

USAEC, David Lilienthal and Oak Ridge, part 2

David Lilienthal's career spanned some pivotal times for energy production in the United States and the world. He met a most important mentor at Harvard, Felix Frankfurter, who later was instrumental in getting him appointed to the Tennessee Valley Authority's board of directors.

Lilienthal kept a detailed diary for the greater part of his life where he noted important people he learned from and things that happened which influenced him. He was an imposing figure being tall and well-spoken. He wrote, *TVA: Democracy on the March* where he extolled the virtues of the grand experiment that was TVA.

Lilienthal chose to have TVA deliver its own power and distribute it through public utility districts. This decision was a source of much infighting among the three directors of TVA and ultimately resulted in President Roosevelt firing one director and the other one resigned recommending Lilienthal as the sole director of TVA from 1941 until 1946.

When at the end of the war, President Truman asked Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson to prepare a plan for the international control of atomic energy, Acheson chose Lilienthal to provide him with scientific expertise. As we noted in an earlier installment, this Acheson-Lilienthal Report formed the basis of the United States' proposal to the United Nations, but was rejected by the Soviet Union.

So, Lilienthal was in a strong position of respect regarding atomic power. Even though he had not actually worked in the Manhattan Project, he had supported it and became very knowledgeable of this emerging technology. He was a strong advocate of the need to control atomic power.

When the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission was created to take over the work of the Manhattan Project, Lilienthal became its first chairman, taking control on January 1, 1947. He did not support the effort to develop the hydrogen bomb and thus was soon in opposition to some major military and political heavyweights.

He resigned in 1950 after General Eisenhower's decision to pursue the hydrogen bomb held the day and President Truman announced a "crash" program to develop a hydrogen bomb. Lilienthal felt it was best to build a stockpile of less destructive atomic weapons. J. Robert Oppenheimer shared Lilienthal's view regarding the hydrogen bomb. This would prove a losing position.

Oppenheimer and Edward Teller strongly disagreed on this subject. Teller and Eisenhower eventually won the argument and the hydrogen bomb was to become the mainstay of the nuclear weapons complex just being created in the early years of the AEC. It remains the primary weapon in the nuclear stockpile today.

Oak Ridge had been the heart of the Manhattan Project with Colonel Nichols running the day to day operations of all the projects sites from the "Castle on the Hill." As the transition from military control of atomic energy to civilian government control took place in Washington, Oak Ridge continued to be the main control point.

The Atomic Energy Commission was formed during the months between August 1, 1946 when the act was signed and January 1, 1947, when the AEC officially took over the control of atomic energy related matters. In addition to Lilienthal, who served as chairman of the AEC from 1947 – 1950, Gordon Dean chaired it from 1950 – 1953 and Lewis Stauss from 1953 – 1958.

Next we will look at some of the events that took place during the first years of the AEC. Some major decisions resulted in the above changes in leadership. There were also changes in Oak Ridge when the AEC took over in early 1947 that were important to the long term survival of the town and the Manhattan Project sites.