In the middle of an intense struggle stands a sensitive and enigmatic figure—an ex-shoe drummer, Wall Street financier, and Hoover Republican—wielding more influence than any other man over the U.S. atomic empire.

The Controversial Mr. Strauss

by Duncan Norton-Taylor

All last summer, at just about Lewis Strauss's bedtime, Tippy Stringer would sing, "Hey there, you on that high flying cloud"—and since the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission lives in an eighth-floor apartment at Washington's Shoreham Hotel, above the terrace café where Miss Stringer was a nightly feature, he got so he could render at least the first few phrases of the song in his own unpretentious baritone. He might have taken the words as having some reference to his own position. But he didn't. The public generally had the illusion that the Chairman of AEC occupied a remote and elevated situation, but this was largely because previous chairmen had never been exposed to the hot blast of politics. Mr. Strauss had the misfortune to be so exposed, and as a result had found himself pulled down out of the cloud and subjected to the close and frequently distorted scrutiny both of the Washington press corps and hostile Congressmen. For Strauss, who had already had a dozen crowded years in public life, in addition to an extraordinarily successful career as an investment banker, the experience came as quite a shock. He was the center of a conflict that was one of the most intense and emotional in Washington, so it became difficult to find anyone who held a completely objective view of him. He was led to observe to friends incredulously, "For the first time in my life I have enemies."

It is Lewis Strauss's job to see that the AEC is manufacturing more weapons, and more terrible weapons, than its Soviet counterpart. He lives with a staggering burden of secret knowledge of the U.S. atomic effort, and with less knowledge of the Soviet effort than he would wish. All this responsibility in itself has created tension, which the very formidableness of Strauss's position has made more acute. Not only does he exercise great power as Chairman of AEC, he exercises even more power, perhaps, when wearing his second hat as special adviser on atomic affairs to Eisenhower, who has instructed all government agencies to make no move in the atomic field without Lewis Strauss's say-so. It is no wonder that Strauss—although a naturally sociable man who enjoys parties, who likes to entertain his grandchildren with sleight-of-hand tricks, and who owes much of his very substantial material success to his ability to make friends—now has, as he puts it, enemies.

For some years Lewis Lichtenstein Strauss has been a vaguely familiar, rather owlish face caught by the camera's eye on the edge of a number of events. Now he has moved into the center of the picture. His critics describe him as thin-skinned, intellectually arrogant, and rough in battle ("he has more elbows than an octopus"). His friends describe him as dynamic, possessed of a brilliant mind, warmhearted, and loyal. A deep barrier of reserve, just behind an outward expansiveness, makes him still, to a lot of people, an enigma.

Political winds first hit the Chairman about a year ago when he was precipitated into the Oppenheimer case. In personal attacks Strauss was portrayed as a man hostile to free science, pursuing a vendetta against one of the country's outstanding physicists. Strauss did not initiate the investigation of Robert Oppenheimer (the White House did), and he was only one of a number of high officials who participated in the case, which he thinks was "a tragic thing—I shall have to live with it as long as I live." But he can see no other course the Administration

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Family group at Strauss's Culpeper, Virginia, farm: the Chairman, Mrs. Strauss, son Lewis H., daughter-in-law Laurie, grandchildren Lewis Carroll and Jeremy, and old dog Jeb.

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The Chairman of AEC: "For the first time in my life I have enemies."

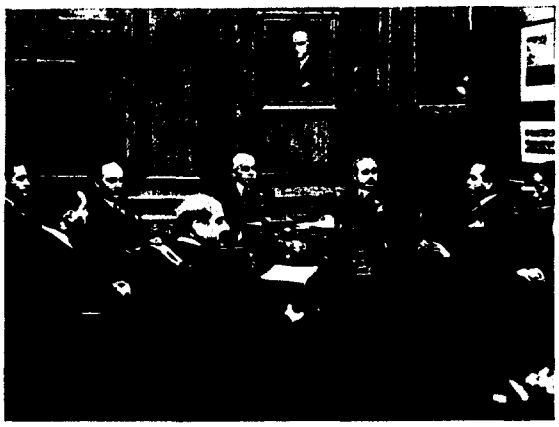
could have followed, and flatly rejects the argument that an exception should have been made because of Dr. Oppenheimer's eminence in the world of science, pointing out that if the government is to be just it cannot except anyone from the rules. "The whole idea of democracy breaks down unless you apply the same rules to all men equally." As for his being vindictive—Strauss, as president of the trustees of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, voted, after Dr. Oppenheimer lost his AEC clearance, to retain the physicist as the institute's director. He has also retained Oppenheimer as head of a committee to make triennial awards to scientists ($15,000 and a medal) from the Lewis and Rosa Strauss Memorial Fund, which is Strauss's own philanthropy, supported solely by his own funds.

While repercussions of the Oppenheimer case were still vibrating around him last summer, Strauss became involved in an argument over the status of the Chairman of AEC. He was accused then of reaching for more power, and he was criticized as a man unable to work *with* people—he had to be the undisputed boss. (Partly because he could not get along with Strauss, Dr. Henry DeWolf Smyth resigned from the commission.) Strauss did agree with some members of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy that the Chairman should be given more administrative authority in order to expedite the work of AEC, but he vehemently denied that he thought the Chairman alone should be a policy maker. This was the argument that Congress finally compromised by designating the Chairman "official spokesman" of AEC.

And finally, Strauss was drawn into the middle of the Dixon-Yates issue, which probably never would have been an issue at all but for the fact that it was an election year. The Dixon-Yates contract had been discussed publicly for several months, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee had tried to make something of it but no one had paid any serious attention to him, or, outside of the AEC itself, much attention to any angles of the business until just before the election, when the Democrats, short of issues and grasping at straws, grasped at this.

"Phony as a $3 bill"

The Dixon-Yates contract was not much different from much larger and very similar contracts that the AEC, under the Truman Administration, had made at Portsmouth, Ohio,



Financier, with fellow partners in Kuhn, Loeb (1932): under portrait of Mortimer Schiff are Otto Kahn and Jerome Hanauer; then, clockwise, Strauss (son-in-law of Hanauer), John Schiff (son of Mortimer), Felix Warburg, Benjamin Buttenwieser, Frederick Warburg (son of Felix), Sir William Wiseman.

and Paducah, Kentucky. And Strauss feels that, as finally written, the Dixon-Yates contract is exceedingly advantageous to the government. But Democratic Congressmen continue to speak of it in shocked tones, have leveled their fire at the Budget Bureau for originating it and at Strauss for carrying it out, and with loud lamentations have pictured Dixon-Yates as the nose of private power pushing under the whole wonderful, sheltering tent of TVA.

Meanwhile the Democrats deplore the time that AEC officials have had to take from their important duties to discuss Dixon-Yates on Capitol Hill, and with a collectively straight face mourn the introduction of politics into the hitherto "nonpartisan" commission. To show how outraged he felt, Tennessee's Senator Estes Kefauver declared that unless the contract was canceled he would block Senate confirmation of two new presidential appointees to vacancies on AEC. (Kefauver later relented.)

Strauss regards all this uproar with a mixture of pained astonishment, grudging admiration for the political cunning of Democrats, and a sense of helplessness. He thinks the Dixon-Yates issue is "as phony as a $3 bill," but he has arrived at the rueful conclusion that the salient facts of the affair will never be heard above the political thundering.

This may well be so. But the Dixon-Yates fight is not completely phony. AEC is involved in politics of a very basic sort, wherein the familiar wrangling of Democrats and Republicans is only incidental to real issues. The remarkable thing about the commission is that it remained to all intents and purposes free of politics as long as it did.

Why it did is fairly plain. In the beginning, the necessity of making atomic power a government monopoly was never questioned. Nobody could see just how private corporations were to get in on the atom (except as contractors building and operating facilities for the AEC), and nobody was particularly interested. More than anything else, the awesome importance of AEC's mission to develop weapons was uppermost in everyone's mind.

Bombs are still AEC's chief mission, but U.S. policy makers have become increasingly aware of the international appeal of an "atoms for peace" program. And as U.S. business has become increasingly aware of the long-term importance of nuclear energy to the U.S. economy (see R.C.A. Chairman Sarnoff's article, page 82) some lively little private firms have begun to operate on the fringes of the AEC empire. But because of the similarities of fuel and techniques in power reactors and in atomic weapons, Strauss points out, it is difficult to separate the two programs, even administratively. And because of the continuing reluctance of private enterprise to put up the enormous capital required, AEC will have to assume most of the risks.

Meanwhile AEC controls thousands of developments that will have a pervasive influence over every phase of the American future: the bombardment of cancerous growth with hydrogen particles, the atomic propulsion of ships and aircraft, the conversion of sea water to fresh water, the development of the resistance of cereals to rust (which Strauss guesses could save farmers hundreds of millions a year), the mutation of the genes of crops to multiply their yields many, many times. And with the Atomic Energy Act

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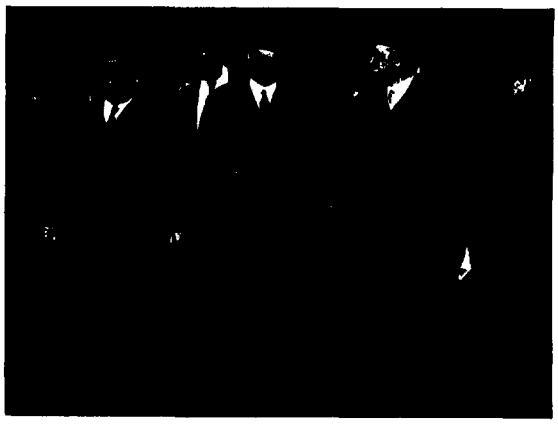

Friend of a President (1936): two old loyalists, ex-Hoover Secretaries Strauss and Lawrence Richey exuberantly meet the Chief on one of his periodic arrivals in New York.

Naval officer (1945): Rear Admiral William R. Purnell, Rear Admiral Strauss, Rear Admiral William H. Blandy testify before a Senate committee on the uses of the atomic bomb.

Lewis Strauss

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rewritten by the Eighty-third Congress to make more atomic information available to private industry, it is only a matter of time before AEC becomes the battleground in a struggle between public and private power, between proponents of government monopoly and proponents of free enterprise. As AEC Commissioner Murray, a Democrat, warns, "AEC can be a wide avenue to socialism." For the longer the government stays in the field, the larger will be its total investment in atomic energy (already some $13 billion), and the more passionately will the old argument be advanced that the taxpayers paid for the developments, and it would be wrong to let such public enterprises become a source of private profit.

This, too, is part of the gradually mounting tension that has centered around the high-domed head of Lewis Strauss, who happens to be Chairman at this juncture in AEC's history—and who turns out to be a Hoover-Taft Republican with personal, conservative convictions that run deep.

A prayer for peace

In appearance, Lewis Lichtenstein Strauss* is a well-set-up, impeccably dressed man with Old World manners and gentle, luminous brown eyes, which his colleagues have seen turn black with anger over some matter of violated security or violated principle. He is a native Virginian and a deeply religious Jew.

At the first meeting of AEC under his chairmanship Strauss, who is a past president of Manhattan's Temple Emanu-El congregation, bowed his head and prayed without self-consciousness: "May we have a harmonious and successful administration and may the fruits of our labor be peace and not war."

He grew up in Richmond. His father worked with his uncle in a small shoe-jobbers firm, and was a man of no wealth but great faith, who lived with his wife Rosa and two boys (Lewis and Morris) in a brick row house in middle-class West Avenue. Young Lewis went to Sunday School, later taught a class in the Beth Ahabah Synagogue. He learned Hebrew before he was thirteen and assisted Rabbi Edward Calisch at Yom Kippur services, in the daylong reading of the Torah and the Judaic litany. His closest cronies were all boyishly religious. They dreamed of floating down the James River on an amphibious raft. They were devotees of magic, secret writing, and the pseudo-science of Jules Verne. They occasionally got into fights with the Oregon Hill gang or the Tenth Street gang. In one of these encounters against superior forces, before whom young Master Strauss refused to retreat ("He had a General Lee complex," one of his old friends recalls), he was hit in the eye with a rock, receiving an injury that kept him out of school for a year. For a while the sight of his Grandfather Leopold Strauss, whose empty eye sockets were hidden by large black spectacles, gave him twinges of anxiety. Grandfather Leopold, who had emigrated from Germany, had owned a general store in Culpeper, Virginia, had been seized during the war by Union soldiers, and disastrously operated on for an eye ailment by a Yankee surgeon.

The shoe drummer

Lewis Strauss forgot Jules Verne in the discovery of physics, and poring over Robert A. Millikan's high-school textbook, he excitedly announced to his friends that he was now determined to devote his life to the study of light. Meanwhile, he managed the John Marshall High School track and baseball teams, and emerged as class valedictorian. If there were conflicts in the chief inspirations of his life, he disposed of them briskly in a valedictory speech entitled "Science and Theology: A Reconciliation." "Fortunately," says the Chairman, "this colossal effrontery has not survived." He got typhoid fever just before graduation so that the speech had to be read by a classmate.

Strauss waived the chance to go to college on a scholarship; instead, after high school, he set out on the road as a drummer for his father's and uncle's jobbing company. This much he was sure of: he wanted to make money. But along with his trunkful of shoe samples he took a selection of Latin classics, Ovid, Horace, Sallust, and miscellaneous books on science, and read them in hired hacks as he was driven along the country roads of the South.

Frequently he served as a lay reader in the synagogues of old Jewish communities that dotted the Carolinas. He was often tortured by longing for the close,

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*Commonly pronounced "Straws" in the Chairman's part of the South.

warm family life in the brick row on West Avenue, but withal he did a lively business and in three years made enough in commissions to put some $5,000 in the bank.

Bullets for freedom

It was 1917. Rosa Strauss was collecting old clothes to send to Herbert Hoover for Belgian relief. During a vacation, inspired by his mother, Strauss went to Washington, and presented himself to Mr. Hoover as a volunteer worker in the cause. Mr. Hoover ordered him to get to work. It was probably the most important event in Lewis Strauss's unique career.

He was to serve with Hoover steadily for three years (without pay, living frugally on his savings) —first as a kind of odd-job staffman around Hoover's headquarters in the New Willard Hotel, then as a personal secretary when Hoover became Food Administrator. He became a close friend of Robert Taft, fresh from Yale Law School, who was on the Food Administration staff as an assistant counsel and who, like Strauss, was barred by bad eyes from Army service.

Hoover took the now indispensable Strauss ("my jewel of a secretary") with him to London. The ex-shoe drummer went to state dinners, doing his best to look casual rubbing elbows with Lloyd George, watching history—and sometimes making it. When Herbert Hoover was asked to contribute an inspirational message to be printed on the backs of French bread-ration cards, Strauss wrote out in longhand, because he didn't have a typewriter, a line in French to the effect that each card was a bullet in the battle of freedom, signed Hoover's name. To his horror the line appeared on millions of cards in facsimile, complete with the French word *coupon* misspelled "cupon," and the signature "Herbert Hoover" in Strauss's hand.

Strauss made another trip to Europe after the war. When the Supreme Economic Council was set up, with Hoover as its chief, to lay down the economic terms of the armistice, Strauss, then twenty-three, served briefly as a council delegate. He attended the Brussels Armistice Conference, along with Morgan partner Thomas Lamont, California banker Harry Robinson, and Hugh Gibson, who was later Ambassador to Belgium.

In the fall of 1919 Strauss was astonished to get a letter from Mortimer Schiff, of Kuhn, Loeb, in New York, offering him a job. He remembered Schiff vaguely as one of the hundreds of people who had drifted through Hoover's Paris headquarters. The salary that the letter mentioned seemed to Strauss then (and still does in retrospect) "enormous" and, with Hoover's blessings, he cabled his acceptance. His cup was full when Sir Eric Drummond subsequently offered him considerably less money ($10,000) but a job full of prestige as comptroller of the League of Nations. With a young man's desire to impress the folks back home, he sent off a second letter to Richmond telling his parents this news. Father Strauss cabled back: "Don't be damn fool," and with this seconding of his own idea, Lewis Strauss sailed for New York and Kuhn, Loeb.

The logical Mr. Schiff

In his first year on the job, Strauss was assigned to represent Kuhn, Loeb in a consortium of American banking firms that was handling the finances of China. The House of Morgan was manager, with K.L. a co-manager. "I did the best I knew how," says Strauss. "I had a veneer of sophistication and knew a lot of people like Balfour, Lord Robert Cecil, and Colonel Edward House. Mr. Morgan Senior was as considerate of me as if I had been twenty years older."

On his own hook, Strauss threw himself into an act of international charity. Some 8,000 Austrian and Hungarian prisoners of war, turned loose by Russia in Siberia, had trudged across half a continent to Vladivostok. Young Strauss and George Sloan, then assistant to the chairman of the American Red Cross, raised around $1 million, and sent chartered ships to pick up the men and carry them half around the world to Trieste.

But Strauss's work around K.L. seemed so inconsequential to him, in comparison to his salary (which had already been raised), that he went to Mortimer Schiff and resigned. "I don't like to take your money and not deliver anything," he explained. Schiff suggested: "Why don't you let us be the judge of that?," which did strike Strauss as logical, and with some relief he withdrew his resignation.

In his second year at K.L. he was given "joint power of attorney"—authority along with one other member to commit the firm to a contract. In 1923 he married the pretty daughter of K.L. partner Jerome Hanauer. He had met her first when he was invited to the Hanauers' for dinner, when Alice Hanauer was a pig-tailed schoolgirl struggling with an assignment in Latin, which he had grandly (and somewhat freely) translated for her. In 1924 he was knighted at K.L. with single power of attorney. In 1929, at age thirty-three, he was made a full partner —a job that Wall Street rated in those days as worth around $1 million a year.

Balls in the air

Old K.L. associates of Lewis Strauss remember him as a suave young man with an uncanny memory, splendidly turned out in derby and fur-collared overcoat; a diplomat and negotiator; a tireless and intense operator who, in the words of John Schiff, Mortimer's son, "always had five or six balls in the air."

Lewis Strauss's paneled office in the somber old building at 52 Williams Street was indeed an unusually active place. He got for the firm clients from many industries K.L. had never done business with before—Inland Steel, Republic, M. A. Hanna. The Chairman explains modestly: "I went in at a time when there was a good deal of industrial expansion."

He had his own irons in the fire. Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky Jr. happened along with a process for taking color pictures, and Strauss, with Sir William Wiseman, another K.L. partner, personally backed them. Eastman bought the invention and put it on the market as Kodachrome. Another time Strauss backed young Edwin Land in the development of the Polaroid.

The 1929 crash found K.L., which had been suspicious of the financial weather, safely battened down under a covering of state and city bonds—although Strauss was hurt trying to rescue friends with personal loans. After the crash he was kept busy putting pieces of corporations together again.

"Those two impostors"

If the cracks in the financial world of the whole West presaged the terrifying events that were around the corner, the still youthful financier did not realize it any more than anyone else on the Street. He lived in affluence in a small mansion on Manhattan's East Seventy-sixth Street, rode horseback in Central Park, patronized the opera, consorted with the scholars of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and busied himself earnestly with a number of philanthropic enterprises.

Strauss had been drawn into politics in 1928, when Hoover got the Republican nomination. He served as a vice treasurer of the G.O.P. National Committee and traveled to Palo Alto to be with his friend on the night in November, 1928, when John Philip Sousa and his band serenaded the new President of the United States. For Strauss it was a moment of high elation—which turned sour four years later when Hoover was repudiated by the voters. On election night of 1932 Strauss and Lawrence Richey, Hoover's secretary, tried to drown their sorrows, and during Hoover's last hours at the White House sat gloomily with the "Chief." Hoover was far more composed than either friend. "I was with him in triumph and disaster," says Strauss, quoting Kipling, "and he treated those two impostors just the same."

Throughout the years of these bustling activities, Strauss had never lost his interest in science. A frustrated physicist, he was a constant reader of scientific articles. When Central European physicists began to flee from fascism and drift into New York, he sought them out and talked to them. Strauss was particularly absorbed in cancer research, an interest that took on a new compulsion when he learned that his mother had a malignancy. She died in 1935. Her son financed the construction of a surge generator at the California Institute of Technology with the hope of producing radioactive isotopes for cancer treatment. Even while this work was under way, his father succumbed to cancer, two years after his mother's death.

For Strauss cancer has been a close and personal enemy. He is a director of Memorial Hospital in New York. There he had Bob Taft taken for an exploratory operation, and he had the duty of telling Taft that he was doomed. A few weeks ago, Strauss was going to Chicago to give Enrico Fermi the AEC's annual $25,000 award for scientific achievement, but death from cancer preceded him to Fermi's bedside.

The fragile and beautiful

In January, 1939, Strauss learned that uranium had been fissioned in Germany. He guessed then that the world stood on the edge of an awesome future. But he was even more impressed by the conviction that the world now stood on the edge of a world war, and in the spring of 1939 he took his wife Alice and their twelve-year-old son on a despairing pilgrimage to Europe. He

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wanted to see once more, and he wanted his son to see, "everything that was fragile and beautiful before it was lost." They visited London, where U.S. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy said to Strauss confidently: "There won't be a war this year." They visited Ste. Chapelle, Chartres. In Paris, U.S. Ambassador William Bullitt said to Strauss: "War won't come this year, because now it's August and winter will be on us. It won't come until next year when the Germans can march across the fields." But when Strauss told Paul Reynaud, later premier, that they had passage for the following week but thought they would wait another three weeks, Reynaud said: "I wouldn't wait." They arrived back in New York a few days before the Germans moved on Poland.

The lieutenant commander

Some years before, Strauss had been persuaded to take a reserve commission in the Navy. In February, 1941, he was ordered to report. He was a little ill at ease at first in officer's blues, wearing the modest stripes of a lieutenant commander, but he found that so far as a deskbound officer was concerned, the department was another business enterprise and he took like a duck to this kind of salt water. He started out in the Bureau of Ordnance, where he originated the "E" pennant as a reward for energetic civilian contractors, coordinated the Navy's haphazard inspection of weapons production, represented the Navy on the Interdepartmental Committee on Atomic Energy.

Navy Secretary Forrestal, who had once been a hard competitor of Strauss's in the banking business, suddenly awakened to his presence in the department. He made Strauss his special assistant, and came to lean on Strauss more and more for counsel. Frequently Strauss acted as Forrestal's alternate at meetings.

The Chairman remembers the last time he visited Forrestal in the Pentagon, several years after the war. "His emaciation was the thing I noticed first. He was vehement and introspective in his conversation, which was unlike him. Then he was complimentary about the things I had done, which was also out of character. He said, 'All this never would have happened if I had kept you and Struve* with me.' He was talking about the fight over unification of the services. 'We could have put these services together,' he said. I said, 'You are mistaken, Jim. You couldn't, no one could put them together until the present senior officers have all reached retirement,' and I cited the story of the children of Israel who had to stay forty years in the desert until all those who had known slavery as a personal experience were dead—only those born free were allowed to enter the Promised Land. The analogy didn't impress him. He was sure that he hadn't measured up. I finally left him. In the dining room next to his office was a portrait of him some artist was working on, covered by a cloth, and I lifted it out of curiosity." An appalled Strauss saw then what the artist had sensed, what Forrestal's friends had missed—an exhausted man on the edge of breakdown. It was only a few weeks later that Forrestal destroyed himself at Bethesda Hospital.

Strauss left the Navy after four long years with the rank of rear admiral, wearing the Legion of Merit with gold star, the Distinguished Service Medal with oakleaf cluster. He had often upset Navy protocol and crossed a number of four-starred bows, but a regular Navy officer, an admiral usually sparing with his praise, now deposes that Strauss is "one of our generation's outstanding Americans."

A few weeks after his discharge, the man who had earned this salute departed for the South to join Hoover for a few days' cruising on a yacht off the Florida Keys. Aboard the Hoover yacht the captain mustered his crew as side boys to welcome the U.S. admiral (ret.) aboard. In the darkness a small launch bearing Strauss chugged alongside. After several minutes of waiting, the captain peered anxiously over the rail. Admiral Strauss had missed the ladder and was floating in the ocean.

The dissenter

Strauss's escape from Washington was short-lived. He had scarcely settled back into Kuhn, Loeb when President Truman, on the strong recommendations of the Secretaries of the Army and Navy, invited him to serve on the new agency, set up under the law, to guide the country through the completely uncharted world of atomic energy. Strauss was Truman's first nominee to the first AEC.

The commission was headed by David Lilienthal, former head of TVA. He was an idealist, aloof and inaccessible. The other three commissioners for the most part went along with his decisions. Strauss put in a long, exasperating stint of minority dissent. But on two occasions he stubbornly fought for his point of view. One was when he argued that the U.S. should set up listening posts around the world for the purpose of detecting atomic explosions elsewhere. Strauss went to the Pentagon with his idea, and the Pentagon did agree to set up the facilities on military bases and provide the personnel to operate them. Members of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy subsequently went out of their way to declare that it was Strauss's foresight that saved the U.S. from the "disaster" of remaining in ignorance of Russia's success with the atomic bomb.

The detection system confirmed the direful tracks of the first Russian explosion in the autumn of 1949. Strauss recognized immediately that if Russia could produce an atomic blast, it was only a matter of time before she would produce a hydrogen explosion. In a memorandum to Lilienthal he urged that the production of a hydrogen bomb in the U.S. be made an urgent program. The rest of the story is well known—how most of the other commissioners and most of the country's top physicists, led by Oppenheimer, stood against the program, how the late influential Senator Brien McMahon and Senator Bourke Hickenlooper, and finally Defense Secretary Louis Johnson and Secretary of State Acheson came to agree with Strauss, and how Harry Truman finally announced, almost five months after the Russian explosion, that the U.S. would manufacture the super-bomb. David Lilienthal resigned. And feeling that AEC should start all over again without any old, irking frictions, Strauss followed Lilienthal out the door.

Squire of Brandy Rock

Strauss was offered a job by Truman on the Federal Reserve Board, but he declined. Once, as he told a friend, he would have liked nothing better. But for the moment he had had enough of government. He intended to go back to Kuhn, Loeb. He would have but for an offer from the Rockefeller brothers, who wanted him as their financial adviser. With a sense of mental and spiritual relief, Strauss took an elevator up to the fifty-sixth floor of the R.C.A. Building in Rockefeller Center and stepped back into the familiar world of private finance.

He also turned for weekend refreshment to his Virginia farm, which he had bought in 1932, and to which he could now devote some time. There, on 1,560 acres of gentle slopes, a part of which once happened to belong to his Grandfather Leopold, he bred Aberdeen Angus cattle and raised corn, barley, and oats. The farm, Brandy Rock, near Culpeper, is still Strauss's refuge. A succession of agricultural-school graduates have managed it for him. They work for Strauss until they are ready to set up farms of their own on capital that Strauss provides without interest. Strauss administers the farm with the meticulousness that he exhibits in all his activities. Nothing goes unrecorded, from the daily rainfall to the smallest gadget acquired by Brandy Rock's gadget-loving owner.

At the slightest hint of a guest's interest, Strauss will exhibit his mementos of the Civil War. His most prized is General Lee's order to his troops after Appomattox, which bears the General's signature. Lee's portrait looks sternly from the wall of the French provincial living room. Just below the house is the valley where Jeb Stuart's mounted troops met Pleasanton's Yankees in the Battle of Brandy Station, the first great cavalry engagement of the war.

"Jeb" is the name of the ancient German shepherd dog that pads around the house on the heels of the man dressed casually in khakis —a different Strauss from the financier, or the Chairman, with the handkerchief in the breast pocket, sitting bolt upright at a conference table. On his flagstone terrace, looking across to the misty Blue Ridge Mountains, with a second martini in his hand, he even lets his voice slide comfortably back into the soft accents of Virginia.

"My last public job"

The idyllic life with the Rockefellers lasted a little less than three years. In July, 1953, Strauss went back to Washington, into the massive marble AEC Building on Constitution Avenue, into the bitterness of the Oppenheimer case, Dixon-Yates, into, he says, "my last public job on earth." He had not sought the job. He had supported Taft for the Republican presidential nomination, but when Eisenhower, after his inauguration, began looking around for an adviser on atomic matters, it was

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**Struve Hensel, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, now an Assistant Secretary of Defense.*

Strauss he commandeered. He gave Strauss the mission of finding a chairman for AEC, and when Strauss could report no results, told him he would have to take the assignment himself.

Life with the Chairman

By eight-thirty Strauss has breakfasted and settled himself at his AEC desk before his morning mail. An occasional letter will rouse him into dictating a personal reply. One such letter not long ago was an attack on fellow Commissioner Murray for the latter's earnestly religious approach to the problems of the atomic age. Murray is frequently at loggerheads with the Chairman in AEC meetings. But Strauss made it plain to the letter writer that he agreed completely with Murray, who is an active lay leader in Roman Catholicism, that the final answer to the world's dilemma does indeed lie in religion.

At least once a week Strauss meets with those commissioners* who are not out inspecting various installations of AEC's widespread domain; the Chairman gets around to AEC's plants and laboratories only occasionally. Strauss meets his colleagues either in his own yawning office or, if staffmen or scientific advisers are to be included, in the AEC conference room, around a kidney-shaped table so big that papers have to be pushed around with a croupier's stick. In the afternoon Strauss talks to the general manager or division directors or other callers. Once a week he goes to the White House to talk to the President.

A staffman who has served with the commission from the beginning says he is awed by the Chairman's "terrific pace."†

Around seven Strauss gets into his limousine and, hunched in a corner sound asleep, is driven to the Shoreham. His catnaps, he thinks, are what keep him going. Usually he takes a briefcase of papers with him that he will study, then put carefully in a safe in his apartment. He is very security-conscious. The papers are never top secret, however, since top secrets can only be transported by an armed courier and—"I don't want to lug a gun around."

Man for the job?

The Strausses' social life consists mostly of large, ritualistic Washington affairs. Alice Strauss misses the more intimate parties, where nothing is involved but sociability. At around midnight the Chairman retires, with a memo pad beside his bed. Often, lying in the dark, he scrawls an outline of some idea, tears off the sheet, sticks it in one of his slippers, and then with his mind relieved goes to sleep. His trick of writing notes when he appears to be asleep on trains or planes has intrigued friends. "I'm not asleep," Strauss explains. "I'm just writing with my eyes closed. If you are half-dozing and open your eyes, it's difficult to get back to sleep because of some photonic effect on the retina." Strauss likes to expound theories—from the inappropriateness of spinach as food for children (it absorbs the calcium that children need), to a method of tracing in the growth of rings of trees the ups and downs of political parties (the width of the rings indicates how much rain fell; the party in power usually loses in years of less than normal rainfall).

A man of moods beneath his urbane exterior, he sometimes regards his present job with an air of resignation: "I may not have been the man for it. If so, I wish it had become apparent sooner. This experience has come late in life." Then looking ahead to the political struggle that he knows will grow, not lessen, in intensity, he says, almost with an air of discovery: "I used to think I had no stomach for this kind of thing. Now I believe I have."

"Heaven help those . . ."

He is buoyed by a vaulting imagination that carries his fancies into a new world of miracles. He sees nuclear reactors, small enough to be moved on flatcars, that will supply heat and power to isolated spots of the globe. He cites the undreamed-of developments that came out of the x-ray—the whole science of electronics, radar, television. "It is sheer conjecture," he declares, "for anyone to say today what will be the most important thing that atomic energy will produce. I look forward to the day when there won't be any military use. It may not come in my lifetime but it will come."

Conflicting estimates of Strauss notwithstanding, it was a remarkable coincidence of events that placed this particular man where he now is—at the very center of the West's crisis. For as much as any man alive, he is a recognizable prototype of Western man: optimistic, shrewd in business dealings, inquisitive about natural science, humanistic, basically religious.

He lives in a constancy required of no other American, with Western man's newest ordeal, the weapon that could be used by the U.S. to annihilate its enemies, or that could be used by an enemy to destroy the U.S. This intimacy, however, has not left him in an agony of doubt; he bears his responsibility with moral calm. He has his answer for nuclear scientists haunted by a guilt complex and an answer for all conscience-stricken Americans: "The atom is amoral. The only thing that makes it immoral is man. We are making bombs because we hope to discourage the use of bombs against us by a government that doesn't make any pretense of morals. I have noticed that heaven helps those who help themselves. Somebody else may think I am all wrong. Gandhi would—you lie down in front of a juggernaut. There may have been people in antiquity who adopted Gandhi's position against the Huns or the Tartars—but history doesn't retain any record of them." Strauss's moral equanimity is unshakable. "If everything was always perfectly clear," he says, "there would be no particular premium on faith." END

**Current line-up: Murray (the only Truman appointee left); Dr. Willard Libby, Chicago University chemist. Dr. John von Neumann, top mathematician, has been nominated but not yet confirmed. One vacancy exists as a result of Joseph Campbell's recent nomination as Comptroller General; to fill Campbell's shoes Strauss says he will recommend a businessman.*

†The staffman provides these thumbnail sketches of other chairman: Lilienthal—"not interested in the details, happier away from such matters as the budget"; Sumner Pike (an interim appointee)—"a wizard with figures, but happy-go-lucky"; Gordon Dean—"serious, with a tremendous capacity to sit and listen and go into things"; and finally, Strauss—"polite but a fighter."

Entrepreneur in Plastics

William Kimball Jr., of San Francisco, has built an admirable little business in reinforced-plastic products in the last three years. This is fast work, even in the plastics industry, and Bill Kimball was able to do it because he had the confidence of a score of well-heeled friends who reinforced his bank account when he needed cash. Today his Kimball Manufacturing Corp. has four production divisions: custom moldings, outdoor billboard moldings, decorative accessories, and sports products. The gross last year was $373,000, the net $40,000. Furthermore, Bill Kimball still controls 63 per cent of the stock.

Kimball was graduated from Stanford University in 1941 and after five years in the Army he went to Harvard Business School. Through mutual friends there he met Robert and Frank Chambers. In 1948, after the Chambers formed Magna Engineering Corp. in San Francisco and began making home-workshop power tools, they hired Kimball as sales manager.

Kimball worked happily for Magna until 1951, when Magna planned to leave San Francisco. Kimball was reluctant to move, so he resigned and looked around for ideas for a manufacturing business of his own. When one of his friends, Francis Letchfield of the Wells Fargo Bank, showed him a photograph of a reinforced-plastic auto body, Kimball got the idea of custom molding reinforced-plastic items for manufacturers.

He started his company by hiring a technician, Chester Ward, and then by raising $51,000 capital through borrowing and by selling stock to friends. He leased a small building and was ready for business in July, 1951. He soon found there was very little business for a company that had no samples of its products. But Kimball kept plugging his potential products and finally landed his first substantial order, which was for 250 reinforced-plastic billboard moldings (i.e., frames) at $60 each. But by that time he had no capital left. So he sold $15,000 in stock to his stockholders, after explaining to them that there were 300,000 billboards in the country and that he had no competition for the business. The cash enabled him to fill his order and wind up his second year with a $37,000 gross, and a slight deficit.

His luck changed in the fall of 1953, when the Outdoor Advertising Association of America approved his product. He suddenly had a wealth of orders, and he financed production by borrowing $20,000 from a bank and by selling his friends $75,000 worth of stock. Last year he began to diversify by inventing and producing plastic water skis, and by increasing the variety of his decorative accessories (bowls and plant holders, etc.).

This year he expects to gross about $750,000, which, he figures, will justify his friends' faith in Kimball Manufacturing and, incidentally, in Bill Kimball.