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Interview with
 DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW
 The Rt. Hon. G.R. Strauss, M.P.
 NO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION FOUND

by Alfred Goldberg Jun 21, 2017

May 21, 1963

Q. Why did the United Kingdom wait until April 1946 to request from the United States information on the manufacture of the atomic bomb?

A. I can only guess at the answer. The ^{for that} obvious reason is that Attlee was so much overwhelmed by domestic problems that the matter didn't loom as large as it does now. All of these other problems -- food, fuel, housing, production, exports -- were so ~~great~~ ^{pressing} that he didn't have time to do anything about it.

I can't conceive that the atomic bomb was considered by the Prime Minister or anyone else as a really urgent matter at that time.

Q. When was the decision taken to manufacture the atomic bomb? Who made the decision? What were the factors that caused it to be made at that time?

A. I don't remember exactly. My impression is that it was a few weeks before the announcement by Alexander ^{in Parliament} _(March 1945). It was discussed of course in the Defence Subcommittee, and the case in favor was put and discussed. The Chiefs of Staff were always present at these meetings of the Defence Subcommittee. The major factors affecting the decision broadly were that it was considered desirable ~~for~~ ^{that} Britain should stand on its own feet militarily and that unless she did she would have no status in the postwar world ~~in any way~~.

Experience had shown that it was impossible to rely on America, particularly in view of the way in which ~~it~~ ^{it} had refused to give us information about the bomb even though British scientists had originally played a leading role in developing the bomb. The cutting off of Lend-Lease at the end of the war produced a general feeling that Britain must be independent and must not rely in any way on America for economic and military help. And as we had the brains and resources to develop the bomb ourselves, there was no reason why we shouldn't possess this most effective military weapon. I should think that the hope of getting international control of atomic weapons did not delay our decision to develop the bomb. We made a decision in 1948 on development of the bomb, ^{as the first stage in} not ~~production of it.~~

Q. Why were requests in the House of Commons for information on the development of atomic energy and the costs of the work consistently rebuffed?

A. No information of that kind was ever given about any military weapons. It has been the rule. Once you break the rule, ^{a dangerous precedent is set} ~~the consequences are bad.~~ Costs ^{of} ~~for~~ ^{weapons} such ~~purposes~~ are never given.

Q. Did the explosion of an atomic device by the Russians in 1949 bring about strong criticism of and dissatisfaction with the role of the Ministry of Supply in the development of the bomb? Did it result in acceleration of the pace of development? Did other international events -- Berlin Blockade, Korean War -- affect the pace of development?

A. No, it didn't bring about any strong criticism.

It came as a surprise to many of us that the Russians were so far ahead. It did not bring about an acceleration of the program here. There were no other domestic or international events that affected the pace of development. The pace was set by the availability of resources -- physical and human-- and especially human.

Q. What priorities were given to the development of the bomb and when?

A. Very high priorities. I couldn't say exactly where it came in the list of priorities in relation to the resources devoted to it. Nothing else was permitted to interfere with the plan. Other defence projects with priorities might be interfered with, the atomic bomb projects and certain other high priority projects were accepted as being inviolable. I think that the development of jet bombers also came into the priority status.

Q. Did the military services play any role in the developmental work?

A. No.

Q. Was the Air Ministry given information on the bomb for use in the development of aircraft?

A. This was bound to be done on the technical level.

The senior people involved in development of the bomb would be in touch the whole time with the top boys in the Air Ministry. This was on the technical, not the ministerial level.

Q. Were there any differences of opinion within the Labor Government on the development of the bomb?

A. No, none.

Q. Was there systematic thinking about the development of military forces to use the bomb?

A. Not on the ministerial level at that stage.

Q. Was there any significant assistance from the United States in the development period?

A. As far as I know, none.

Q. Did the lack of resources -- money, scientists, engineers, technicians -- delay the development of the bomb significantly?

A. No, Do not assume that it took seven years in this country to develop the atomic bomb. It was seven years until we tested the bomb. My impression is that if we had devoted more resources in money and men it would not have made much difference, unless we had been able to do it on a scale comparable to that of the United States during the war. We had a lot of knowhow. If we had been completely free to devote resources to it, it would have been done sooner, but not much, I believe. Testing took place

a considerable time after the bomb had actually been developed. Testing may have been delayed somewhat in the course of getting agreements with other countries-- Australia and the United States.

- Q. Were major decisions on bomb carrying vehicles -- aircraft, rockets -- delayed pending the progress of development of the bomb?
- A. Yes. In considering what new bombers should be developed it was always in the minds of the Air Force and the Ministry of Supply that these planes might have to carry atomic weapons.