

LETTERS

to the EDITOR

Sir:

On Friday, February 3rd, I read in the local newspapers: "Senior Scientist—Harwell Atomic Energy Research Establishment—accused of violating national security regulations . . . Dr. Klaus Fuchs . . . purportedly giving to persons unknown, unknown information—calculated to be prejudicial to the (British) national interests. . . ." On his arrest, Dr. Fuchs' only statement was (to the Harwell security officer): "Do you realize what this means to Harwell?"

These are but fragments of the early report which, doubtless, has now been more than fully amplified in the American press. Before continuing, let me state emphatically that the point of this letter is far more than just the case of His Majesty's Government vs Klaus Fuchs, charge: TREASON. The real issues lie fathoms deeper in the sea of moral and ethical problems which form the media of the complex called civilization. We do not presume to the omniscience required to propound invariable truths, but insofar as we dare try to approximate to such truths, these can be seen only with the lens of the mind and the soul.

My immediate reaction was shock; no, it was not possible! I had worked closely with Fuchs in America during the two-year wartime period of Anglo-American cooperation on the Manhattan project, and I believed that the essential workings of this man's mind were reasonably clear to me. His political allegiances were unknown to me, but I was fully convinced that he was not capable of betraying any trust—personal or national. Doubtless another case arising from fear, ignorance, and hysteria, more bureaucratic witch-hunting, particularly in view of the vague allegations, information unknown to persons unknown, and Fuchs' seeming concern only with effect on morale at Harwell. It was natural enough to so interpret his simple, quiet remark because of the similar effect of

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*Head of the Department of Physics,
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a number of totally unfounded accusations brought against scientists in the United States, notably the recent case of Dr. E. U. Condon, Director of the Bureau of Standards, who was cleared in private hearings but never really cleared in the eyes of the public by a public withdrawal of charges and apology—as was, indeed, his least due.

Fuchs was not a dear friend, of which one can have all too few in our pressed times and lives, but he was a fellow scientist and I could not, in the light of the ethics and principles by which I guide my life, stand by without moving a hand in his behalf. In the worst case, I thought, he might be guilty of some naïveté or indiscretion, but not treason—this was unthinkable. I could no more believe it of myself; and the treason to which I refer is not necessarily in the national sense, but rather that basic concept which is far better expressed in the "Christian Ethic" which knows neither creed, nor color, nor national boundaries.

That night I wrote a letter to Professor Sir John Cockcroft, Director of the Harwell Laboratories, stating in essence my acquaintance with and faith in Fuchs, that we had worked together for a long period, that I had been active (in a small way) since the very inception of the Manhattan Project and was a consultant to the AEC in the U. S. from the time of the war's end. Therefore, I asked his kind consideration of my urgent request to be apprised of the exact nature of the case, so that I might chart my course accordingly; and in this I added my apologies for the evident liberty of intruding in matters internal to British interests (particularly as an invited visitor), but that my personal code and convictions forbade either noninterference or desertion of a friend—friend in any degree whatever. Life is unbearable in its many ugly manifestations—if one has not some deep-rooted faith in the essential decency of people and the necessity of a justice of some kind, sometime, somewhere—though it may not always be on this particular plane of ours or in the sparkling instant which to each of us is a lifetime.

Then followed several not too pleasant days of waiting for a reply; there were discussions with colleagues, of course, but not too deep a concern for Fuchs. Some of his presumed friends would (probably) desert him—and it was not my place to sit in judgment on them, but there was faith in a certain justice. Surely I would be accorded the courtesy of a reply as requested, and if not, then I would go to London and stay there until accorded the deemed right to know the true facts. Fuchs would be all right, though it would not be a pleasant experience or memory for him.

Professor Cockcroft's reply arrived on Thursday (February 9), the day before the appointed preliminary hearing to which I had planned to go, though I was completely

exhausted from long days and nights of work. The essential text:

"Dear Professor Corson:

Thank you for your letter of 3rd February about the case of Dr. Fuchs. We have all been very much shocked by this development. . . . At present the case is, as you know, *sub judice* and we who are officially connected are not therefore allowed to comment on the case."

This was, of course, rather the reply I should have anticipated and would probably have given had the positions been reversed.

I had been giving lectures at various universities and had yet some more to deliver at other universities in England. The urgings of my colleagues prevailed upon me not to go to the arraignment hearing in London, because likely I would not be admitted. However, I felt that I should wire Fuchs:

FEBRUARY 10, 1950

DR. KLAUS FUCHS
BOW STREET JAIL
LONDON

HAVE WRITTEN COCKCROFT. NATURALLY DO NOT BELIEVE THE ACCUSATIONS. IF I CAN BE OF ANY SERVICE CALL ON ME.

No immediate reply, but on returning to the Hotel on Friday afternoon I found a wire from Fuchs:

THANK YOU. THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO. THE EVIDENCE WILL CHANGE YOUR MIND. FUCHS.

How shall I describe the pain which shook me in mind and body? Time and again I have placed my (naive?) faith in people only to have it dissolve as in a mist. Yet, conviction, ethics, morality, faith, whatever you choose to name it, is the Phoenix of every age. It cannot die, it is perhaps our one superiority to the lower beasts, and alone encompasses all our claims to progress. Not all the flashing chrome, the towering canyons of buildings, the super-speed, the beautiful mathematics, the atomic bombs, none of these measures progress that truly matters. Yes, it is easy to laugh this off. But if words seem ineffectual it is only because it has all been spoken before and by far better men than I presume to be.

And now, what about Klaus Emil Julius Fuchs? Why did he betray the trust of his friends, and even more, the trust of his adopted country which gave him sanctuary from Nazi persecution? Apart from the matter of the security oath, why does he admit his monstrous amorality and all but say "I face my fate, probably death, calmly; I clearly know what I have done; I have no regret!"

Senses reel under the impact of this seeming fanaticism, and when objectivity begins to return, one asks the question: "Is it not possible that he is, after all, a strange complex of confused idealism which somehow superseded an oath (and if an oath is not in some sense sacred, it is a travesty)?" Of course, in point of elementary logic, this

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is irresolvable and if we seek to forgive (if we dare) then we seek a rationalization of the irrational.

I learned then, too late, that Fuchs has long been a fanatical communist, and though I insist on the basic precept that each one of us must by right believe ideologically, and otherwise, as he chooses, yet I cannot subscribe to unreasoning, irrational, even destructive and vindictive fanaticism. These issues are too involved for further analysis here, but we may ask "What lies at the root of Fuchs' fanaticism which was so strong that he admits to giving regularly, over a period of some seven years, detailed technological atomic information (and it is only technological information which is at all secret, in any sense, because the basic principles are joint property of all reasoning scientists) to agents of a foreign power?" Indeed he apparently admits receiving payment, and this is incidental; nor are we engaged in name calling—there is nothing to be said but Judas!

How easy this is to say, and yet consider that this man is clearly a brilliant psychopathic personality, perhaps made so by the torture and murder of members of his family by the Nazis. Small wonder that he could be deranged! Rather the fantastic element is that he was not found out on the basis of his actions when he first came to England.

Are the security officials the basically guilty ones? More generally, as with all psychotics whom society neglects to its own ultimate sorrow, is not society now on trial side-by-side with Fuchs for making it possible that Fuchs may, indirectly and in some measure, be responsible for the millions who will perish in the onrushing holocaust! It matters very little to me as a scientist and for myself, but for my daughter and in the name of all children in whom alone rests the treasure of the future, I protest. No, I demand that this madness, which overtook mankind millennia before it was prepared to receive the great gifts which might obtain from nuclear energy, stop!

There is no adequate punishment on our plane for the Fuchses; nor would it matter ultimately even were he set free, though this is not likely. The issue at stake is that mankind will pay the greater price—utter and complete destruction of all living things—if this madness continues! As a scientist I realize full well that the original atomic bomb and its variations, per se, could not easily achieve this end, but with the now definitely feasible thermonuclear processes devolving on hydrogen and lithium, etc., the full halt of sensed-time is at hand! The earth itself will not be destroyed; this does not appear scientifically (?) possible, though even to speak of it is a titanic and ghastly commentary on civilization today.

Thus, the issue is not the small one of a particular case, the psychotic Fuchs vs The State, but it is one of Mankind vs God in the form of truth, beauty, ethics, and logic. All plans proposed thus far have failed, and no

country, not even my own that I love well, is free of this guilt. Not all the appeals to statesmen, not all the appeals through the clergy, not all the appeals to all peoples can stop what is now inevitable. Only one dim hope hovers in the clouded night which is the future; this is the moment of decision, not hysteria; the moment of purpose, not vacillation; the moment of truth, not lies; the moment of sacrifice, not avarice! The few men of rarely endowed intellect (which is so accidentally bestowed, and must therefore carry heavy responsibility) who were, in their respective and incidental countries, the accidental attendants to the birth of this knowledge, its development, and that of the various bombs, must be prepared to pay the price which knowledge often exacts. If these men are at peace with their beliefs, it would be far better that their time be now, for this purpose, than in the futile holocaust which will follow if the now looming future runs its appointed course.

The one entity which nations can neither buy nor build, command, nor usurp, is intellect, on which will depend such things as more efficient and horrible bombs as well as the better purpose to which this knowledge can be put. The task is not simple. How it is to be fully joined simultaneously in good faith and in all countries, I am not sure; nor, particularly, whether there are among the Russian scientists enough men of deep conviction akin to a Christian Ethic, for theirs will be the most difficult task of all. Yet, I call on all scientists, of all creeds and nations, to stop new theoretical work on this monster now.

We stand at position check-mate on the board of the future, there is no issue of sin, there is no issue of nobility, above all, there is no issue of national allegiance; there is only one eternal and invariable truth: Faith, Ethics, Conviction, and Hope. As you seek for those truths in nature, on whose validity we jointly discourse, I say, "Seek also the truth which is to be found within each of us under a universal law."

You, who have not blind eyes of the mind, may well say "but how is this to be made a reality?" I believe that there is a simple and logical way. Use that very fear and ignorance of mean men to a true purpose! We obviously cannot now restrain, by our convictions, the use of known weapons; this is part of history, and now merely nuclear technology. But there are far worse (theoretical) possibilities which, if ever realized, might well rend our planet. Join your purposes, if there are yet these men of conviction, and use the knowledge and imminent presence of these weapons to force a halt!

Give us but time, perhaps a decade, and there may well be an end to much of humanity's material wants through this very same knowledge; people cannot be driven to war. The rare psychotic personalities who seek mastery over other men—we shall deal with individually.

Edward M. Corson

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