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Darrow, Karl K.
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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW
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August 9, 1945.

CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED
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Dr. Ernest O. Lawrence,
University of California.

Ernest:

This is written to put on record the fact that you told me, on August 9, 1945, that you had presented to the Secretary of War by word of mouth the view that the "atomic bomb" ought to be demonstrated to the Japanese in some innocuous but striking manner, before it should be used in such a way as to kill many people. You made this presentation in the presence of Arthur Compton, Fermi, Oppenheimer and others, and spoke for about an hour. The plea was rejected by the Secretary of War on the grounds that (a) the number of people to be killed by the bomb would not be greater in order of magnitude than the number already killed in fire raids, and (b) an innocuous demonstration would have no effect on the Japanese.

I hope [illegible] in due course you will publish the fact that you made this plea. [illegible] partly because I concur in your view, but mainly because I [illegible] possibility of a public opinion harmful to science [illegible].

Many people, including some who are prominent and influential, think that science does more harm than good to humanity. Some of these, and some who think oppositely, contend that scientists ought to control the applications of their discoveries, though I for one cannot imagine how they could exercise any control. Some people go so far as to blame scientists for the consequences of their discoveries. I think that it is not far-fetched nor absurd to conjecture that in time to come, people will be saying "Those wicked physicists of the 'Manhattan Project' deliberately developed a bomb which they knew would be used for killing thousands of innocent people without any warning, and they either wanted this outcome or at least condoned it. Away with physicists!" It will not be accepted as an excuse that they may have disapproved in silence. We do not excuse the German civilians who accepted Buchenwald while possibly disapproving in silence.

I think that if the war ends today or tomorrow or next week, this sort of criticism will not be heard for a while, and yet it will be heard eventually -- and particularly it will be heard if a time should come when some other power may be suspected of planning to use the same device on us. In other words, if the use of this weapon without forewarning has really brought quick victory, this fact will delay but will not indefinitely prevent the emergence of such an opinion as I have suggested. It may then be of great value to science, if some scientist of very great prominence has already said that he tried to arrange for a harmless exhibition of the powers of the weapon in advance of its lethal use.

Sincerely yours,

Karl K. Darrow

Karl K. Darrow.

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