.

offering, namely, to get rid of the general. At the end of the meeting even Royall, one of Groves' most avid supporters, was persuaded that the general needed to leave. Of Conant's success in the matter Hershberg observes, "Conant knew how to cut a backroom deal behind an associate's back when the need arose."<sup>120</sup>

A small *Associated Press* blurb appeared in the *New York Times* on February 3, 1948, announcing that General Leslie R. Groves was "voluntarily" retiring from the Army to take a civilian position with Remington-Rand.<sup>121</sup> Like he had on September 21, 1945, Groves used the retirement announcement as occasion to continue his public opposition to the international sharing of atomic secrets. He also expressed little concern over Russia's atomic program, quipping, "I don't expect to live in a cave in the Ozarks just yet."<sup>122</sup> Subsequent to the resignation, Royall named Nichols to head the AFSWP while Forrestal appointed Donald F. Carpenter to succeed Groves on the MLC. Most importantly, Groves' resignation improved the building crescendo of resentment which threatened to severely hamper AEC and military relations. In an April 14, 1948, meeting at the

---

120. Hershberg, *James B. Conant*, 358.

121. The general's resignation had been anything but voluntary and historical accounts characterizing it as such have misinterpreted the event. In efforts to support his militarization thesis, Sherry writes, "The rush of wartime officers into civilian government, corporate, and research posts (Gen. Walter Bedell Smith as head of the CIA, Gen. Omar Bradley as board chairman of Bulouva Research Laboratories, Gen. Leslie R. Groves as vice president for research at Remington Rand) also eroded civil-military barriers of outlook, status, and experience." Sherry, *In the Shadow*, 140. Sherry is correct in saying that Groves' move to the civilian sector "eroded civil-military barriers of outlook" but just in a different context than he intended: it improved the strained relations between the AEC and Pentagon.

122. "Groves, Atom Chief, Will Leave Army to Take Position with Remington-Rand," *New York Times*, Feb. 3, 1948.

White House with new Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, Lilienthal finished the discussion with the president by stating, “I concluded by saying that our relations with the military had been good...I said I had no reason whatever to believe that the good relations between the Commission and the military would not continue.” Johnson agreed with Lilienthal’s assessment, adding, “I agree with that, except that it is a lot better than he has said; they have done a hell of a job.”<sup>123</sup>

The Groves’ controversy did not simply end with the general’s resignation, there were residual effects. One of the more significant changes implemented was Forrestal’s reorganization of the MLC. Not only was the civilian Carpenter slated to be Groves’ replacement on the MLC, he was also to assume the committee’s chairmanship from Brereton. Forrestal hoped that by replacing Brereton with a civilian, “Carpenter could end the crippling hostilities between the Commission and the military and at long last weld the organization into an effective team for building the nuclear stockpile which each day was becoming more critical to national security.”<sup>124</sup>

Making sure all parties were using the same game plan, when asked by the military to officially promote Nichols to head the AFSWP, the president promptly summoned Nichols, Royall and Lilienthal to the White House. Lilienthal’s March 11, 1948, journal entry portrays the meeting as agitated father—Truman—verbally rebuking his quarreling sons—AEC-military:

---

123. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 511.

124. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 155.

The President said he had before him the recommendation of the promotion of Col. Nichols as head of the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project, that he wanted to have a talk with us before acting on it. "I don't want another General Groves incident." Royall injected to say that he saw after his trip West that that situation was as I had said it was, quite impossible.

The President said, "I want it clearly understood before I act on this appointment that this is a civilian-run agency and I thought I ought to say this to you directly. It requires cooperation between the civilian and the military, of course." Nichols said, "You can count on 100 percent cooperation." I said, "You have a team, Mr. President."<sup>125</sup>

After hearing word that Groves was to resign, Lilienthal was not as overjoyed as one may expect. Angered by another of Groves' exploits, Lilienthal was incredulous about the resignation:

Saturday I was boiling and steaming. General Groves again. This time he objected to inclusion of some things in our report to Congress...The objections were an almost perfect caricature of what is known as the "military mind." Then, this morning about 10 A.M., came word: General Groves has announced that he has requested retirement, to enter private business. This indicates that the confident expectation he and his crowd had that we would be out in six months, as John O'Donnell and the Hearst

---

125. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 303.

press predicted when I was confirmed, those hopes have gone flat. This business of not having Napoleon sitting on Elba while his crew waited for ‘the Day’-that at least will no longer be our trouble.<sup>126</sup>

Others allegiant to Groves were alarmed at the announcement. When initially hearing about Groves’ resignation, Hickenlooper rushed to the Pentagon to meet with the Secretary of Defense. Forrestal writes that Hickenlooper was troubled by “The indispensability and therefore the perpetuation of Mr. Lilienthal in power...He was disturbed by the fact that there had been practically no advances made in the art since the dissolution of the Manhattan District and he was further concerned that the one man who had brought the Manhattan District to a successful completion was no longer in this field of work.”<sup>127</sup> Hickenlooper’s worries proved lasting.

A little over a year later on May 22, 1949, he demanded that the president ask for Lilienthal’s resignation charging the AEC chairman with “incredible mismanagement.” “Our atomic program is suffering from equivocation, misplaced emphasis and waste. There are a number of important problems, the solution of which requires administration, through the chairman of the AEC,

---

126. Ibid., 287. The reference to “six months” is the date when Lilienthal and the other AEC commissioner’s term expired. If the President decided to resubmit their names to Congress for additional terms they faced a Republican controlled Senate. The prospects that they would be given another AEC term seemed dim. Relative to John O’Donnell, this would not be the only instance in which Lilienthal would complain about the Hearst Press’ biases against the AEC chairman.

127. Millis, *The Forrestal Diaries*, 380.

which is competent, realistic and courageous,” insisted the senator from Iowa.<sup>128</sup>

Formal hearings over the charges began May 26 with the outcome being mixed:

“In the public view Hickenlooper had lost the verdict. But Lilienthal was exhausted and wounded, the Commission confused and cautious.”<sup>129</sup>

Hickenlooper’s charges were testament to Lilienthal’s battles against militarization. As a Groves’ apologist, Hickenlooper would not have gone to the immense trouble of holding hearings if he did not consider Lilienthal a grave threat to everything he and the general stood for regarding the atom. But by far, the most enduring consequence of the hearings was the mental anguish felt by Lilienthal.

### **The Hydrogen Bomb Battle**

In March of 1949, Lilienthal wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* which continued his campaign, begun at the Chicago conference, for atomic openness. Stressing democratic values, Lilienthal asserts:

It is important for us to recognize that neither the atomic weapon nor any other form of power and force constitutes the true source of American strength...That source is our ethical and moral standards of precepts, and our democratic faith in man. This faith is the chief armament of our

---

128. Clayton Knowles, “Hickenlooper Asks Lilienthal Ouster,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1949, 19.

129. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 361.

democracy. It is the most potent weapon ever devised. Compared with it, the atomic bomb is a firecracker.<sup>130</sup>

Little did Lilienthal realize that the firecracker was about to get a whole lot larger.

His final battle, as AEC chairman, with the military was precipitated by distant events. On the evening of September 19, 1949, during an extended vacation on Martha's Vineyard, while driving home after a dinner-out with friends, Lilienthal's car was unexpectedly stopped short of its destination. His depiction of the event has a Hollywood movie feel:

11 P.M. Monday night, Sept. 19. Driving up to Norton Circle, returning with Pat Hough and Helen, from dinner with the Henry Houghs and Bob Duffuses in Edgartown. A heavy ground-fog. Just at the Circle (the Wuthering Heights background of the goat field and its boulders faintly visible), the headlights pick out the figure of a man, hatless, squinting into the lights, looking bemused, hooking his thumb in the hitchhiker's gesture (though, of course, there's nothing beyond to hitch to but the gate). I said quietly, It's Jim McCormack (being Brigadier General James McCormack, AUS, Director of the Division of Military Applications of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission). As I frequently found him on a windswept moor, in the dead of night, on an island, outside a goat field. It was he. No

---

130. David E. Lilienthal, "Our Faith is Mightier Than Our Bomb," *New York Times*, Mar. 6, 1949, SM11.

questions; said he had lights a candle in our house. Had he parachuted; what was this?<sup>131</sup>

Over two beers from Lilienthal's icebox, McCormack proceeded to tell Lilienthal the startling news of a successful Russian atomic test and that the AEC chairman was immediately needed in Washington the following day. The pair boarded an Army C-47 the next morning and headed to Washington.

When Lilienthal discussed the matter with the president later that afternoon there was disagreement concerning a public statement. The president appeared apprehensive to issue a statement fearing it would result in public paranoia but Lilienthal disagreed. He believed that a statement would reassure the public that the president was abreast of Russian events; second, the announcement would show the American people that the president was not afraid of the Russians; and third, Lilienthal hoped, it would reassure the President that he could level with the citizenry without him having to fear that widespread panic would ensue. Two days later, on September 23, 1949, the president released a statement concerning the Russian test which concluded by saying, "This recent development emphasizes once again, if indeed such emphasis were needed, the necessity for that truly effective enforceable international control of atomic

---

131. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 569. Helen was Lilienthal's wife.

energy which this Government and the large majority of the member of the United Nations support.”<sup>132</sup>

National magazine publications interpreted the statement’s significance differently. *Newsweek* elected to put an ominous looking picture of Joseph Stalin on its October 3 issue accompanied by a caption asking, “Atom War, Cold War, or Peace Through Fear?” An editorial inside *Life* warned “As Marxists they do not prefer war, but as totalitarians self-doomed to expansive power they are remorselessly driven toward war.”<sup>133</sup> *Time* had a more hopeful tone, noting, “By & large, the U.S. accepted the fact with grim concern but with no panic.”<sup>134</sup> *Life* concurred a week later: “People aren’t even talking about it...Personally we are glad that there is more wailing over the Yankees than over the bomb.”<sup>135</sup> But many inside the Pentagon, Congress and the nation’s universities were talking about “it.” As for Lilienthal, surprisingly, his journal entries don’t reveal an immediate and heightened sense of excitement over the developments. The first time he seriously referenced the Russian bomb relative to his AEC duties was over one month after the McCormack visit.

Word of the Russian test came at an especially bad time for Lilienthal.

Earlier in August, he had hoped that a vacation to Martha’s Vineyard would mend

---

132. Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President on Announcing the First Atomic Explosion in the USSR, September 23, 1949,” in Robert C. Williams, and Philip L. Cantelon (eds.), *The American Atom: A Documentary History of Nuclear Policies From the Discovery of Fission to the Present, 1930-1984*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 117.

133. *Life*, Oct. 3, 1949, 22.

134. *Time*, Oct. 3, 1949, 7.

135. *Life*, Oct. 10, 1949, 38.

some of the lingering Hickenlooper hearing lethargy: “Everything looks set for a departure next Thursday morning for the Vineyard, and six weeks of rest and vacation. I’m pretty tired, though far better than I’d have hoped for.”<sup>136</sup> Before leaving, he met one last time with the president at the White House on August 15. The first subject the two spoke about was the hearings:

After greetings-the President seemed quite relaxed and happy, though worn-told him I had been in to see him the morning the roof fell in-the Monday when Hickenlooper’s blast appeared-and he had sent me out of his office rarin’ to go. “Well, you’ve survived, I see,” he said, grinning from ear to ear. “I told you what you were up against: a couple fellows” (he held up two fingers) “up for re-election” (meaning McMahan and H.) “And that it wouldn’t turn up a thing-and it didn’t. You came out of it better than ever.”<sup>137</sup>

Lilienthal hadn’t come “out of it better than ever” and his time-off at Martha’s Vineyard was not a cure-all. As Hewlett and Duncan note, “Somehow, the weeks of seclusion had failed to restore the energy and taste for challenge which had always marked Lilienthal’s career.”<sup>138</sup>

One month into their Martha’s Vineyard vacation, Lilienthal came to the conclusion that he should leave the AEC. “I’m not a ‘new man’ and never will be;

---

136. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 561.

137. Ibid., 564. The “blast” Lilienthal is referring to is when Hickenlooper’s charged Lilienthal with “incredible mismanagement.”

138. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 374.

but I'm no longer acutely weary, and certainly this is a place to develop some perspective. Right now it seems clear: get out of Government service no later than the end of this term," he confided to his journal.<sup>139</sup> Clearly still haunted by the hearings, Lilienthal and his wife used a portion of the vacation to discuss potential careers after his stint as AEC chairman was slated to end June 30, 1950. However, before he would leave his post, the beleaguered Lilienthal, once again, faced-off with the military. But this time his opposition was much broader, including members of Congress, AEC commissioners and accomplished physicists.

Responding to mounting pressure from those inside the AEC, back at Martha's Vineyard, Lilienthal sent a letter to Oppenheimer on October 11 requesting that the GAC chairman convene his committee for a special meeting to discuss how the AEC should react to the news of a Russian bomb. Oppenheimer scheduled the meeting for the weekend of October 29-30, the first available dates that Conant and Enrico Fermi were able to attend.<sup>140</sup>

As he had spearheaded the campaign to force Groves' resignation, according to Hershberg, Conant led the opposition against the hydrogen bomb during the meetings. While Hershberg remarked, "Conant emerged as the leader who built the consensus against the H-bomb," Richard Rhodes described

---

139. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 567.

140. GAC member Glenn Seaborg was in Sweden and not able to attend the meeting.

Conant's arguments more as "contentious moralizing."<sup>141</sup> With committee members having had not reached a unified position on Saturday, by Sunday consensus was reached against development of the H-bomb. Of the Sunday swing, Lilienthal who agreed with the GAC's final recommendation, noted, "Yesterday it appeared that less than half of the eight [GAC members], never more than five, would be for going ahead all-out; today they were in full agreement: that they would not be for it."<sup>142</sup> But the GAC's unanimous verdict on Sunday was not cause for celebration. Instead, those within the AEC who agreed with the GAC now worried about Lilienthal's fortitude in facing another conflict of his life.

On Sunday evening after the GAC's weekend meetings had concluded, it seemed as though Lilienthal was prepared for yet another tough fight.

Commenting on his opposition to the hydrogen bomb, Lilienthal's Sunday night journal entry revealed nothing atypical about his resolve to see the issue through:

"At present the issue seems to me fairly simple, and fairly conclusive: this [hydrogen bomb] would not further the common defense, and it might harm us, by making the prospects of the other course—toward peace—even less good than they are now...Things are certainly coming to the showdown stage and fast."<sup>143</sup>

But those close to him were beginning to doubt whether he was indeed ready for

---

141. Hershberg, *Conant*, 474. Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 400.

142. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 582.

143. *Ibid.*

another “showdown.” Many in the AEC had noticed a change in Lilienthal since the Hickenlooper hearings. Of the difference, Hewlett and Duncan wrote:

Manley, sensing the danger of indecision within the Commission, heard Oppenheimer confirm his fears in a telephone conversation on Monday morning, October 31. Oppenheimer’s description of his talk with Lilienthal convinced Manley that he should stay in Washington for a few days to see that the committee’s report was not lost in the confusion of other matters. He found that Pike shared some of his impressions of Lilienthal’s fatigue. Pike saw a striking contrast to the courageous leadership Lilienthal had exhibited at the confirmation hearings in 1947, and some of the headquarters staff were nervous that Lilienthal would see that others had noticed the change in his demeanor.<sup>144</sup>

Despite their concerns, like the Sunday night journal entry, Lilienthal seemed to be giving the issue his full attention a few days afterward. During a November 3 flight from Chicago to Washington, for approximately an hour, Lilienthal wrote notes pertaining to his feelings relative to the hydrogen bomb. The final section of the notes is devoted to his thoughts, still internationalist in nature, on the Cold War titled “alternative to H-bomb program” :

To maintain the opportunity to take advantage of every [chance] to develop a situation in which the U.S.S.R.-U.S. relations will simmer down

---

144. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 386. John Manley was executive secretary of the AEC.

to less than boiling, and then gradually be accepted as rivalry and opposition, but not enmity that verges daily on war; to persist in efforts to the Cold War by a stalemate at about the present stage (add and subtract a bit from year to year) or to win it, by Russian inability to make further net inroads, or win it by the Russian Politburo's unwilling but pragmatic acceptance of her own internal strengthening as her measure of her own political success. This projected on a 20- to 25-year time segment. But what happens then? Well, let some other, perhaps wiser men try to solve that one then.<sup>145</sup>

Like he and his wife had discussed earlier at Martha's Vineyard, soon the enlisting of "wiser men" was to be necessary because only days after writing down these thoughts, on November 7, still having not fully recuperated from his Hickenlooper wounds, Lilienthal met with the president to inform him of his plans to resign. Paraphrasing the encounter in his journal, Lilienthal writes, "So I went into my story, with no frills. I had been in public service for 19 consecutive years, come next Feb., always in a controversial field. I have to move on, and I've come in to talk it over with him, not only as the President but also on a personal basis, as my friend."<sup>146</sup> Lilienthal told the president that he only planned to serve until January or February, time enough to make his successor's transition smoother. The talk mostly centered on the resignation, with the president adding

---

145. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 590.

146. *Ibid.*, 592.

that he didn't want a "military-minded civilian, he must be someone who sees the necessary military setting, how it fits in, but he must be someone who doesn't regard that as our objective."<sup>147</sup> Only at the end of the discussion was the hydrogen bomb briefly referenced, with the president adding, "I've got a serious—a very serious—problem about this to decide before long."<sup>148</sup>

Lilienthal found himself back inside the Oval Office just two days later, this time to deliver the president a report listing the summaries of each AEC commissioner's position relative to the H-bomb.<sup>149</sup> Thinking it especially appealed to the president's "sanguine temperament," Lilienthal told the president that his primary objection to the hydrogen bomb was that it would ruin the president's "program for peace."<sup>150</sup> To Lilienthal's amazement, the president had already read defense secretary Johnson's copy of the report AEC report. Like he had been two days earlier, the president seemed more interested in speaking about Lilienthal's replacement than of the H-bomb.

The topic apparently drew little more interest from new MLC chairman Robert LeBaron.<sup>151</sup> Days after the White House meeting, LeBaron told Lilienthal that the DOD "had not even gotten under way with much of a staff study in the Joint Chiefs" over the hydrogen bomb.<sup>152</sup> Even though LeBaron had said to

---

147. Ibid., 594.

148. Ibid.

149. Three were against H-bomb development—Lilienthal, Smyth and Pike—and two were for it—Strauss and Dean.

150. Ibid.

151. LeBaron had replaced Carpenter. Lilienthal and LeBaron's discussion took place on November 11, 1949.

152. Ibid., 596.

Lilienthal that the Pentagon wasn't seriously addressing the H-bomb issue, some historians have argued that the decision had already been made by the military to make the atom the centerpiece of its defense. One such historian is David Rosenberg who contends that "Truman himself initiated a process that would finalize American dependence on the atomic air offensive...The president's continuing refusal to budget adequate conventional alternatives thus made the United States virtually dependent on the atomic bomb."<sup>153</sup> Rosenberg cites Truman's fears of spiraling inflation for his May 13, 1948, placement of a \$14.4 billion ceiling on the 1950 defense budget. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) estimated that for the U.S. to continue supporting "adequate" conventional forces in Europe and, in the case of war, for the navy to be able to carry out operations in the Mediterranean, a defense budget of \$21-31 billion was required. Even a compromise of 16.9 billion might have been acceptable. The military argued that the only offensive operation the president's \$14.4 billion budget permitted was an atomic air offensive from the British Isles and Cairo-Suez region.<sup>154</sup> In the end, according to Rosenberg: "After four years of planning, the military's perception of Soviet strength and American weakness, and the need to rely on atomic weapons in ever greater numbers to restore the balance, was so deeply entrenched that it could not be undone."<sup>155</sup>

---

153. David Alan Rosenberg, "American Atomic Strategy and the Hydrogen Bomb Decision," *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (June 1979): 63-87, on 69.

154. *Ibid.*, for information about Truman's 1950 budget limiting military options.

155. *Ibid.*, 87.

Even if military policy hadn't been handcuffed by budget constraints, it seems unlikely that there existed willingness by the military to seriously listen to opposing viewpoints regarding the H-bomb. According to Hewlett and Duncan, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson had little sympathy for the concerns of other government agencies: "Secretary Johnson clearly had no intention of admitting State Department or Commission officials to the inner circles of military planning," telling one AEC official that "he would not permit the Commission, as the 'producer' of nuclear weapons, to participate with the military, as the 'consumer,' in determining weapon needs for the same reason that he was opposed to having the Department of Defense certify the need for additional Commission facilities."<sup>156</sup> If Johnson believed development of the hydrogen bomb prudent, there seemed little chance that his opinion could be swayed from those outside the agency.

And at least some serving under Johnson in the Pentagon were inclined to favor the H-bomb. On November 15 Manley met with Brien McMahon and William Borden of the Joint Committee.<sup>157</sup> According to the official history of the AEC, when LeBaron and General George F. Schlatter joined the threesome for lunch "Manley's spirits sank as McMahon and LeBaron found themselves in

---

156. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 370.

157. McMahon was the Connecticut Senator whose legislative fight ensured civilian control of the AEC. After resigning as chairman of the JCAE, McMahon placed William Liscum Borden, a twenty-eight-year-old recent graduate of Yale Law School, as the JC's executive director. Borden had already vociferously advocated the build-up of America's atomic stockpile in a book titled *There Will Be No Time* which described a nuclear attack on Pearl Harbor. Herken, *Brotherhood*, 194.

general agreement on the potential value of the Super.”<sup>158</sup> And four days after telling Lilienthal that the Pentagon was not seriously considering the hydrogen bomb, LeBaron, himself, and the entire MLC also became supportive of development. Shortly thereafter on November 23, the JCS forwarded a report to Johnson, largely based on MLC positions, which stated that “Soviet possession of the weapon ‘without possession by the United States would be intolerable’”...“If the Super was feasible, it seemed evident to the Joint Chiefs that the weapon might act as a deterrent to war and would provide an offensive weapon ‘of the greatest known power possibilities.’”<sup>159</sup> But the MLC and the JCS were not the only H-bomb proponents. Cracks of dissent were starting to appear from within the AEC itself with some of the most vehement support for the hydrogen bomb coming from one of Lilienthal’s very own commission members.

When contemplating his resignation during his Martha’s Vineyard vacation, one reason cited by Lilienthal was AEC commissioner Lewis L. Strauss. On September 19 Lilienthal writes, “Then there are selfish reasons: Lewis has made it almost impossible to enjoy the Commission as a family, as we did when we started out, something I worked hard to develop.”<sup>160</sup> As early as late September, Strauss had already been trying to persuade two of his fellow AEC “family” members, Gordon Dean and Sumner T. Pike, to join him in advocating the hydrogen bomb. Knowing that neither Lilienthal nor Henry Smyth were sympathetic to his position, Strauss only chose to show a memorandum he had

---

158. Ibid., 393.

159. Ibid., 395.

160. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 568.

written in defense of the development of the H-bomb to Dean and Pike. On November 25 Strauss wrote the president recommending “that the president should direct the Atomic Energy Commission to proceed with all possible expedition to develop the thermonuclear weapon.”<sup>161</sup> This time the military wasn’t the only challenge to Lilienthal. Now the dissent was much closer to home, coming from inside the AEC. Also joining H-bomb proponents were prominent voices from within the scientific community, namely Ernest Lawrence and Edward Teller, challenged Lilienthal as well.

While en-route to Washington for a radiological conference, on October 7, Berkeley physicists Ernest Lawrence and Luis Alvarez decided to make one stop in New Mexico at Los Alamos laboratory to speak with physicist Edward Teller about the hydrogen bomb.<sup>162</sup> After they arrived at Los Alamos, Teller, Manley and physicist-mathematicians George Gamow and Stan Ulman briefed Lawrence and Alvarez on recent developments concerning the Super. Teller was encouraged by Lawrence’s optimism regarding the H-bomb and decided to accompany Lawrence and Alvarez back to the Albuquerque Hilton, “where the

---

161. Lewis S. Strauss, “Lewis Strauss to Harry S. Truman, November 25, 1949,” in Williams and Cantelon (eds.), *American Atom*, 128.

162. Teller’s association with the Super is well known. He and Enrico Fermi discussed the potentialities of a thermonuclear reaction during the winter of 1942 at Columbia University. He first alerted his colleagues to the notion of a hydrogen bomb during conference later that year at Berkeley. In an interview with Herken in 1992, Serber told Herken that Teller’s revelation caused great excitement among those at the conference: “Everybody forgot about the A-bomb as if it were old hat.” (Herken, 66) Oppenheimer was deeply troubled by Teller’s ideas. He immediately called Arthur Compton and the two met three days later on Michigan beach. The two men “briefly considered recommending that scientists go no further down the road that might lead to the superbomb.” Herken, *Brotherhood*, 67.

trio talked into the early morning about the newly improved political prospects for the Super.”<sup>163</sup>

After arriving in Washington the following day, Lawrence and Alvarez met with Lilienthal on October 9. The meeting went badly. Lilienthal describes the day as being full of “talk about supers, single weapons capable of desolating a vast area. Ernest Lawrence and Luis Alvarez in here drooling over the same. Is this all we have to offer?”<sup>164</sup> Alvarez later wrote of the discussion that “Lilienthal wordlessly swiveled in his chair and stared silently out the window.”<sup>165</sup> But Lawrence and Alvarez had a more receptive audience the next day at the Pentagon with AFSWP chairman Nichols. During the meeting, Lawrence proposed that the JCS make the Super a military requirement.” Nichols told Lawrence he would share the physicist’s position with General Hoyt Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff. Days later at a JCAE meeting on October 14, Vandenberg announced that it was the Air Force’s firm contention that the hydrogen bomb be completed as quickly as possible.

Another potent voice advocating the development of a hydrogen bomb came from Senator Brien McMahon. Together with the hawkish Borden, the pair passionately lobbied Washington in favor of development. Herken describes the two as hopeful of “ensuring that the nation achieved what Borden called ‘atomic abundance.’”<sup>166</sup> Lilienthal was quite aware of McMahon and Borden’s campaign.

---

163 . Herken, *Brotherhood*, 202.

164. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 577.

165. Herken, *Brotherhood*, 203.

166. *Ibid.*, 194.

During his November 7 meeting with the President, Lilienthal expressed reservations at the efforts of the physicists and McMahon in supporting the Super: “I told him our concern was that this would get up a head of steam from some of the scientists and from McMahon and his Committee to try to put on a blitz to get a quick decision.”<sup>167</sup> Although the Lawrences, Strausses and McMahons of the world posed significant troubles, Lilienthal’s main foe continued to be the military.

When the GAC issued a report on December 3 reaffirming their earlier October position, it did not take long for the military to respond. On January 13, 1950, the JCS sent Johnson a paper which was specifically intended to counter the second GAC report. Johnson immediately forwarded the JCS paper onto the president. Paraphrasing the JCS’s position, Hewlett and Duncan noted:

The Super, in the chief’s opinion, would serve as a deterrent against Soviet aggression and to that extent would strengthen the defenses of the nation. Production of the Super would place additional burdens on material and manpower resources, but would be within the nation’s capability without dislocating the existing defense effort. The Joint Chiefs opposed forswearing or renouncing the Super. The American people of the free world expected the United States to develop the most effective weapons against communist aggression. As for moral issues, the chiefs voiced the responsibility of the United States to assert its moral and physical

---

167. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 594.

leadership. It was folly to argue in war that one weapon was more moral than another.<sup>168</sup>

The report found a sympathetic reader in the president. On January 19 he told Sidney Souers, National Security Council executive secretary, that the report “made a lot of sense and that he was inclined to think that was what we should do.”<sup>169</sup> McMahon also thought the JCS report to be sound. When the JCS’s position was summarized to McMahon and the JCAE on January 20, McMahon was moved to suggest that the GAC had now been “effectively removed from further considerations of the Super.”<sup>170</sup> Still, Lilienthal persisted in fighting McMahon’s notion that the GAC was no longer relevant.

After reading the JCS position, Lilienthal’s first impulse was to send it to the GAC so that the committee could issue a rebuttal. When he called James S. Lay seeking permission to forward the report to the GAC, Lay told Lilienthal that he would confer with the president and then get back to Lilienthal with an answer.<sup>171</sup> The answer was a disappointing one for Lilienthal: “Lay called back to report that Truman considered the report ‘confidential advice to the President.’ Lilienthal was allowed to show the report to his fellow commissioners, but then no further.”<sup>172</sup> McMahon’s observation now seemed correct. Time had run out

---

168. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 400.

169. Rosenberg, “American Atomic Strategy,” 83.

170. Hewlett, *Atomic Shield*, 403.

171. Lay was soon replacing Souers as the National Security Council’s executive secretary.

172. *Ibid.*

on the GAC and time was quickly running out on Lilienthal to stop the Super's momentum. He next set his sights on Acheson.

In December when the president had called for a special subcommittee of his National Security Council, composed of Johnson, Acheson and Lilienthal, to convene and debate the H-bomb issue, it appeared that Acheson's was to be the swing vote. However, after stringent lobbying efforts by Lilienthal and Conant had failed to persuade Acheson, the issue seemed all but decided. When the NSC subcommittee met one final time on January 31, Acheson, siding with Johnson, voted in favor of development. Finding his viewpoint the lone one in the discussion, frustrated, Lilienthal fired this statement at Johnson and Acheson concerning the "Military Establishment":

The proposal for accelerated research and development toward a thermonuclear weapon, however, presented a clear case where the underlying assumptions, policies and plans of the Military Establishment to provide for our defense needed to be examined independently if there was to be substance to the principle of civilian control of atomic weapons by the Commission. If a military conclusion could not be examined into and was not examined into independently by the Secretary of State, the Atomic Energy Commission, and of course by the President, but was regarded as the whole answer to the ultimate question, then this definitely

removes any notion of civilian participation in a fundamental policy question.<sup>173</sup>

To Lilienthal, the hydrogen bomb debate was far more than just a discussion of thermonuclear weapons or Cold War strategy. As in his earlier battles with Groves and the military, Lilienthal was deeply fearful of a “Military Establishment,” Sherry’s “militarization,” Waymack’s “two-headed elephant,” and this fear drove him to protest many decisions which he perceived could strengthen the military’s scope.

Ultimately, Lilienthal lost his final battle with the military over the H-bomb. After Johnson, Acheson and he went to the White House to inform the president of the group’s decision, the president issued a public statement: “It is my responsibility as Commander and Chief of the Armed Forces to see to it that our country is able to defend itself against any possible aggressor. I have directed the Atomic Energy Commission to continue its work on all forms of atomic weapons, including the so-called hydrogen or superbomb.”<sup>174</sup>

Lilienthal solemnly took the news to the GAC. Among other developments of the day, the president also decided to gag GAC members from taking the debate public. The gag-order effectively ended public discussion. “It was like a funeral party--especially when I said we were all gagged. Should they resign? I said definitely not, on the contrary. This would be very bad,” writes

---

173. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 627.

174. Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President on the Hydrogen Bomb, January 31, 1950,” in Williams and Cantelon (eds.), *American Atom*, 131.

Lilienthal of the GAC's reaction.<sup>175</sup> But it was Lilienthal who was to resign.

That same day, describing his emotional defeat and hopes for the nation, he remarked:

No denying, this is a night of heartache. But there is some personal satisfaction, where there is nothing but pain for the decision made today. For I have found my manhood sufficient for one of the hardest tests I've ever had: to stand up in the meeting and say No to a steamroller, knowing it would be easy to equivocate, or to acquiesce silently, be a good sport, etc...It was a hard experience, and my views didn't prevail. I hope I was wrong, and that somehow I'll be proved wrong. We have to leave many things to God; this one He will have to get us out of, if we are to get out.<sup>176</sup>

Nearly three weeks before Groves' jurisdiction over the MED was set to be transferred to the AEC on midnight of December 31, 1946, Lilienthal met with the president on December 11. During the discussion Lilienthal casually mentioned to the president that there existed the distinct possibility that relations between the AEC and military may experience troubles in the future. The president reassuringly replied, "I expect that. The Army will never give up without a fight, and they will fight you on this from here on out, and be working at it in all sorts of places...I know how they are, they are trained never to give up.

---

175. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy Years*, 633.

176. *Ibid.*, 634.

I know because I am one of them.”<sup>177</sup> The president’s forecast had been precise and the military had vociferously fought. The battle to shape the nation’s evolving atomic policy was not without its share of casualties. Groves’ pressured resignation, Hickenlooper’s tarnished reputation resulting from his unsuccessful hearings and Oppenheimer’s rescinded security clearance in 1954 were among the wounded. As for Lilienthal, after a seventeen-year stint in public office, his resignation as AEC chairman can also be tallied on the casualty list. If it not for the deep wounds inflicted from the Hickenlooper hearings, Lilienthal might have gone on standing in the steamroller’s path.

### **Conclusion: Lilienthal, Anti-militarism, and the Counter-culture Connection**

Twenty-five years after writing *The Making of a Counter Culture*, speaking of why the counter culture had sprung-up in the U.S., one prominent reason cited by Theodore Roszak was as a response to the military-industrial complex and nuclear proliferation:

Unfortunately, granting the military-industrial complex a free hand to set the political agenda entailed liabilities—like the cancellation of democracy. Or, worse still, the possibility of incinerating the greater part of the civilized world. The military-industrial complex was, after all, a system committed for its very survival to an authoritarian style and a paranoid geopolitical worldview. Otherwise, how to justify the expanding warfare state and endless arms race?...The Cold War was the lifeblood of

---

177. Ibid., 118.

the military-industrial complex, and the Cold War brought with it the balance of terror and a worldwide community of fear. Sooner or later somebody with his finger on the button was bound to miscalculate. But what of that? Intoxicated with apocalyptic power, thinkers in high places began to flirt with surrealistic thermonuclear scenarios of “acceptable casualty levels” that ran to a hundred million...tops.<sup>178</sup>

If combating the military-industrial complex and “thermonuclear scenarios” are qualities possessed by counter culturists, then surely Lilienthal’s name deserves mention relative to the counter culture. Not only did his efforts from 1945-1950 attempt to check the ever-expanding military-industrial complex, they were also aimed at stopping nuclear proliferation.

Not stifled by his hydrogen bomb defeat, Lilienthal persisted in opposing nuclear proliferation for the remainder of his life. In a 1975 *New York Times* op-ed titled “If This Continues, the Cockroach Will Inherit the Earth,” concerned with international nuclear proliferation, Lilienthal called for the International Atomic Energy Agency to “be the sole processor of the spent fuel from the safe atomic power plants,” so that nations could not extract plutonium from the spent fuel to develop atomic weapons.<sup>179</sup> And only one year before his death in 1981, Lilienthal published his final book, *Atomic Energy: A New Start*. The book’s

---

178. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), xxi.

179. David E. Lilienthal, “If This Continues, the Cockroach Will Inherit the Earth,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1975, 35.

concluding words referenced back to the Acheson-Lilienthal Report and proposed a suspension of atomic weapons manufacturing:

An American sponsored moratorium on the production of more bombs could conceivably provide the breathing space for a new start, perhaps a revival in some altered form of the American Plan for International Control of Atomic Energy proposed by this country more than thirty years ago. That plan was based on the all-out world-wide development of the peaceful atom, using the world's great need for more energy as leverage and incentive for the control and elimination of the dangerous atom, the bomb.<sup>180</sup>

The culmination of Lilienthal's campaign against nuclear proliferation came in 1976 when he testified before the Senate Government Operations Committee. During the hearing, commenting on the potential for nuclear calamity, Lilienthal said, "The tragic fact is that the atomic arms race is today proceeding at a more furious and more insane pace than ever...We have to decide now what we can do now within our own capabilities to prevent a bad situation from becoming disastrous." And then with vintage Lilienthal optimism, he put forward that "Congress and the President order a complete embargo to the export of all nuclear devices and all nuclear material, that it be done now, and done

---

180. David E. Lilienthal, *Atomic Energy: A New Start* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 116.

unilaterally.”<sup>181</sup> The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* lauded his testimony, claiming that “if the country had heeded the Acheson-Lilienthal plan thirty year earlier, the world would not be facing continuing nuclear peril.”<sup>182</sup> From the drafting of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report until the end of his life, Lilienthal stayed involved in trying to find solutions to the vexing issue of nuclear proliferation. But although he battled the military-industrial complex and nuclear proliferation, there was much to Lilienthal’s ideology which starkly contrasted from that of the counter culture.

First on the list of differences between Lilienthal and counter culturists was the New Deal. Many in the counter culture looked disdainfully on New Dealers like Lilienthal who they perceived had cultivated government bigness which in turn spawned the military-industrial complex. Roszak writes that “the New Deal finished out its course by ushering in the military-industrial complex...which represents the highest stage of urban-industrial dominance.”<sup>183</sup> More explicit in his critiques critical of the New Deal was Charles A. Reich’s *The Greening of America*. Reich viewed the New Deal as “a planned, rational America...where technology would take the lead in creating a better life,” but which caused “a transfer of power from the man in the street to the man from the *Harvard Law Review*”—to men exactly like Lilienthal.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, in

---

181. David Burnham, “U.S. Ban on Nuclear Equipment Urged by Former Atomic Energy Chief,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1976, 2.

182. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 299.

183. Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1989), xiv.

184. Reich, *The Greening*, 53

Reich's estimation, the New Deal "had convinced much of America that its people must be placed under the control of something larger and more rational than individual self-restraint; that individual must, for the good of all, become part of a system."<sup>185</sup> As for the New Deal's legacy, Reich writes, "The lasting product of the New Deal era was not its humanism or idealism, but a new consciousness that believed primarily in the domination and the necessity for living under domination."<sup>186</sup> Although possibly applauding Lilienthal's anti-militarization energies, Reich placed blame squarely on New Dealers whose penchant for big government made the military-industrial complex possible.

Like Reich, Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* equated technology with domination and totalitarianism: "Technological rationality reveals its political character as it becomes the great vehicle of better domination, creating a truly totalitarian universe."<sup>187</sup> Also connecting totalitarianism with technology is Roszak who asserted, "So subtle and well rationalized have the arts of technocratic domination become in our advanced industrial societies that even those in the state and/or corporate structure who dominate our lives must find it

---

185. Ibid., 60. That the individual should become part of a system greatly appealed to Lilienthal who connected the idea with "grass roots democracy." In *TVA* he wrote: "When the principles of grass roots democracy are followed, electricity, like soil minerals, provides men with a stimulus in their own lives, as well as an opportunity to work together with others toward a purpose bigger than any individual." Lilienthal, *TVA: Democracy on*, xxii. Lilienthal saw the system as enhancing individual civil liberties. The messages of many counter culturists had a Libertarian feel to them—big government takes away individual rights.

186. Ibid.

187. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 18.

impossible to conceive of themselves as the agents of totalitarian control.”<sup>188</sup>

Speaking of how the counter culture viewed a technological society, Thomas P.

Hughes notes that counter culturists “believed that the rational values of the technological society posed a deadly threat to individual freedom.”<sup>189</sup> Lilienthal saw the situation in an entirely different light.

Going back to 1944 in *TVA: Democracy on the March*, Lilienthal believed that technology and democracy led to increased individual freedoms instead of repression. The same theme, that technology inspired freedom, is again spouted by Lilienthal in his 1952 *Big Business: A New Era* in which he writes:

There is a new dream: a world of great machines, with man in control, devising and making use of these inanimate creatures to build a new kind of independence, a new awareness of beauty, a new spirit of brotherliness.

---

188. Roszak, *The Making*, 8.

189. Thomas P. Hughes, *American Genesis: A History of the American Genius for Invention* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 444-445. It is worth noting that not all associated with the counter culture were critical of technology. Lilienthal’s views were reminiscent of another counter culture figure, Robert S. Pirsig. Through his 1974 popular book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (ZAMM)*, Pirsig celebrated technology: “Technology is not an exploitation of nature, but a fusion of nature and the human spirit into a new kind of creation that transcends both.” Pirsig’s lauding of technology has been misinterpreted in two historical accounts on the 1970s by David Frum and Peter Carrol. In his book *How We Got Here: The 70s, The Decade That Brought You Modern Life For Better Or Worse*, Frum references *ZAMM* in a section of his book listing literary works which denounced rationalism and technology. Likewise, Peter Carroll’s study of the 1970s titled *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened* also portrays *ZAMM* as an attack on science.

The brain of man conceived these fabulous machines, and the intellect of man can master them to further the highest purposes of human freedom and culture.<sup>190</sup>

In fact, Lilienthal was such an ardent believer in technology as the world's saving grace, in 1953 he formed Development and Research Company (D&R)—a privatized TVA of sorts. Following in the tradition of the TVA, D&R sought to assist depressed areas of the world through engineering and technology. Before it folded in 1979, among some of the places D&R had established contracts with were Africa, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Italy, and Iran.

Also significantly contrasting from the counter culture were the ideas Lilienthal put forward in his 1953 book *Big Business: A New Era*. In *Big Business* Lilienthal argued against anti-trust legislation and called for a Basic Economic Act to judge business, not in terms of bigness, but instead in terms of how it furthered the public interest. That the book seemingly was a call for a private TVA was not lost on critics. Richard Hofstadter remarked, "Lilienthal's more recent defense of big business does not represent a conversion to a new philosophy but simply an ability to find in private organization many of the same virtues that as TVA administrator he found in public enterprise."<sup>191</sup> Neuse's criticisms of the book noted Lilienthal's duplicitous ways: "In spite of his grass

---

190. David E. Lilienthal, *Big Business: A New Era* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 204.

191. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 323.

roots rhetoric, Lilienthal had been a proponent of bigness since the TVA days—first as director of the largest public power producer in the nation and then as leader as an industrial monopoly over the greatest source of power in the world.”<sup>192</sup> Whereas the New Deal saw big government and technology as protecting people from economic uncertainties, uplifting them from depression and increasing their freedoms, the counter culture saw government bigness and technology as canceling civil liberties and producing a totalitarian environment.

Lilienthal never envisioned his anti-militarization efforts as part of the counter culture. In fact he seldom mentioned the counter culture in his journals. However, his occasional reference to it was not ever critical. In September of 1968, while walking the streets of New York and seeing Hippies he was reminded of his own youth: “So they do go without washing their feet, sit around for hours whanging those guitars, and all the rest. So they are full of catch phrases about ‘the Establishment’ and tearing down the ‘power structure.’ So they don’t have a cause, any sense of what they would do to make things better, as I did as a young rebel and radical—well, let them have fun.”<sup>193</sup> It is difficult to measure what impact counter culture “catch phrases” and Roszakian literature had on the nation’s militarization. More intelligible are Lilienthal’s post-war efforts in ousting Groves and keeping the atomic arsenal in civilian hands. The early stages of the Cold War were a time of nervousness and fear and there can be little blame assigned to any individual who was engaged in the battle to shape atomic policy.

---

192. Neuse, *David E. Lilienthal*, 256.

193. David E. Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 7, *Unfinished Business, 1968-1981* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 75.

Whether it was the isolationism of Groves and Hickenlooper or the internationalism of Lilienthal, in this time of great uncertainty, all were motivated by principles they thought best for the country.

Yes, modern American history, as Sherry rightly points out, has been dominated by the trend of militarization, but, as Lilienthal's example indicates, there have always been strong counter-trends against the domination of American society by the military establishment. In 1960, Eisenhower's memorable farewell speech warned Americans to "guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."<sup>194</sup> The anti-war counter-culture movements of the 1960s-70s demonstrate that many were indeed on "guard." In the wake of 9/11, efforts in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq are clear indications that a re-militarization is taking place in the U.S. Not only will the counter-currents against this re-militarization continue to take the form of protests on America's streets, there will also be counter-currents protesting from inside of Washington, by civilians. Another Lilienthal may be hard at work.

---

<sup>194</sup> Sherry, *In the Shadow*, 234, taken from *Eisenhower PP*, 1960-1961: 1035-40.

## Bibliography

- Acheson, Dean. *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*. New York: Signet, 1969.
- Baruch, Bernard M. *Baruch: The Public Years*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.
- Bernstein, Barton J. "Reconsidering the 'Atomic General.'" *Journal of Military History* 67, no. 3 (July 2003): 62-87.
- Blankett, P.M.S. *Fear, War and the Bomb: Military and Political Consequences of Atomic Energy*. New York: Whittlesey House, 1949.
- Carroll, Peter. *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- Eiler, Keith E. *Mobilizing America: Robert P. Patterson and the War Effort, 1940-1945*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Frum, David. *How We Got Here: The 70s, the Decade that Brought You Modern Life (for Better or Worse)*. New York: Perseus Books, 2000.
- Galambos, Louis, ed. *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, vol. 7, *The Chief of Staff*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Groves, Leslie R. *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962.
- Hartz, Louis. *The Liberal Tradition in the United States*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1995.
- Hawkins, Helen S., G. Allen Greb, and Gertrude Weiss Szilard, eds. *Toward a Livable World: Leo Szilard and the Crusade for Nuclear Arms Control*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987.
- Herken, Gregg. *Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002.
- Hershberg, James. *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- Hewlett, Richard G. and Oscar E. Anderson. *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission: The New World, 1939-1946, Volume I*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962.
- Hewlett, Richard G., and Francis Duncan. *A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission*, vol. 2, *Atomic Shield, 1947-1952*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.
- Hughes, Thomas P. *American Genesis: A History of the American Genius for Invention*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.
- Key, Milton E. "History of the Custody and Development of Nuclear Weapons, July 1945 through September 1977," March 30, 1978, 1-26. From The George Washington University's National Security Archives, website:

- [www.gwu.edu/~nsarchive/news/19991020/04-01.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchive/news/19991020/04-01.htm), accessed on June 13, 2003.
- Lapp, Robert E. *Atoms and People*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956.
- Lawren, William. *The General and the Bomb: A Biography of General Leslie R. Groves, Director of the Manhattan Project*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1988.
- Lieberman, Joseph I. *The Scorpion and the Tarantula: The Struggle to Control Atomic Arms*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970.
- Lilienthal, David E. *TVA: Democracy on the March*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Big Business: A New Era*. New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Change Hope and the Bomb*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 1, *The TVA Years, 1939-1945*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 2, *The Atomic Energy Years, 1945-1950*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 3, *The Venture-Some Years, 1950-1955*. Harper & Row, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 4, *The Road to Change, 1955-1959*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 5, *The Harvest Years, 1959-1963*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal*, vol. 7, *Unfinished Business, 1968-1981*. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Atomic Energy: A New Start*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- McCloy, John J. "In Defense of the Military Mind." *Harper's* 194, no. 1163 (Apr. 1947): 341-344.
- McCullough, David. *Truman*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.
- Michelmore, Peter. *The Swift Years: The Robert Oppenheimer Story*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1969.
- Millis, Walter. ed. *The Forrestal Diaries*. New York: The Viking Press, 1951.
- Neuse, Steven. *David E. Lilienthal: The Journey of an American Liberal*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996.
- Norris, Robert S. *Racing for the Bomb: General Leslie R. Groves, The Manhattan Project's Indispensable Man*. South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 2002.
- Novick, Peter. *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Oxnam, Bromely G. *Personalities in Social Reform*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.
- Pfau, Richard. *No Sacrifice too Great: The Life of Lewis L. Strauss*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1984.

- Pirsig, Robert S. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.
- Reich, Charles. *The Greening of America*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Rhodes, Richard. *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.
- Rhodes, Richard. *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
- Rosenberg, David Alan. "American Strategy and the Hydrogen Bomb Decision." *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (June 1979): 62-87.
- Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1989.
- Schwarz, Jordan A. *The Speculator: Bernard M. Baruch in Washington, 1917-1965*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981.
- Sherry, Michael S. *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Truman, Harry S. *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman*, vol. 2, *Years of Trial and Hope*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1956.
- Williams, Robert C., and Philip L. Cantelon. eds. *The American Atom: A Documentary History of Nuclear Policies From The Discovery Of Fission To The Present*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- U. S. Atomic Energy Commission. *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer: Transcript of Hearing before Personnel Security Board*. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1954.
- U. S. Department of State. *Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy*. (Acheson-Lilienthal report) Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946.

January 1, 1947: U.S. Atomic Energy Commission: President Truman created the Atomic Energy Commission and appointed David E. Lilienthal its chairman. Robert Oppenheimer was appointed Chairman of its General Advisory Committee (GAC). The purpose of the commission was to foster and control the peacetime development of atomic science and technology. Creation of the commission followed intense debate, and reflected America's Cold War optimism during a time of nuclear monopoly. The rationale of the commission was that atomic energy should be employed not only in the form of nuclear weapons for The Atomic Energy Commission. By Alice Buck July 1983. U.S. Department of Energy Office of Management Office of the Executive Secretariat Office of History and Heritage Resources. Introduction. During the preceding year, Lilienthal and Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson had co-authored the well-known Acheson-Lilienthal report which had formed the basis for the American plan for international control of atomic energy. By mid-July 1950 Gordon Dean had become chairman of the Commission, and the Nation was no longer in a twilight zone between peace and war. Following an attack by North Korean troops across the 38th parallel, President Truman ordered U.S. forces to the aid of South Korea. The Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy was written by a committee chaired by Dean Acheson and David Lilienthal in 1946 and is generally known as the Acheson Lilienthal Report or Plan. The report was an important United States document of the early Cold War era, as it discussed possible methods for the international control of nuclear weapons and the avoidance of future nuclear warfare. Historical context. A proposal to pass the responsibility for the control of atomic energy to a United Nations Atomic Energy Commission was endorsed by both the USA and the Soviets in 1945. In the first years of the atomic era, it was generally believed that the great obstacle facing a would-be developer of an atomic bomb was the acquisition of sufficient fissile material.