

FAS IN THE 1960s: FORMATIVE YEARS

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I am sharing some memories of the period 1960-1970 when I served as FAS General Counsel. I start by echoing Freeman Dyson's caution that 50-year old memories are unreliable. For anyone interested in FAS history, visit <http://fas.org/publications/public-interest-reports/> for a complete record of FAS Newsletters, beginning with the first publication on March 1, 1946. It's a great trip down memory lane.

I first learned about FAS in late 1958 when my wife, Dr. Maxine Singer, a molecular biologist employed by NIH, shared with colleagues her concerns about a range of science-related public issues. I was then a young lawyer in the small DC office of a larger NY-based general practice firm; the DC office had substantial experience representing, among many other clients, American Indian tribes in matters before Federal agencies and on Capitol Hill.

At that time, FAS volunteers published a newsletter 8-10 times a year to keep its members (approximately 2000) informed about matters of concern to scientists – e.g., radiation hazards, nuclear weapons, passport denials, government secrecy, loyalty oaths, and civil liberties for scientists – in anticipation that scientists would take direct policy to influence governmental action. For several years, the FAS Newsletter was assembled on our dining room table and, willy-nilly, I became part of the process.

Recall, if you can, that in December 1953, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, chaired by Admiral Lewis Strauss, withdrew the security clearance of J. Robert Oppenheimer. In late 1954, the clearance was formally revoked after a hearing. Oppenheimer was a distinguished physicist who was then the Director of the Institute for Advanced Study and chair of the AEC's General Advisory Committee. During World War II, he was the Scientific Director of the

Manhattan Project and was in every way a major force behind America's successful wartime effort to build the atom bomb.



THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION will ultimately review the security board's findings on Oppenheimer. AEC Commissioners are (left to right) Eugene Zuckert, Henry Smyth, Chairman Lewis Strauss, Thomas Murray and Joseph Campbell. Chairman Strauss, after only four days in office, initiated the inquiry.

Members of the Atomic Energy Commission, April 26, 1954. Extracted from "U.S. Ponders a Scientist's Past," Life magazine. Source: SCARC Holdings, Oregon State University Libraries.

In November 1958, President Eisenhower nominated Strauss, to the dismay and outrage of FAS members and many others, to be the interim Secretary of Commerce. When Senate confirmation hearings were held the following spring, several FAS leaders testified against confirming Strauss. In June of 1959, by a vote of 46-49, the full Senate declined to confirm Strauss. [For a detailed history, see "Green, The Oppenheimer Case: A Study in the Abuse of Law," 33 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, September 1977.]

That political triumph persuaded the FAS leadership that FAS needed enhanced representation in DC. In 1960, FAS retained my law firm and I became the FAS General Counsel. One of my tasks was to arrange appointments with Congressional staff and Executive Branch officials for FAS leaders visiting in Washington. The small, separate FAS office was closed and all membership and administrative functions were thereupon transferred to my law office.

By 1960, the test ban treaty and creation of an Arms Control and Disarmament Agency had been added to the FAS agenda and the Kennedy-Nixon presidential campaign was underway. In addition to providing administrative support for all FAS activities relating to membership, dues collection, Council meetings, officer elections, chapter support, and relations with other like-minded organizations (e.g., SANE), we organized a series of breakfast briefings by FAS members to inform Members of Congress and Congressional staffers about, and stress the need for, an official focus for arms control activity – an idea that found support among both Democrats and Republicans. Shortly before the 1960 election, such an agency was created by Executive Order within the State Department and was continued after Kennedy's inauguration.

Among Kennedy's first White House appointments was MIT professor, Jerome Wiesner, as his Science Advisor. Wiesner was instrumental in responding positively to quiet efforts by FAS and others to organize an official apology to Oppenheimer for the AEC's humiliating 1953 withdrawal of Oppenheimer's access to any classified information. Those efforts proved successful when Kennedy, in mid-1963 (prior to his assassination), announced that Oppenheimer would receive the Fermi Award. The Award was presented by President Johnson in December 1963 in a small White House ceremony. The December 1963 FAS Newsletter reported:

Fermi Award to Oppenheimer

Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer received the Enrico Fermi award, the AEC's highest honor, from President Johnson at a White House ceremony on December 2. In presenting the \$50,000 award, the President praised Dr. Oppenheimer as a "leader" who by his example had set "high standards of achievement" for the nation. The presentation came just ten years from the date of President Eisenhower's order suspending Dr. Oppenheimer's security clearance. Those present at the ceremony included members of the AEC, Congressmen, past winners of the Fermi award, and a representative of FAS.

During the 1960s, FAS maintained its interest in keeping lines of communication open between U.S. and Soviet scientists; FAS members were deeply engaged in the Pugwash conferences and in assuring that U.S. scientists could communicate readily about science and science-related matters with colleagues abroad. The list of FAS worries, both at home and internationally, included long-range missiles and anti-ballistic missile defense, tactical nuclear weapons, CBW, and accidental wars. And on the horizon were issues related to newly-appreciated powers of scientists in biological sciences. At the December 1968 annual meeting of the AAAS in Dallas, FAS put together a day-long symposium entitled "Genetic Technology – Some Public Considerations."

By the mid-1960s, FAS was sufficiently stable (both in terms of membership and finances) so that in November 1969, FAS began a search for a full-time Executive Director who would revitalize the organization – increasing the membership and broadening its agenda. On July 1, 1970, Jeremy J. Stone assumed that position, consolidated operations in a new office on Capitol Hill, and helped keep FAS focused on its original mission – to assess and advise concerning "the impact of science on national and world affairs."