Szilard

December 17, 1959

Dr. Warren Johnson
Advisory Committee
U.S. Atomic Energy Commission
1717 H Street NW
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Dr. Johnson:

Professor Puck from the University of Colorado Medical Center has indicated that it might not be amiss for me to comment on Leo Szilard's contributions to biology in connection with his qualifications for a Fermi Award. Clearly these should not serve as the primary justification for this particular award which should be earned by his well known contributions to the development of atomic energy. Nor, regardless of the distress which news of Szilard's current illness brings to his friends and colleagues should this be a weighty factor for the committee except insofar as it influences their judgment on the timing of an otherwise well-earned recognition.

On the other hand, Szilard's idealism and unstinting devotion to the cause of world peace, to which he has given so much of his time and effort since the war, cannot be overlooked.

In biological research, Szilard's influence has been manifest less in his personal publications than in his impact on other workers in the fields of biophysics, genetics, and molecular biology. His questioning was often naive but ipso facto might reawaken scepticism about cherished conclusions. His experimental work was mainly done in collaboration with Dr. Aaron Novick and included outstanding contributions in the study of photo reversal of ultraviolet damage, phenotypic mixing in bacteriophage, and the quantitative analysis of bacterial growth and mutation in the chemostat. From the last named work came the discovery of the <u>anti</u> mutagenic effect of purine ribosides, a discovery which has not yet been widely exploited but I predict will have enormous consequences for the population genetics of the human species. One of Szilard's most significant contributions to biology has been, of course, Dr. Novick himself.

SZILARD, L.

If Szilard's basic contributions to nuclear physics meet, as I am assured they do, the most exacting criteria of scientific excellence his more recent work both in science and in policy combine to support the outstanding merit of a Fermi Award to Leo Szilard.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics