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He Nearly Jailed Bohr in 1944

How Churchill Kept Lid on A-Bomb



NIELS BOHR
... Churchill was alarmed

LONDON, Sept. 24 (AP) — The late Danish nuclear physicist, Niels Bohr, tried to get Prime Minister Winston Churchill to tell the Russians about the atom bomb in 1944, and Churchill considered having him confined.

This is told by Margaret Gowing in a book, "Britain and Atomic Energy, 1935-45," published today. It is the first installment of the official history of the United Kingdom atomic energy project.

Mrs. Gowing, the archivist and historian of the Atomic Energy Authority, writes that Bohr, a pioneer figure in the history of nuclear physics, became

convinced that the Russians should be told what was going on in the world of the atomic bomb so they could be brought into a system of international control.

Talks to Churchill

In 1944 he saw Churchill. The book says Sir Winston retained "a very disagreeable memory of the interview."

Bohr said they "did not speak the same language." Churchill put his doubts to Lord Cherwell, his scientific adviser:

"Professor Bohr... is in close correspondence with a Russian professor, an old friend of his in Russia. It seems to me, Bohr ought to be confined or at any rate made to see he is very near

the edge of mortal crimes," the book quotes Churchill as saying.

Matter Dropped

Cherwell and other scientists came to Bohr's defense, saying he had done nothing improper and his letters had been agreed upon by British intelligence. The matter was dropped.

Bohr had escaped from Nazi-occupied Denmark to England in October 1943. He died in 1962 at the age of 77.

Mrs. Gowing also says that the British government was the first government in the world to be told by scientists that an atomic bomb was possible. She reports that in the

spring of 1940 two refugee scientists, Prof. Otto Frisch, now at Cambridge, and Prof. Rudolf Peierls, now at Oxford, drew up a memorandum at Birmingham University that an atom bomb was feasible and indicated how it could be built. Frisch was 35 at the time and Peierls, 32.

Out of the memorandum came the government's Maud Committee, headed by Sir James Thomson, which in 1940-41 did extensive research into the problems of construction of the bomb.

After the United States entered the war, the work on the bomb moved to America.