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862a.394/5-1260

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: May 12, 1960

SUBJECT: German Development of Ultra-Centrifuge

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Albert Ernecke, Commercial Counselor, German Embassy  
Mr. Charles Sullivan, S/AE  
Mr. Robert Winfree, S/AE  
Mr. Bernard Menke, Atomic Energy Commission  
Mr. John Devine, GER

MAY 19 1960

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Dr. Ernecke explained that he had requested the appointment with Mr. Sullivan in order to convey information received from his Government in response to the mention made of the ultra-centrifuge problem by Secretary Herter in his conversation with Foreign Minister von Bismarck on March 15. Dr. Ernecke explained that several experimental ultra-centrifuges, for the production of enriched uranium, have been made by the Sartorius Corporation which is located near Goettingen in Northern Germany. About two years ago several experimental centrifuges were sent to Brazil in response to a Brazilian request. These centrifuges were not such that enriched uranium could be produced for practical purposes. As far as the German Government knows the Brazilians have not made any progress in their work with the experimental centrifuges.

In the meantime work has gone on in Germany toward the further development of the ultra-centrifuge and the principal efforts are being made by AEG and Degussa who are being assisted by the Ministry for Atomic Energy. At the present time there is nothing significant to report in the way of progress regarding experimental work but perhaps in three months or so more can be said. The German groups involved hope to produce about 25 more ultra-centrifuges to carry on their developmental work.

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Dr. Ernecke

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Dr. Ernecke then mentioned that Professor Kistenmacher is working along similar lines in the Netherlands but up until now there has been no cooperation between the German and Dutch groups. He said that the German authorities hope to be able to tell in two or three years whether the ultra-centrifuge method has real possibilities.

In regard to export control of ultra-centrifuges, Dr. Ernecke said that none can be exported without special licenses which are issued jointly by the Ministry for Atomic Energy and the Economics Ministry. Licenses would not be issued if there was any chance of an experimental ultra-centrifuge reaching a destination not in the public interest. Dr. Ernecke said there would be a disinclination to allow the ultra-centrifuge to be sent to non-NATO countries. In response to a question by Mr. Sullivan, Dr. Ernecke said he had no information as to whether the Dutch were exporting experimental centrifuges. Dr. Ernecke replied to another question by Mr. Sullivan saying that he did not know whether any of the German operation was classified.

Mr. Menke then said that Dr. Ernecke might not know that the State Department had recently asked Ambassador Dowling to discuss ultra-centrifuge developments with German authorities and to inquire about the possibility of controlling exports of the ultra-centrifuge. Mr. Menke then referred to the research that the United States has done in this field over a period of years and to our contacts with German scientists working on this subject. He said that in our opinion the ultra-centrifuge development might have practical results in about two years and for this reason we have classified our work. One of our main interests in the discussion with the German Government on this subject would be to ascertain the possibility of Germany classifying its work in this field. Mr. Menke said that our scientists are very much interested in discussing with the Germans further work in the development of centrifuges. Mr. Menke added that there was added urgency to solve these problems of cooperation in export control since the Atomic Energy Commission has been approached by several United States firms which want to work out licensing arrangements with Degussa in this field.

Mr. Sullivan thanked Dr. Ernecke for the information which he brought and said that in view of the fact that we had already asked Embassy Bonn to take up the subject with the German Government and the fact that most of the information in which we were interested was in Germany, it seemed better to have the next discussions of this subject take place in Bonn. Dr. Ernecke agreed.

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