

Abstract Submitted
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Fermi's Conundrum: Proliferation and Closed Societies WENDY TELLER, Independent Scholar, CATHERINE WESTFALL, MSU — On January 1, 1946 Emily Taft Douglas, a freshman Representative at Large for Illinois, sent a letter to Enrico Fermi. She wanted to know whether, if atomic energy was used for peaceful purposes, it might be possible to clandestinely divert some material for bombs. Douglas first learned about the bomb not quite five months before when Hiroshima was bombed. Even though she was not a scientist she identified a key problem of the nuclear age. Fermi responded with requirements to allow peaceful uses of atomic energy and still outlaw nuclear weapons. First, free interchange of information between people was required, and second, people who reported possible violations had to be protected. Fermi had lived in Mussolini's Italy and worked under the war time secrecy restrictions of the Manhattan Project. He was not optimistic that these conditions could be met. This paper discusses how Douglas came to recognize the proliferation issue and what led Fermi to his solution and his pessimism about its practicality.

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