

PROF. PETER J.W. DEBYE (1884-1966)

in 1935-1945

Brilliant scientist
Gifted teacher

An investigation of historical sources

Dr. Gijs van Ginkel

2006

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The stamp printed on the front cover of this report is one of a series, which was issued by the Dutch postal services PTT to commemorate Nobel Prize winners from The Netherlands. The stamp shows Petrus J.W. Debye (born in 1884 in Maastricht, The Netherlands and died in 1966 in the USA) who received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1936 for his outstanding contributions to the study of molecular structure through his investigations on dipole moments and of the diffraction of X-rays and electrons.

Six flags are printed on the back cover of this report. They are the flags of the City of Maastricht (top left), the Province of Limburg (top right) and of The Netherlands (middle right) as symbols of the homeland Peter Debye loved above all. The flag at the bottom left is of the USA, the country that gave him and a part of his family safe refuge during WW2 and for the remainder of his life. The flags of Switzerland (bottom right) and Germany (middle left) are symbols of the countries in which he began and pursued the early portion of his professional career.

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PROF. PETER J.W. DEBYE (1884-1966) IN 1935-1945. An investigation of historical sources.

RIPCN, the Netherlands, December 2006.

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We thank "PTT filatelie" for supplying us with the picture of the Debye stamp for use on the cover of this report. The stamp was designed by Mr. H.N. Sierman.

“Also nicht verzagen und stets bereit stehen das Gute was vorbeihuscht, zu fassen ohne dem Schlechten mehr Platz zu gönnen als unbedingt nötig ist. Das ist ein Prinzip, was mir schon viel Nutzen gebraucht hat. Hoffentlich bringt das neue Jahr mehr Gutes, als unser Kleingläubigkeit in diesem Augenblick wahr haben will”.
Translation: *“Not to despair and always be ready to grab the Good which whisks by, without granting the Bad any more room than is absolutely necessary. That is a principle of which I have already made much use. Hopefully, the new year will bring more good than our little faith allows us to see at this moment.”*

Professor Peter J.W. Debye, December 30, 1939

“How do historians conceive historical scenario’s and their probability? Don’t historians also work with fictive assumptions about past events, at least at the beginning of their work? And how do they achieve a subtle historical analysis? The issue at stake is interpretation, and it continues to be at stake even if the technical and historical details have been settled. Historical interpretation is a balancing act, always running the risk of turning into speculation.”

Matthias Dörries in *“Michael Frayn’s Copenhagen in Debate. Historical essays and documents on the 1941 Meeting Between Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg.”* Office for History of Science and Technology, University of California, 2005

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

“It is difficult to summarize briefly Debye’s role in Physics and Chemistry. Suffice it to say that one essential aspect was his masterly ability to formulate mathematically the physical essentials of the problem” wrote Mansel Davies on May 23, 1984 in the Journal of Physical Chemistry about Professor Peter J.W. Debye. In the field of Physics and Chemistry Debye is considered as one of the most important scientists of the 20th century. In 1936 the physicist Peter Debye got the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Next to that he received an enormous number of awards and honorary degrees for his work. His impressive achievements as a scientist and as a teacher made him into an excellent example for students and investigators in the field of Physics and Chemistry. That was the reason that in 1986, the name of Professor Peter Debye was associated with a prestigious institute for the research of physics and chemistry of Nanomaterials at Utrecht University. Debye’s name was also associated with the Debye Award for Research in the Natural Sciences from Maastricht University in cooperation with the Hustinx Foundation.

On February 16, 2006 the Trustees of the Universities of Utrecht and Maastricht decided to drop the name of Peter Debye. Their decision was based on the publicity in connection with a chapter in the book *Einstein in Nederland* by the Dutch journalist Sybe Rispens and the subsequent advice of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) concerning the sources supplied by Rispens. The publicity regarding Debye was concentrated on his alleged role towards the Nazi authorities in 1938-1939.

In view of the publicity generated and the accusations made, it seemed necessary to perform an investigation of the position of Peter Debye in 1935-1945 on the basis of all the historical sources, which we could find in this matter.

This was done to get a better view of the actions of Peter Debye in this difficult time in history, the problems he was confronted with and how he handled them.

CHAPTER 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To obtain an accurate impression of the position of Peter Debye during the years 1935-1945, set within a proper historical context, a good insight into the societal and political reality in Germany during that period is necessary. This is difficult to grasp almost 70 years later, because the Nazis had established a totalitarian state. They were masters in manipulation, deception and trickery. Words and language were distorted by the Nazis: truth became a lie and lies became truth. All documents produced by the Nazis have therefore to be considered with suspicion. Another complication is that many witnesses of the ruthless and cruel Nazi regime were murdered by the Nazis, which makes it difficult to get a good view “from inside”.

For a view of the situation during that period in history, I have used three books.

- Firstly, the book “*Hitler. Vergelding 1936-1945*” (In the original English literature published as “*Hitler, Nemesis 1936-1945*”) by Ian Kershaw, which gives a good insight into the political and military situation in Germany during 1936-1945.
- Secondly, the book “*Scientists under Hitler. Politics and the Physics Community in the Third Reich*” by Alan Beyerchen, which describes the problems and dilemmas of physicists under Nazi rule.
- And thirdly, I used the book in two volumes entitled “*Bis zum bitteren Ende*” by Dr. Hans Bernd Gisevius, a German military clerk, who had access to the highest circles of the German military and the Nazi authorities in the years 1933-1945. Gisevius tried actively to organise opposition and resistance to the Nazis. He was a witness for the prosecution at the Nurnberg trials against, for example, the German army generals Keitel and Jodl. At these trials, he testified under oath that the information in his book was correct. His book is based on notes Gisevius made in secret in the period 1933-1945. I have used the Dutch translation of the third German edition of his book from 1946 (copyright: Fretz & Asmuth Verlag Ag., Zürich). The Dutch edition was printed by Kemink en Zoon N.V. in Utrecht with the title “*Tot het bittere eind*”. Gisevius states in his Dutch edition on pages 716-717:

“We moeten nog op een principieel verschil tussen de oppositie methoden in een democratisch en een totalitair staatsbestel wijzen. In een democratie mag, ja moet de oppositie werken in het openbaar. Onder het totalitarisme blijft haar niets over dan zich te camoufleren. Deze camouflage gaat zover, dat men eigenlijk alleen maar obstructie kan voeren, wanneer men op de een of andere manier “er in” zit..... De opposant, beter gezegd de illegale strijder binnen een dictatoriaal regime, zweeft voortdurend heen en weer tussen twee kwaden, namelijk, dat de niet-ingewijden hem tot opportunist verklaren en dat ze hem een verrader noemen. Als hij de periode van verwarring overleeft, kan hij later verklaringen leveren waarom hij hier een concessie heeft gedaan of daar een vertrouwelijke mededeling heeft doorgegeven”.

Translation: “*We still have to point out a fundamental difference between the opposition methods in a democratic and a totalitarian state. In a democracy the opposition can, yes, must work openly. Under totalitarianism nothing else remains but to camouflage oneself. This camouflage goes so far that one can in fact only perform obstruction if one is in one way or another “in the system”. The opponent, or better formulated, the illegal militant within a dictatorial regime, floats continuously back and forth between two evils, namely, that the non-insiders call him an opportunist or that they call him a traitor.*

If he survives the period of confusion, he later can give explanations as to why he made a concession here or passed on a confidential communication”.

One must examine the position of Debye in Germany under Nazi rule within this framework. As director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics (KWIP) he was essentially independent of Nazi rule, because the KWIP was not under the direct control of the government. In fact, Debye was more accountable to the American Rockefeller Foundation, which had played an important role in financing the new KWIP and his appointment as scientific director.

If in 2006 one wants to judge the actions of Peter Debye, which he was forced to undertake under pressure of the Nazis, one has to take into account the fact that the totalitarian Nazi regime was ruthless and cruel. For a judgement of the actions of a person under such circumstances the quotation of Willy Hartner in the paper by V.R. Remmert (2004) is relevant. He states:

“Heldentum ist nicht jedermanns Sache. Es von Einzelnen zu verlangen ist absurd. Aber was wir fördern müssen, ist Menschlichkeit, menschliches Verhalten, menschliches Mitfühlen mit dem Bedrängten und die Bereitschaft zu aktiver Hilfeleistung”.

Translation: *Heroism is not everybody's business. To require it from every single person is absurd. However, what we have to require is humaneness, humane behavior, empathy with the oppressed and willingness to actively offer help).*

Debye himself in a letter of December 30, 1939 to Sommerfeld indicates which principles he applies:

“Also nicht verzagen und stets bereit stehen das Gute was vorbeihuscht, zu fassen ohne dem Schlechten mehr Platz zu gönnen als unbedingt nötig ist. Das ist ein Prinzip, was mir schon viel Nutzen gebraucht hat. Hoffentlich bringt das neue Jahr mehr Gutes, als unser Kleingläubigkeit in diesem Augenblick wahr haben will”.

Translation: *“Not to despair and always be ready to grab the Good which whisks by, without granting the Bad any more room than is absolutely necessary. That is a principle of which I have already made much use. Hopefully, the new year will bring more good than our little faith allows us to see at this moment.”*

CHAPTER 3.

1930-1938: SEARCH FOR A KWIP DIRECTOR IN BERLIN: PETER DEBYE

Professor Peter Debye was actually in function as director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics (KWIP) from October 1, 1935 until September 16, 1939. How he became KWIP director is described in this chapter.

In “The Einstein Dossiers” the author Grundman (2005) describes the birth and development of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics:

“The idea of a Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physical Research dates back to 1913. The Institute was founded on October 1, 1917 and Albert Einstein was appointed as its director.... In a retrospective handwritten message from March 10, 1924 Max Planck (Note: who was a major driving force behind the idea of a KWIP) informed the Ministry of Culture that the KWI of Physics had thus far remained provisional, first of all, for lack of funding, on the other hand and principally, for lack of a suitable person. Planck thought that he had now found in Max von Laue the right man for the job. Janos Plesch, a medical doctor who had befriended Einstein in the 1920s, was probably right with his recollection that Einstein ‘always arranged things so that ‘de facto he had no institute on his back.’ He simply wanted ‘to keep his mind clear’, nor did he want to dispose over the activities of others – thus he was neither ‘leader’ nor ‘subordinate’.

In the 1920s Einstein lost interest in the KWIP and because of these developments Max Planck tried to establish a new viable KWIP led by a suitable person (Grundman, 2005).

In the biography of Max Planck “The Dilemmas of an upright man: Max Planck as spokesman for German science” by Professor John B. Heilbron (1986, The California University Press), a detailed description is given of the procedure to get a new physics institute at the KWI established in Berlin and the role of Debye in that process (the book can also be found on page 225 in Rispen’s reference list).

For readers who prefer the German edition of this book: the text given below can be found therein on pages 180-184 in: “Max Planck. Ein Leben für die Wissenschaft 1858-1947”, Prof. John B. Heilbron, S. Hirzel Verlag Stuttgart, (1988).

Heilbron’s original book (in English pages 175-179) describes the establishment of the KWIP and Debye’s position in that process:

“THE ARK. Planck’s achievements as science administrator included more than help to Jewish colleagues and employees in the temporary conservation of their status and income. It was his personal triumph that a Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute for Physics came into existence in 1938. As we know, a physics institute had been a high priority of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft before the First World War, and was realized in 1917 only as a mechanism for dispensing grants for ongoing research projects. In the spring of 1929 Planck and the other Berlin physicists moved to establish a Kaiser-Wilhelm institute for theoretical physics. The timing seemed right both financially and substantively: the Republic was prosperous, and theoretical physics had recently undergone a deeper and more consequential development than it had ever experienced before. The proposed institute would have experimental facilities, devoted first of all to X-rays and molecular beams. Without the means of quick conformation or refutation, Planck and his colleagues argued, theorists would lose direction and time; they therefore required a four-story building with the latest apparatus and the best experimenters.

Just after the financial crash of 1929, the projectors, to be on the safe side, submitted the same proposal to the Academy. It was not a good time to ask the Republic for money. In December the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft exported the

proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation, which had helped with the financing of other institutes. In a few months the Foundation granted what German science, industry, and government had declined to provide in a decade and a half: the contemporary dollar equivalent of 1.5 million RM for building and equipping a physics institute to be headed by von Laue, and an additional sum to acquire the necessary land in Berlin-Dahlem. There was the condition that as usual with the Foundation's grants, the recipients promise to assume the costs of operations. Glum accepted the terms, but doubted the possibility of compliance, since the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft had for maintenance only the income (about 50.000 RM) from the sum it had reserved for purchasing land, and the hard-pressed government refused to promise the additional 100.000 RM thought necessary. A request from von Laue that the Society be allowed to build part of the institute and apply the income from the rest of the grant to operations was not favourably received by the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1931 Glum and Planck asked to postpone building for a year or two; meanwhile the money might be found, and Planck would be able to establish physics in Berlin on a sound basis. He had in mind obtaining additional support from the government by coupling the directorship of the hoped-for institute with the professorship of physics at the University of Berlin that would soon be released by Nernst's retirement. The combination might attract not only state money but also (and more likely) the best available physicist. Planck hoped to entice Franck from Göttingen and to transform the paper theoretical institute into a brick-and-mortar home for experiments. He spared no effort to make the position as attractive as possible, as he told von Laue, who had effectively taken over Einstein's directorship but agreed to step down to second in command. The plan did not work: the budget of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft had to be cut again, Nernst stayed another year at the University, the Nazis came, Franck emigrated, and the institute for physics stood poised down to return to nothingness.

As a Rockefeller representative said, "The completion of the Physics Institute lies very close to Planck's heart". It had become for him the ark in which a few exemplary German physicists could weather the national storm. By June 1934 he had picked his Noah in the person of Peter Debye, head of the experimental physics at the University of Leipzig, where he worked harmoniously with Heisenberg. Besides his scientific attainments, Debye had the advantage of Dutch citizenship and the toughness to stand up to Nazi bureaucrats; he justified choosing his assistants for their scientific rather than for their political merit by citing the führer principle, which, he said, made him dictator in his own laboratory. Debye's lieutenant would be von Laue, who would oversee X-ray research in the new institute. But to obtain release of the Rockefeller grant, Planck still required 100.000 RM a year. In July 1934 he wrote the Foundation that the government had agreed to provide the sum. The Rockefeller field representatives doubted that the agreement meant much. For one thing, it was only verbal. For another, they thought it likely that the government would fall and, if it continued, that it would repudiate any commitment to pure science. Already the institute for chemistry worked largely on chemical warfare (so the men in the field reported), and an institute for anthropology devoted itself to race purification. Planck "who held the KWG on a straight course", was old, and Stark stood ready to take his place. The New York office answered that it knew "comparatively little about (Stark) as a person, thereby declaring its incompetence to decide on the release of the funds; it worried instead about covering the running expenses. Meanwhile, on July 1934 the Foundation's W.E. Tisdale visited Planck and asked whether a written commitment could be secured. "He threw up his hands (Tisdale reported) and said that negotiation with the Government was almost impossible... Negotiations are interminably slow and met at every step by indecision and red tape".

Tisdale's visit prompted Planck to make a personal appeal. For four years, he said, he had worked hard to bring the institute into existence; were the Rockefeller

Foundation to withdraw now, "it would be an extremely painful disappointment for me". It would sink the ark. "The future development of physical science in Germany depends very much on whether we are now finally successful in creating a modern physical institute of the first rank, which we have sadly missed for some years in Germany". This appeal by the conscience of German science helped the Foundation to see its way, against its inclinations, to honor the commitment it had made five years before in a different political environment. So perhaps did an interview with Franck, who said that the Nazi's depreciation of pure science "would cause him grave doubts" about the wisdom of building the institute were it not for the presence and guarantees of Planck. On 1 November 1934 the Foundation decided to release the funds and requested a written commitment from the government, which, after much negotiation, Planck was able to supply the following February. In a further coup, he persuaded the authorities to credit the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft with 1,5 million RM for the Rockefeller grant, although at the official rate of exchange the dollars would have brought less than a million marks.

Then Debye went into action. He got the government to agree to give double its promised contribution to operating expenses within two years and to allow him to name his assistants without restrictions; that made Debye "the only undepressed person" Tisdale found in Germany in the fall of 1935. Scientific work began in the institute in 1937. It was not dedicated, however, until May 30, 1938. The reason for the delay, Debye told a visitor from the Rockefeller Foundation, was that Stark and Lenard had protested against the name Debye had chosen for the institute and had mobilized the Ministry for Science, Education and Popular Culture. This conversation took place in January 1938. Five months later Debye felt himself strong enough, and Stark and Lenard sufficiently discredited, to open his new research facilities, with great fanfare, as the Max Planck Institute für Physik".

Roger W. Curtis describes the name-giving event (International Science and Technology, July 1963) on pag. 42-48 of his article:

"Peter Debye, who built the Institute of Physics (with funds of the Rockefeller Foundation) was the first one to name his institute the "Max Planck Institute" and had it carved in stone above the entrance. When the Nazis came into power they told him to remove the name because Planck was an anti-Nazi. So Debye and his staff had a conference and decided to cover "Planck" with a wooden plank (the pun works in German also). But then everyone asked what was behind the board, and two weeks later the Nazis asked Debye to remove the board"

In its edition of November 24, 1936 the New York Times reported about the funding of the KWIP by the Rockefeller Foundation:

"ROCKEFELLER GIFT AIDS REICH SCIENCE.

The Rockefeller Foundation has granted \$ 655,000 to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Germany in fulfillment of pledges made before the Hitler regime came into power, it was learned yesterday. The grant has been used to establish two research laboratories, one for the study of cellular physiology and the other for research in pure physics. Dr. Peter Debye, Holland born scientist who recently received the Nobel Prize for his studies of the structure of the molecule, is head of the physics institute, which is expected to open within a few weeks.

Raymond B. Fosdick, president of the Rockefeller foundation, called attention yesterday at the foundations' offices in Rockefeller Center to the fact that in making the money available the foundation was carrying out promises made to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute prior to 1930. "The world of science is a world without flags or frontiers," Mr. Fosdick said. "It is quite possible, however, that the foundation would not have made the grant if it could have foreseen present conditions in Germany".

The foundation agreed to provide the money for the ground and buildings for the two laboratories and for part of the equipment. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was to provide for continuous upkeep, the salaries of personnel and the rest of the laboratory equipment. Ground for both establishments was purchased at Berlin-Dahlem, a suburb of the capital. The laboratory for the institute of cellular physiology was completed in 1931 and Dr. Otto Warburg, also Nobel Prize winner, was appointed as its head.

A delay in beginning work on the physics laboratory was caused by the inability of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute to find a scientist who could meet the requirements laid down by the Rockefeller Foundation. Dr. Debye was persuaded to leave his post at the University of Leipzig to head the new Institute. The building was completed recently and will be opened soon”.

Together with his position as director of the KWIP Debye also received an appointment as Professor of Physics at Berlin University in 1935.

In a letter dated March 24, 1936 from the Archiv der Humboldt Universität in Berlin, Personalakte Peter Debye Max-Planck Gesellschaft (by courtesy of Dr. Christian Bremen, RWTH Aachen University, Germany) the “Reichs und Preußische Minister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung”, Dr. Bernhard Rust, wrote to ‘Professor Herrn Dr. Peter Debye in Leipzig C1, Linnestr. 4”:

“Im Verfolg der in meinem Auftrag mit Ihnen geführten Verhandlungen berufe ich Sie zum 1. Oktober 1935 in gleicher Eigenschaft aus dem Sächsischen Landesdienst in den Preußischen Landesdienst und weise Sie unter Übernahme in das Beamtenverhältnis der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Berlin zu. Ich verleihe Ihnen in dieser Fakultät die durch das Ausscheiden des Professors Dr. Nernst freigewordene planmäßige Professor für Physik.....

Ihr bisheriges Dienstverhältnis im Sächsischen Landesdienst endet mit Ablauf des Monats September 1935. Entsprechend der mit Ihnen getroffenen Vereinbarung von 14. Dezember 1935 erwerben Sie durch diese Berufung nicht die Deutsche Reichsangehörigkeit. Sie bleiben weiterhin Holländischer Staatsangehöriger.

Im Einvernehmen mit dem Herrn Preußischen Finanzminister bewillige ich Ihnen vom 1. Oktober 1935 ab anstelle Ihres bisherigen Dienstehaltens und unter Vorwegnahme sämtlicher Alterszulagen ein Grundgehalt von jährlich 16400 RM, in Worten: Sechzehntausendvierhundert Reichsmark’, neben dem gesetzlichen Wohnungsgeldzuschuß, dem örtlichen Sonderzuschlag und den etwaigen Kinderbeihilfen. Diese Bezüge wird Ihnen die Universitätskasse zu Berlin in die vorgeschriebenen Teilbeträgen im voraus zahlen. Für das Ihnen zufließende Unterrichtsgeld haben die Ihnen bekannten allgemeine Bestimmungen Gültigkeit.

Es wird Ihnen aber Gewähr dafür geleistet, daß Ihnen eine Einnahme an Unterrichtsgeld von jährlich 7000 RM, in Worten: Siebentausend Reichsmark verbleibt. Diese Zusicherung fällt mit dem Zeitpunkt Ihrer Entpflichtung fort. Die vorgenannten Bezüge unterliegen den allgemeinen Kürzungsbestimmungen.

Wegen der Erstattung der Umzugskosten wollen Sie sich mit den Herrn Verwaltungsdirektor bei der Universität in Berlin ins Benehmen setzen. Wegen Übernahme der Leitung des Kaiser-Wilhelm-Instituts für Physik in Berlin-Dahlem wird der Herr Präsident der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft das weitere Veranlassen. Die Ihnen aus Forschungstätigkeit bei der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zufließende Vergütung bleibt Ihnen in voller Höhe belassen. Den Herr Verwaltungsdirektor, die akademischen Behörden der Universität in Berlin, den Herrn Präsidenten der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft sowie das Sächsische Ministerium für Volksbildung in Dresden habe ich hiervon in Kenntnis gesetzt.”

Translation: Following the negotiations carried out with you under my instructions, I appoint you from October 1-st, 1935 to the Prussian Civil Service in the same capacity as your appointment in the Saxon Civil Service and I assign

you to the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Berlin. I confer on you in this faculty the position of Professor of Physics, which has become vacant on the retirement of Professor Dr. Nernst....

Your present employment in the Saxon Civil Service stops at the end of the month of September 1935. In accordance with the agreement of December 14, 1935 that we have made with you, you will not become a German citizen on appointment. You will remain a Dutch citizen. With the agreement of the Prussian Minister of Finance I assign to you from October 1, 1935 as your present revenues and getting ahead of all old-age gratifications a basic salary of 16400 Reichsmark per year, in words 'sixteentousandfourhundred reichsmarks', as well as the legal housing allowance, the special local allowance and any possible children's allowance. These payments will be made to you in advance in the terms prescribed by the bursar of the University. The general arrangements for tuition fees, which are known to you, will apply. It is guaranteed, however, that you will receive a yearly income of 7000 Reichsmark for tuition fees, in words 'seventhousand Reichsmark'. This guarantee stops when you are relieved of your responsibility. The above-mentioned arrangements are liable to the general reduction decrees. Regarding reimbursement of the moving expenses: please come to an agreement with the director of the administration of the University in Berlin. The President of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Gesellschaft will take care of further arrangements with regard to the acceptance of the leadership of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute of Physics in Berlin-Dahlem. The full allowance to which you are entitled for your research activities at the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft will be continued. I have informed the director of administration, the academic authorities in Berlin, the presidents of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft and the Saxon Ministry of Education in Dresden."

Between the time Peter Debye began his study in Aachen in 1901 (Aachen 1901-1906, Munich 1906-1911, Göttingen 1914-1920, Leipzig 1927-1935) and 1935, he had worked for 24 years in Germany. During this time period, he also stayed for 9 years in Switzerland (Zürich 1911-1912, and 1920-1927) but it was only for two years that he returned to the Netherlands with high hopes, when he was appointed professor at Utrecht University from 1912-1914. He felt forced to leave Utrecht when the university denied his request to use any laboratory facilities because he had been appointed as a theoretical physicist. It is well documented that he had a great love for his country of birth and the city of Maastricht. When Max Planck asked Peter Debye to become the director of the KWIP, Debye wanted to be sure that this would not interfere with his Dutch citizenship. He therefore asked permission of the Dutch queen to keep his Dutch citizenship, as he was to become director of the KWIP. He describes that himself in the foreword of "The collected papers of Peter J.W. Debye":

"At the time I accepted to go to Berlin I was still a Dutch citizen. According to Dutch law a Dutch citizen can accept state positions in another state, without loosing his citizenship, only with permission of the queen. I applied for this permission. It was granted".

How Debye kept his Dutch passport is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

- Before 1933 the KWIP was a "paper institute". By 1933 Einstein had lost interest in the institute and the institute was runned by Max von Laue.
- It was the initiative of Max Planck, who is described as the "conscience of German science", to establish a new, prestigious KWIP, which would be dedicated to pure science and which would operate independently from the Nazis and Nazi ideology.
- Max von Laue was Einstein's successor as director of the KWIP paper institute.

- It was Planck's intention to have Nobel laureate James Franck as director of the KWIP. Since Franck left Germany in 1933, he was not available.
- Planck then asked Debye as KWIP director on the basis of Debye's scientific merits and since he had the toughness to stand up to the Nazi bureaucrats.
- The Rockefeller Foundation agreed with Planck's judgment about Debye's scientific merits and his ability to stand up to the Nazi bureaucrats.
- Rispen states on page 174 of his book *Einstein in Nederland* that Debye immediately accepted Planck's offer to become the successor of Einstein as KWIP director and he continues with a description of the whole matter which places Debye in a negative perspective. Study of the sources shows that Debye was not Einstein's successor. It also shows that the sources, for example Heilbrons' book, which is also found in Rispen's reference list, do not support Rispen's negative perspective of Debye on pages 174-175 of his book.

CHAPTER 4. THE NOBEL PRIZE. 1936

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to Prof. Peter Debye in November 1936. He accepted the prize and traveled to Stockholm to receive it. This was, at that time and under the circumstances, not an obvious thing to do in Nazi Germany, as we can read in Hentschell's book (1996) on pages 141-143:

"When Carl von Ossietzky (a German pacifist leader) was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1935, Hitler was so enraged that he prevented the internee from accepting it and forbade all Germans from accepting any Nobel prizes, to prevent similar affairs in the future".

The decree published by the Nazis was very clear:

"Acceptance of a Nobel prize is herewith forbidden to all Germans for all future times".

The Swedish Academy of Sciences decided that it could not discriminate between Germans and other nationalities, so it kept awarding Nobel prizes to German scientists and ignored the German decree. According to Hentschell:

"For instance it awarded the 1939 Nobel prize in chemistry jointly to Adolf Butenandt (1903-) and Leopold Ruzicka (1887-1976), and retroactively for the year 1938 to Richard Kuhn (1900-1967); Gerhard Domagk (1895-1964) received the Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine. They were all forced to decline the award, however. For Butenandt's vivid description of the pressure he was subjected to by R. Mentzel and his collegus see Karlsson [1990], pp. 105-106. See also Time, Nov. 6, 1939: 'Since Adolf Hitler forbade Germans to accept Nobel Prizes, Domagk has already politely refused to take the prize money. Kuhn and Butenandt will probably do the same, unless they want to perform the scientific experiment of living in a concentration camp'. The prizes were handed out to them retroactively in 1947 when they were able to explain the circumstances of their initial involuntary refusals".

That Debye went to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize can therefore be interpreted as a courageous action, considering the fury of the Nazis against the Nobel Prizes.

Rispens states in his book on page 175 that Debye deliberately kept his Dutch passport to get the Nobel Prize. He does not give references to support this statement and it is not in agreement with the facts we know about Debye, see below.

During the FBI investigation of Debye set into motion by a letter of Prof. Samuel Goudsmit and which was carried out by the FBI from September to November 1940, the strong desire of Debye to stay a Dutch citizen is raised by some of the interviewed scientists. Prof. Bridgman (Harvard University) states in FBI report 62-475 dated October 24, 1940 that:

"In the fall of 1927 the University of Leipzig offered him (=Debye) a position which he accepted on condition that he could retain his Dutch citizenship and would not come within the rule that when a foreigner accepted a position within a German University, that person automatically became a German citizen. Then in 1936 Debye received a call to be a Director at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, Dahlem, Germany, which he accepted under the same condition of retaining his Dutch citizenship".

In the FBI report 77-2476 TK dated September 30, 1940 a note is found in which is stated that when Debye came to the US in 1940, he was in the possession of a passport issued by the Kingdom of The Netherlands on April 17, 1939 in Berlin, Germany. (We know from the Debye family archives that his wife and his daughter had received Dutch passports on the same date.)

In the Netherlands, the current validity term for passports is five years and, as far as I could find, that was also the case before WW2. If Debye fell under this procedure he must have had a new passport every five years before April 17, 1939, i.e. Spring 1934, Spring 1929, Spring 1924 etc. If for some technicality Debye's Dutch passport had been lost, as Goudsmit recalls in the FBI report in which he was interviewed about Debye, it seems most likely to have happened around 1927 when Debye was appointed the Director of the Physics Institute at the University of Leipzig. The year 1927 was also the year in which Goudsmit left Germany to accept a position in the US, so events in that period may have been stored in his memory. This hypothesis is supported by the letter from Debye dated May 15, 1958 to Dr. Wylick, see below.

In FBI report 62-6887 dated October 2, 1940 Dr. Warren Weaver, head of the Educational Division of the Rockefeller Institute, also mentions the passport matter:

"Weaver further stated that Debye had told him, and it was a matter of common knowledge, that his Dutch citizenship had lapsed, due to some legal technicality, and that it had been restored to him while he was still residing in Germany by a special act of Queen Wilhelmina. This restoration of citizenship, which appeared on his passport, gave him an almost diplomatic status".

Debye travelled abroad in:

- May 1927, University of Wisconsin, USA,
- July-August 1932, President Compton of M.I.T., USA,
- October 1934-April 1935, University of Liege, Belgium
- July 1935, Oxford, UK, Leiden and Eindhoven, The Netherlands
- August 1936, Harvard University, USA
- November 1936, Stockholm, Sweden
- May 1937 Rome, Italy

On all these occasions Debye must have had a valid Dutch passport.

Debye's son wrote me by e-mail the following about the passport matter:

"I remember that my father always confirmed our Dutch nationality before accepting another position such as for instance Leipzig or Berlin. I remember that for Leipzig my father was told that he would have to become a German citizen for his appointment because it was the law, which my father answered by saying 'well if you want me, change the law', and they did".

The passport question is fully clarified in a letter dated May 15, 1958 to Dr. W.A.H. van Wylick (Regionaal Historisch Archief, Maastricht, the Netherlands, doos 37) in which Debye writes about his passport on page 2 of this letter the following:

"Uw vermoeden over mijn officieele nationaliteit is niet juist. De werkelyke geschiedenis volgt. Het is waar, dat, als ik van Utrecht naar Goettingen verhuisde en daar hoogleraar aan de universiteit werd, volkomen onbekend was met de nationaliteits-wetten. Tot mijn schrik werd mij, kort nadat ik in Goettingen was aangekomen, verteld, dat ik nu duitscher was. Daaraan kon ik niets veranderen. Dat dit maar de helft van het onaangename geval betrof en dat ik door "overname van een positie van een vreemden staat" bovendien mijn nederlandsche nationaliteit verloren had bleef mij nog lange jaren onbekend. Toen ik van Goettingen naar Zurich terugging (1920), (nu aan de Technische Hoogeschool in Zurich) diende ik in Duitschland de nodige stukken in, waarin ik verklaarde, dat ik nu ook officieel uit den duitschen "Staatsverband" uitstapte. Daarmee dacht ik is alles in orde totdat ik toevallig door van der Waerden op de nederlandsche wet werd opmerkzaam gemaakt. Dat gebeurde in Leipzig (ongeveer 1927 op 1928). Wij kwamen daarover te spreken omdat ik van der Waerden vertelde, dat ik, voordat ik de positie in Leipzig had aangenomen, een stuk liet onderteekenen in het ministerie van Saxen. In dit stuk werd uitdrukkelijk verklaard, dat mijn geval een uitzondering was en ik niet duitscher werd door

overname van de positie aan de universiteit. Nadat het mij duidelijk was, dat dit niet genoeg was volgens nederlandsche opvatting, heb ik toen een petitie ingediend, die door de tweede kamer (en waarschijnlijk ook door de eerste kamer) ging. Eindresultaat ik had nu ook weer de nederlandsche nationaliteit. Toen ik tenslotte naar Berlijn ging heeft ten eerste minister Rust een stuk geteekend volgens hetwelk ik door overname van de positie in Berlijn niet duitsche werd. Ten tweede heb ik een petitie in Nederland ingediend en de koningin heeft verklaard, dat ik haar toestemming had de positie in Berlijn aan te nemen. Dus nu was alles in orde, totdat de duitsche regeering mij den secretaris van de Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft stuurde met de verklaring, dat ik alleen dan van het door mij met Rockefeller-geld gebouwde laboratorium gebruik kon maken, indien ik duitscher werd. Toen ben ik naar Amerika gegaan. Hier bleef ik Nederlander (en betaalde dubbele belasting) totdat de oorlog voorbij was. In 1946 werd ik officieel genaturaliseerd als Amerikaan op eigen verzoek”.

Translation: “Your assumption about my official nationality is not correct. The real history is as follows. It is true that I was fully unfamiliar with the nationality laws when I moved from Utrecht to Goettingen and became a professor there. To my fright, I was told I was a German, shortly after my arrival in Goettingen. I could not do anything about it. That this was only half of the unpleasant case and that I had lost my Dutch nationality through the acceptance of a position in a foreign country was for many years unknown to me. When I went back from Goettingen to Zurich (1920, now at the Technische Hochschule in Zurich) I submitted the necessary documents in Germany, in which I declared that I was now officially released from German citizenship. I thought that everything was in order until by accident my attention was drawn to Dutch law by Van der Waerden. That happened in Leipzig (approximately in 1927-1928.) We happened to talk about it because I told Van der Waerden that I had a document signed in the Ministry of Saxen, before I accepted the position in Leipzig. In this document it was explicitly stated, that my case was an exception and that I would not become German by accepting a position at the university. When it became clear to me, that this was not sufficient for Dutch law I presented a petition, which passed “Tweede Kamer” of parliament (and probably also the “Eerste Kamer”). The final result was that I now regained my Dutch nationality. When I finally went to Berlin Minister Rust signed a document which stated that I would not become German by accepting a position in Berlin. Secondly I presented a petition in The Netherlands and the Queen declared that I had her permission to accept the position in Berlin. So everything was all right until the German Government sent the secretary of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft to me with the declaration that I could only use the laboratory, which I had built with money from the Rockefeller Foundation if I became German. Then I went to America. Here I stayed a Dutchman (and paid double taxes) until the war was over. In 1946 I was officially naturalized as an American citizen at my own request”.

The list of passengers of the S.S. “Europa” travelling from Cherbourg to New York in July, 1932 mentions Debye and his wife Mathilde as having Dutch passports (Ref. Debye family archives). This means that Debye had a Dutch passport while employed in Leipzig. In a publication in the Dutch “Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden No 174“, dated April 9, 1935, Queen Wilhelmina of The Netherlands announced the law in which Petrus Josephus Wilhelmus Debye is granted certificates of naturalization as a Dutch citizen (Reprint by courtesy of Wil Lem from Maastricht, published by Ted Reckman in De Ster, Maastricht, December 15, 2006). The law had passed both chambers of the Dutch parliament and the State Council. The law was passed after Debye had sent a handwritten request to Queen Wilhelmina, dated January 4, 1934. In another handwritten letter to

Queen Wilhelmina, dated July 23, 1935 Debye asked permission to take up as Dutchman his directorship and professorship in Berlin.

In an e-mail from December 28, 2006, Dr. Peter P.R. Debye, Debye's son reported us (Debye's son was born in 1916 in Göttingen, Germany and the family moved to Zürich, Switzerland in 1920):

"I grew up with the firm belief that our family had the Dutch Nationality and I never had any indication that this is not true. I do not recall any discussion about the validity of our Dutch Nationality. There may have been statements reaffirming this fact. When documentation was required, as for instance in crossing borders, we always had Dutch passports.

I recall that when we moved from Zurich to Leipzig in 1927, my father told me that the Germans had a law that required him to give up his Dutch Nationality before he could take the position there. My father's answer was: If you want me then you will have to change that law – and they did. When we moved from Leipzig to Berlin my father explicitly included in the agreement that we could do this as Dutch citizens.

Being a Dutch citizen at this time was extremely important because it gave us a certain immunity to every day pressures that German citizens were experiencing. For example: I distinctly remember watching a uniformed band march down Leopold Street in Munich and the onlookers that did not respond with a raised arm were interrogated by storm troopers walking along with the band. Naturally I was one of those that had not saluted H.H. fashion, but when asked why not and my answer was that I am a Dutch citizen, they went on.

This kind of isolation undoubtedly made our life much easier and kept us away from the anxiety and fear that forced people to refrain from any loud derogatory remarks anywhere in public. I had my valid Dutch passport crossing many national borders until I finally came to the USA on July 7, 1939 to visit for 2 months with my girlfriend on invitation by her parents. I had left Berlin with my mother saying - -"and if war breaks out, don't come back." That happened on September 3, 1939 and I received a telegram from my Dutch grandmother saying not to come back. Some months later my father joined me in New York City and we both went to Cornell in Ithaca, N.Y. My father became a US citizen in 1946. On January 1, 1951, I also became a citizen of the USA".

The article "Erinnerungen an Peter Debye und an meine Lehrjahre" from Prof. Erich Hüchel (Phys. Blätter, 26 (1972) 53-57) makes the matter perfectly clear: Debye never lost his Dutch passport, but he had during the period in Göttingen both a Dutch and a German passport:

"Beinahe wäre Debye im 1. Weltkrieg in die Fänge des Deutschen Militärs gekommen. Obwohl er die niederländische Staatsbürgerschaft besaß, hatte er zugleich als deutscher Beamter auch die deutsche" ... Translation: Debye almost fell in the trap of the German military in WWI. Although he had the Dutch nationality he had as a German civil servant also the German nationality."

From these sources it can be concluded that they give no evidence that Debye kept his Dutch passport in order to receive the Nobel Prize as stated by Rispen.

CHAPTER 5. DEBYE AND THE ESCAPE OF LISE MEITNER AND OTHER (JEWISH) COLLEAGUES.

On November 12, 1933 Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and the Nazis were in power. In September 1935 the Nazi-dominated parliament passed the racist Nuremberg decrees on the basis of which Jews were banned from public employment. The forced retirement of Jews currently employed in public service became effective on December 31, 1935. On March 12, 1938 Hitler annexed Austria. As a consequence, the Austrian Jews in Germany were then also subjected to the racist laws of the Nazis. This endangered the Austrian scientist Dr. Lise Meitner, a brilliant nuclear physicist who worked in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry, which was headed by Prof. Otto Hahn. Colleagues of Lise Meitner saw the danger and helped her to escape from the Nazis.

Rispens writes in his article in *Vrij Nederland* about Debye and Lise Meitner's escape:

“Dat de situatie meer dan hinderlijk was, ontging Debye volledig. Zo had hij niet in de gaten dat door de Anslu  van Oostenrijk bij Hitler-Duitsland een van zijn beste medewerkers zich in acuut gevaar bevonden. Het ging om de joodse scheikundige en specialiste op het gebied van radioactiviteit, Lise Meitner.”

Translation: *“That the situation was much more than annoying escaped Debye's attention completely. He did not notice for example that, because of the Anschluss of Austria by Hitler-Germany, one of his best coworkers was in danger. This was the Jewish chemist and specialist in the field of radioactivity, Lise Meitner”.*

In his book on page 178-179, Rispens paints an oblique and naïve picture of Debye's involvement in the escape of his Jewish colleague Lise Meitner out of Germany mid-1938. Rispens statements are not in agreement with the historical facts.

First of all, Lise Meitner was not Debye's coworker. She worked together with Otto Hahn in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Chemistry; Debye was director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics. As described by the sources in Chapter 2, Max Planck and Debye ensured that the research in the KWIP was as much as possible independent of the Nazi authorities. They were helped in this by the financial support of the American Rockefeller Foundation, which did not want state interference with the physics research in the KWIP.

In the book: “Lise Meitner and the Dawn of the Nuclear Age” (Patricia Rife (1999), in chapter 8 “*Escape from Germany*”, a positive and active role is attributed to Debye in the escape of Lise Meitner. In the chapter “Escape” in the biography of Lise Meitner by Ruth Lewin Sime (1996), which Rispens seems to have used for his account of the story, a much more active and more positive picture of the role of Debye is presented than the one painted by Rispens. With these actions, Debye directly endangered himself and his family. The Jewish scientist Lise Meitner, who played a very important role in the Uranium research in the laboratory of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute of Chemistry, was being discussed in the Nazi government. The escape of Lise Meitner not only saved her life, but it was also very important that one of the key scientists in nuclear fission research was out of reach of the Nazis. In the biography of Lise Meitner by Ruth Lewin Sime (1996) one finds the following role of Debye in the escape of Lise Meitner:

June 16, 1938 Debye writes to Bohr seeking help to obtain a position for Lise Meitner outside Germany

June 26, 1938 Lise Meitner spends that day at Debye's home

June 27, 1938 Lise Meitner meets with Rassmussen, von Laue and Debye in

- Debye's Berlin home to discuss if she should go to Holland or Sweden. Meitner decides on Sweden*
- July 4, 1938 *Lise Meitner spends the evening with Hahn and Hertz in Debye's home. Debye and Lise Meitner agree that she must leave immediately because of the imminent strict enforcement of the policy prohibiting departure of scientists from Germany*
- July 6, 1938 *Debye sends an SOS letter to Coster in Holland to get him to take Lise Meitner immediately to Holland*
- July 11, 1938 *Coster arrives in Berlin from Holland during late evening and he stays with the Debye family*
- July 13, 1938 *Lise Meitner leaves by train with Coster. They arrive at six in the evening in Groningen, Holland*

In her biography of Lise Meitner, Rachel Stiffler Barron (2000) describes the escape and the dangers for her and all who helped her as follows:

"Coster arrived in Berlin and spent Monday night with a friend, Peter Debye, and his family. He could not talk to Lise directly without arousing suspicion, so he explained the plan to Peter who then relayed the message to Otto (Hahn): Lise should be ready to leave first thing Wednesday morning".

The author characterizes the dangerous environment as follows:

"Lise stayed at work until eight p.m. then left for home where she hastily threw all she could into two small suitcases. She could not withdraw any of her money from the bank either. She could not tell anyone good-bye. All those things would have tipped off the German Officials that she was planning not just a short trip, but to flee the country permanently. They would arrest her and anyone else who was helping her.

It was only later that everyone understood how close Lise had come to being turned in to the German authorities. Kurt Hess, a Nazi scientist at the institute (KWIC), had somehow learned she was planning to escape and had notified the government. Fortunately, two sympathetic police officers purposely delayed the investigation long enough for her to escape".

Rispens used the information of Sime and distorted it so that it ends up being negative for Debye. Rispens fails to mention the enormous risk that Debye took on for himself and his family.

Debye not only helped Lise Meitner to escape, but also others. We know from different sources about the following persons who were helped by Debye. Examples are:

- a. Around 1933 Debye and his wife assisted their Jewish help in the house to get out of reach of the Nazis. She escaped to Spain via Belgium and France. How this was done, see under (e) (Ref. Mrs. Siemens-Niël, the Netherlands).
- b. Debye tried to get help from Linus Pauling to find a safe haven outside Germany for Henri S. Sack, his Jewish assistant in Leipzig from 1927-1933. Debye fought in vain to prevent Sack's dismissal in Leipzig, but he succeeded in having him later hired by Cornell University (Refs. The Pauling Archives and the Debye family archives).
- c. In 1935 the Jewish Prof. Dr. Ing. Salmang, who worked at the KWI in Berlin, was dismissed from the KWI on the basis of the Nazi laws from 1935. Debye helped Prof. Salmang to get a new job at Sphinx in Maastricht, the Netherlands). Prof. Salmang and his family were friends of Debye also after WW2. (Refs. Debye

- archives in the Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg, Maastricht, the Netherlands and letter of Prof. Salmang to Debye dated May 29, 1959).
- d. Debye contacted E.K. Condon, Westinghouse (letter dated May 9, 1940) and asked for his help to get a position for his former KWIP assistant Dr. van der Grinten. Van der Grinten was also a Dutch citizen and thus forced to leave the KWIP. He was in charge of the KWIP high voltage equipment the Nazis wanted for nuclear fission research at the end of 1939 (Refs. Debye family archives and the Debye archives in the Regionaal Historisch centrum Limburg in Maastricht).
 - e. Debye helped his coworkers in Berlin who wanted to escape from Germany. (Ref. Interview of Debye's sister and her daughter Mia in 1970, Tapes and transcripts are available in the Debye Archives in Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht.) This was done via Belgium. Debye's brother-in-law, Mr. Hubert Niël had an important role in the Belgian escape route. He had roots in Belgium and he knew many people in Belgium and France. When somebody had to be helped to get away Debye, sent his brother-in-law a postcard with the remark 'Hubert, can you arrange this' and then Mr. Niël took care of it. Both men did not talk about it after the war. One of the reasons was that upon liberation of Maastricht by the Allied Forces on September 13, 1944 many people suddenly declared themselves members of the resistance movement while it could be shown that they had cooperated with the Germans (Ref. Mrs. Siemens-Niël). In the interviews of Debye's sister Caroline and her daughter Mia by Mrs. Schotman in 1970 (Debye Archive in Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht) they refer to the deep friendship of Debye with King Albert and Queen Elisabeth from Belgium. They shared the love for rose gardens. Debye's sister Caroline and her daughter Mia stated that Debye even wanted to go to Brussels upon his retirement and live there. There is no evidence that this friendship played a role in the Belgian escape route of the Debye-Niël couple.

Debye seemed not to have had interest in promoting himself or the things he did on behalf of other people in Germany under Nazi rule, see for example his letter to Miss Gloria Wagner of September 27, 1962 upon her questions to give her information about Lise Meitner and her escape from Nazi Germany. (Ref. Debye Archives in Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht):

"Dear Miss Wagner,

I have indeed known Lise Meitner. I was in Berlin as a Director of the "Kaiser Wilhelm Institut" for Physics. She was a collaborator of Otto Hahn and was born in Austria. Just at that time she began to fear trouble with the Nazis since she is Jewish. Very quickly she left Germany over Holland before anything happened. The best man who could tell you whether anything has been written, which is of importance to you would be Hahn himself. He is still living in Goettingen, Germany. I believe that the name of the street he is living in is "Gerviniusstrasse". He is a friendly person and will certainly answer a letter in case you care to write him. Sincerely yours. P. Debye".

CHAPTER 6. THE “DEUTSCHE PHYSIKALISCHE GESELLSCHAFT (DPG)” IN 1937-1939

Debye became Chairman of the Board of the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft (abbreviated DPG) in 1937. To my knowledge Debye has been up to now the only non-German Chairman. From 1935 to the end of 1938 the DPG Board and its chairman Debye succeeded successfully to prevent execution of the racist Nuremberg laws, so they kept their “non-aryan” members as long as possible.

At the end of 1938, the DPG was forced by the Nazis to address the ‘Aryan question’. This resulted in a letter from the DPG, dated December 9, 1938, in which Debye as Chairman of the Board asked the Jewish DPG members to relinquish their membership in view of the Nazi laws regarding race (in accordance with statutory exclusion of their membership).

Rispens writes in his book on page 180 about this matter:

“In november 1938, Lise Meitner is net veilig in Zweden aangekomen, maken de nieuwe leiders de balans op van de ‘Reichskristallnacht’: meer dan duizend synagogen zijn afgebrand, zo’n achtduizend Joodse winkels vernield en talloze woningen verwoest. Voor Debye is het nieuws voornamelijk relevant omdat nu van hem wordt verwacht dat hij alle ‘niet-arysche’ personen van de ledenlijst van de Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft schrapt.”

Translation: *“In November 1938, Lise Meitner is safely arrived in Sweden, the new leaders draw up the balance of the ‘Reichskristallnacht’: more than a thousand synagogues have been burned, approximately eight thousand Jewish shops destroyed and countless homes demolished. For Debye the news is primarily relevant since he is now expected to remove all ‘non-aryan’ from the membership of the DPG”.*

He makes the same statement in his newspaper article in Vrij Nederland dated January 21, 2006. In the newspaper the Aachener Nachrichten of February 23, 2006 Rispens goes even further, see the quotations of his statements:

“Er (=Debye) habe aber die Situation von 1934 bis 1940 als ‘Opportunist für seine eigene Zwecke genutzt’. Immerhin habe Debye “strukturell an der ‘Lösung der Judenfrage’ innerhalb der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft und der Deutschen Physikalischen Gesellschaft mitgearbeitet’. Nach Rispens Forschungen existieren ‘einige Dutzend, mit ‘Heil Hitler’ unterzeichnete Briefe, in denen er mit den Behörden ‘die Judenfrage diskutiert’. Vor allem habe Debye 1938 den Auftrag gegeben in einer ‘Sonderaktion’ die Juden aus der Deutschen Physikalischen Gesellschaft (DPG) zu entfernen”. Ausserdem hat Debye ‘ohne dazu aufgefordert zu werden dafür gesorgt, dass die ‘Judenfrage’ auch in der Satzungen der DPG geregelt wird’. Schliesslich habe Debye der 1940 in die USA übersiedelte, ‘mehrfach probiert nach Hitlerdeutschland zurückzukehren, ohne das er dazu gezwungen wurde.”

Translation: *“He (= Debye) used the situation from 1934 until 1940 as ‘opportunist for his own goals’. Furthermore, Debye ‘contributed structurally to the ‘solution of the Jewish question’ in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft and in the German Physical Society. According to Rispens’ research some dozen letters exist signed with ‘Heil Hitler’ in which he discusses with the authorities ‘the Jewish question’. In particular, Debye in 1938 gave the order in a ‘special action’ to remove the Jews from the German Physical Society. Moreover, Debye ‘without being forced to do so, saw to it that the Jewish question was also dealt with in the meetings of the German Physical Society’. Finally, Debye tried numerous times after he had emigrated to the USA in 1940, to return to Hitler’s Germany without being forced to do so.”*

[Note of Van Ginkel: The use of terms such as “Lösung der Judenfrage” (solution of the Jewish question) and “Sonderaktion” (special action), with their very charged connotation, is in this context totally irresponsible. The first term points to the extermination of the Jews, the second is directly associated with the murder squads of the SS.]

The historical sources do not give any support for these accusations. In the historical sources the following information is found:

Under great pressure from the Nazis, the DPG Board decided that its Chairman, Peter Debye, would write the letter. The circumstances in which this letter came to be written have been extensively documented and described by the German historians Rechenberg, Kant, Hentschel and Hoffmann and by the American historian Walker. Beyerchen (1977) has also described the letter and the protests of the Nazis with regard to the text in note 82 on page 230 of his book. The historians state that the Board and/or Debye painstakingly crafted the text in such a manner that the dignity of his Jewish colleagues would be spared as much as possible under the given circumstances at the time. The Board and Debye firmly opposed the pressure of the Nazis, who wanted the text to be much harsher toward the Jewish physicists. According to the opinion of the Nazis, Debye’s line was much too ‘*Judenfreundlich*’ (*friendly towards the Jews*). They wanted to unseat him as the President of the DPG. A detailed account of this can be found in a paper in *Physikalische Blätter* 44 (1988) by Rechenberg, an article by Dieter Hoffmann in *Phys. Perspect.* 7 (2005) pp 293-329 and in a book by Klaus Hentschell from 1996 (*Physics and National Socialism. An Anthology of Primary Sources*) and in an article by Dieter Hoffmann and Mark Walker in *Physics Today* (December 2004, pp. 52-58) which is also listed in Rispen’s overview of the literature he used.

A grandson of Debye, Prof. Nordulf Debye, who grew up in the house of his grandparents from 1951 states the following regarding the letter:

“Peter Debye had no love for the Nazis. He disliked politicians. He loved the pursuit of science and his country of birth above all else. He refused to sign that infamous DPG letter even after being ordered confined to his office in Berlin until he signed it, a story I heard many times at home”.

I will elaborate below in some more detail on the circumstances under which this letter was written on the basis of sources, which have been published in the open literature in the past decades and personal communications of science historians who have studied this matter in more detail.

6a. In the article by Hoffmann and Walker in *Physics Today* from December 2004, the authors state on page 54:

“It is significant that the DPG, in contrast to other scientific professional organizations – for example, those representing mathematicians, chemists and engineers – only expelled its last Jewish members when forced to do so in 1938”.

6b. Rechenberg states in his 1988 paper in *Physikalische Blätter* 44 page 418, the following about this matter:

“Am 9-10 November 1938 erreichte die Judenverfolgung in Deutschland in der sog. Reichskristallnacht einen weithin vernehmbaren Höhepunkt. Weniger aufsehenerregend verlief dagegen die endgültige formelle Ausschaltung der jüdischen Mitbürger aus allen bereichen der Gesellschaft. Ende 1938 musste auch die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft den Widerstand gegen diese Entwicklung aufgeben.

Die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft war "eine der wenigen Organisationen, die der Gleichschaltung im Dritten Reich entgehen konnte", die "nie von einer umfassenden, von den Nationalsozialisten beherrschten Dachorganisation geschluckt und nie einem von den Nationalsozialisten ernannten Präsidenten unterstellt wurden" (Beyerchen).

Trotz der öffentlichen Massnahmen gegen die Deutschen Juden ("Gesetz von der Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums" vom April 1933, "Nürnberger Gesetze" vom September 1935) hatte die Gesellschaft unter von Laue und seinen Nachfolgern Jonathan Zenneck und Peter Debye ihre aus den akademischen Ämtern und Behörden vertrieben Mitgliedern behalten".

Translation: "On November 9-10, 1938 the persecution of Jews in Germany reached a noticeable climax through the so-called "Reichskristallnacht". Much less noticeable, however, was the formal exclusion of Jewish citizens from all aspects of society. At the end of 1938 the German Physical Society also had to give up its resistance against these developments. The German Physical Society was one of the few organisations to escape alignment in the Third Reich. It was never absorbed by a broad Nazi-dominated cover organization, and never submitted to a Nazi-appointed president (Beyerchen).

Despite the public measures against the German Jews ("Law of the Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums of April 1933, the Nurnberg laws from September 1935) the Society under the presidency of Von Laue and his successors Jonathan Zenneck and Peter Debye had kept those members, which had been expelled in other academic professions and authorities".

6c. Hoffmann and Walker (Physics Today, 2004) describe in more detail the pressure on the DPG both from the inside by DPG Nazi members Stuart and Ortmann as well as from the outside by the Reich Ministry of Education to get rid of the "non-Aryan" members of the DPG. The Board of the DPG therefore was forced by the Nazis to act in this matter.

6d. The German historian Klaus Hentschel writes in a letter dated 27 January 2006 to historian Ernst Homburg of Maastricht about this matter.

"The DPG tried to keep all its members, including émigrés, Jews, communists, etc. as long as possible. It was possible astonishingly long, much longer than in the case of German chemists (as documented by Ute Deichmann). But in 1938, a few younger NSDAP party members mounted increasing pressure on the Vorstand to exclude Jewish members. After an intense, but unfortunately undocumented debate, it was decided that the president would write this letter, rather than exclude the unwanted persons ex cathedra. Of course, as seen from today, it was a mistake to bend to the pressure, but at the time, Debye and his colleagues in the Vorstand seem to have considered it the lesser evil. That Debye signed official letters with this phrase (meant here is: Heil Hitler) is not so surprising; anything else would have been rebellious in this official context. So this signature per se is not so much the problem".

6e. After the decision of the DPG Board that its Chairman should write the letter, Peter Debye formulated the following text, dated December 9, 1938 (Rechenberg 1988):

"Unter den obwaltenden zwingenden Umständen kann die Mitgliederschaft von reichsdeutschen Juden im Sinne der Nürnberger Gesetze in der Deutschen Physikalische Gesellschaft nicht mehr aufrecht erhalten werden. Im Einverständnis mit dem Vorstand fordere ich daher alle Mitglieder, welche unter die Bestimmung fallen, auf, mir ihren Austritt aus der Gesellschaft mitzuteilen".

6f. Hoffmann and Walker (Physics Today 2004) present the following English translation of this text:

“To the German members of the German Physical Society: Given the compelling circumstances, the membership of German Jews as defined by the German laws in the German Physical Society can no longer be sustained. In agreement with the executive committee, I therefore call upon all members who come under this provision to communicate their resignation from the Society to me. Heil Hitler, P. Debye. Chairman”.

And they comment: *“Thus the DPG got rid of its non-Aryan members in what was perhaps a relatively gentle and respectful way...”*

6g. On December 2, 1938 Peter Debye wrote a letter to the members of the Vorstand of the DPG (Rechenberg, 1988):

“Ich beabsichtige, am Mittwoch, dem 8. Dezember das beiliegenden Schreiben (meant is the text of the December 9, 1938 letter) an sämtliche deutsche Mitglieder der Deutschen Physikalischen Gesellschaft zu versenden. Falls Sie mir nicht bis zum 6. Dezember Mitteilung zukommen lassen, setze ich Ihr Einverständnis voraus. Gez. P. Debye Vorsitzender”.

Das beiliegenden Schreiben hatte im wesentlichen den oben wiedergegebenen Wortlaut, allerdings mit zwei Varianten: im ersten Satz stand “muss ich...als nicht mehr tragbar ansehen”; der zweite begann mit “Ich bitte”.

Die Debyeschen Akten enthalten kein Dokument, das auf die “zwingende obwaltende Umstände” Licht wirft. Offensichtlich waren sie aber wohlbekannt, denn der alte Streiter wider nationalsozialistische Druck, das Vorstandsmitglied Max von Laue, schrieb umgehend: “2.12.38 Einverstanden Laue”.

Translation: *“I intend to send on Wednesday, December 8 the attached letter to all German members of the German Physical Society. If you do not give a reaction before December 6, I will assume that you agree. Signed. P. Debye, chairman”.* The added letter had essentially the wording given above, although there were two versions: in the first case was written: *“I have to... consider as no longer sustainable”*; the second started with *“I request”*.

The Debye files do not contain a document, which sheds light on the “compelling circumstances”. Obviously they were, however, well-known, since the old fighter against Nazi pressure, the member of the DPG Board Max von Laue, wrote in return on December 2, 1938: “Agreed”.

Considering the enormous respect which Max von Laue had gained, also from his Jewish colleagues, for standing up to the Nazis before and during WW2, this “agreed” shows that the DPG simply had no choice. Note that the DPG Board and his Chairman Debye sent the letter to ALL DPG members and not only to its so-called ‘non-aryan’ members.

In a letter dated December 19, 1938 Max von Laue wrote to Lise Meitner about the DPG letter:

“Das Rundschreiben Debye’s sollte nur innerhalb des Reichsgebietes versandt werden. Betrachten Sie es also, als hätten Sie es nicht erhalten. Sein Inhalt wird Sie ja nicht verwundert haben. Bei den Akademien haben wir jetzt dieselbe Sache. Die neue Satzungen, welche eine Kommission letztthin dem Plenum vorlegte, welchen das Plenum auch zustimmte, die aber freilich noch nicht den höheren Segen erhalten haben, sind so günstig, wie sie unter den heutigen Verhältnissen irgend sein können. Ich glaube Planck’s Mitarbeit hat viel dazu beigetragen. Wegen des Wortlaut seines Rundschreibens hat Debye hier Angriffe erfahren; man las aus dem ersten Satze “leider” heraus, und wollte ihn mit dem Hinweis auf das “schwarze Korps”(Note: das “Schwarze Korps” war die Hetzenzeitschrift der SS) schrecken, welches kürzlich einige Firmen anprangerte, die jüdische Angestellte mit einem “leider” entlassen haben. Debye’s Antwort war: “Das ist mir Wurst”.

Translation: *The circular letter of Debye will only be sent within Reichs- territory. Consider it therefore as if you did not receive it. The content will not have surprised you.*

We have the same matter now in the Academy. The new statutes, which a committee recently presented to the Plenary Meeting and which were approved by the meeting and which however did not receive the higher blessings yet, are so favourable as they can possibly be under the present conditions. I believe that Planck's cooperation has contributed a lot to it. Because of the formulation of his circular letter Debye has been attacked here; one took the word "regrettably" out from the first sentence and wanted to frighten him with the "Black Corps" (Note: the "Black Corps" was the hate journal of the SS), which exposed a short time ago some companies which fired Jewish employees with "regrettably". Debye's answer was: "I couldn't care less".

About the text of the December 9th letter, Klaus Hentschel states in his book on pages 181-183 (Physics and National Socialism. An Anthology of Primary Sources, 1996) the following:

"The wording in the opening sentence in the draft version in particular, but also in the revised text clearly suggests criticism of the measures and implies their temporariness and lack of justification. Subtle formulations became one outlet for passive resistance, which did not go unnoticed".

And Hentschell says further on:

"The final version dated December 9th was modified as follows: "Under the prevailing compelling circumstances the membership of German Reich Jews in the sense of the Nuremberg Laws in the German Physical Society can no longer be upheld. In agreement with the Board of Trustees I therefore summon all members who fall within this provision to inform me of their withdrawal of the Society". The initial polite request in the second sentence was also given stronger emphasis – though both verbs used have double meanings: "Bitte" (request/invite) to "auffordere" (summon/bid). Note that in both versions Jewish members were requested to submit their own resignations instead of being expelled by the Society".

Our attention was drawn to a series of articles in the regional Limburg newspaper "De Ster" about the Debye controversy and the turmoil created by Rispens around Debye's name. In these articles the author points out that, as yet, not a single original version of the DPG letter with the signature of Debye has been shown, whereas 1318 letters (Beyerchen) must have been sent. The version of the letter Rispens has presented is a galley.

With the hindsight of 2006, the phrase "Heil Hitler" at the end of the letter evokes questions. Science historian Mark Walker states the following about the matter in a personal statement to Prof. Nordulf Debye, the grandson of Debye:

"in the mid-thirties all officials, including professors, were obliged to place that phrase at the end of their letters. Even Max von Laue, who was known as an anti-Nazi, used it in his letters. One must therefore not attach too much weight to this phrase in official documents".

Science historian Klaus Hentschel says in a personal message of January 27, 2006 to Prof. Ernst Homburg of Maastricht the same about the use of the phrase "Heil Hitler" under official letters (see 6.d).

One can, however, also interpret the Heil Hitler phrase under the letter differently if one takes into account Hentschel's analysis of the wording of the December 9th letter stating that the *text clearly suggests criticism of the measures and implies their temporariness and lack of justification*. Add to this that Debye had no love at all for the Nazis and that he even mocked them by putting a plank over the name sign "Max Planck Institute" when he was not allowed to give the KWIP that name. Within that framework the phrase 'Heil Hitler' can perhaps also be read as a sarcastic ending of the letter with which the Board of

the DPG and its Chairman wanted to say: “this is what causes it all”. Another aspect of this phrase was that the request and the critical undertone of the text and the implication of the temporariness and lack of justification in the text, which did not go unnoticed by the Nazis, in fact is reinforced by this phrase, while at the same time it effectively undermines Nazi criticism of the text. Ending with phrases like “Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung” or “Mit Deutschem Gruss” would likely have been read by those who were affected as hypocritical considering the measures which the Board of the DPG had to take under Nazi pressure. This interpretation remains of course a matter of speculation but it gains support if one looks at the text of the letter from the Board of the Deutsche Mathematiker Vereinigung (DMV) described in Chapter 6.h.

In order to judge whether the DPG letter from December 9, 1938 should be viewed as potentially incriminating for Debye, a validation by those directly affected is of great importance. Early information on this matter can be found in an FBI Report 62-1132 of September 27 1940, which is part of an FBI investigation about security risks if Debye were to be involved in the US in research of military importance. In that FBI interview, the FBI agent reports the statement of scientist Kasimir Fajans from Michigan University (summarized):

*“Dr. Fajans stated that he recalled that he talked with Debye about a year after Hitler came into power in Germany and that at that time Debye was disgusted with Hitler and the latter’s regime. He stated that when he last saw Debye in Munich in 1935 Debye was still not in sympathy with the Hitler regime...
Dr. Fajans recalled an instant where Debye was President of the German Physical Society and the German Government ordered all Jews to be expelled from the society, as is the usual Nazi custom for all organizations. He stated that Debye wrote letters to the Jewish members of the society asking them to resign. Dr. Fajans stated that he was disappointed in this move by Debye as he thought Debye would have enough moral stamina to resign the Presidency of the society rather than write such letters to his close colleagues even under pressure...
Dr. Fajans seemed to have a very high opinion of Debye.... He said that he deems Debye to be absolutely honest and trustworthy and to be interested only in science and not in politics...
Dr. Fajans advised that he has known other German scientists whom he would not trust with information but that Debye is so open and frank and above board that he would certainly trust Debye.
The FBI report notes that Dr. Fajans is Jewish and yet he seemed to have the highest regard for Debye...”.*

In 1950, when Debye received the Max Planck medal of the DPG, the persons who were directly affected and all who were witnesses had THE opportunity to criticise Debye’s actions in 1938. There is not a single indication that Jewish physicists, who were entitled to speak up at that time, or others including Max von Laue known as a fierce anti-Nazi made objections or expressed criticism of Debye. On the contrary, Albert Einstein even voted in favor of Debye for this award (Ref. Archives of the DPG)

Perhaps it is relevant in this matter to mention that in 1951 the Max Planck medal was given by the DPG to Professor James Franck, the Jewish physicist and Nobel laureate who had left Germany in 1933 because of the Nazis, just like Einstein. The Jewish scientist Professor Lise Meitner received the Max Planck medal in 1949.

Prof. Joshua Telser, Roosevelt University, Chicago, USA, as an undergraduate at Cornell an admirer of Debye, states the following in a reaction dated March 13, 2006 regarding the historical context and circumstances of the letter:

“The record of the Netherlands during the 1940-1945 Nazi German occupation with regard to its Jewish population is frankly not one to be proud of. As a result there is today in the Netherlands guilt and the desire to assuage that guilt by “politically correct” actions that have nothing to do with that terrible period in your country. It is easy in hindsight to criticize those who were in Nazi Germany, but no one at the time expected the atrocities that developed. Germany was the most advanced country in the world at that time. I suppose that Debye could have resigned, rather than sign that 1938 letter, but what would that have accomplished? All Jews had been expelled from Government jobs (such as universities) in 1934 and 1938; whether one was a member or not of the DPG was the least of the Jews’ problems”.

Prof. Dietrich Woermann, Professor em. of Physical Chemistry at the University of Cologne, Germany, who was a post doctoral fellow with Debye and, being German, well aware of the matter, wrote us :

“I had been a post doctoral fellow with Professor Debye at Cornell University during the time from 1959-1961. Debye is accused of “Nazi Collaboration”. What does it mean? From my point of view a Nazi collaborator is a person who identifies himself with the views clearly described in Hitler’s Mein Kampf (independent of the edition chosen) and acted in accordance with these views, doing harm to people who do not agree with these views. With this definition, I do not see any indications that Debye was a “Nazi Collaborator”. Of course you can modify this definition and call every person a “Nazi Collaborator” who closed official letters with “Heil Hitler” instead of “sincerely yours”. Why people did that is very difficult to understand today. From my point of view this has something to do with the climate of “obedience” which was part of education in Germany in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. In addition it had been the standard established by the dictatorship.

The “incriminating” letter has a special background: in September 19, 1935 the German “Reichstag” (elected Parliament with only one party present) passed unanimously the so-called Nürnberg Laws which separated the German people into groups: Non-Jews and Jews. The basic result of this application of the Nürnberg Law was that Jews were no longer German Citizens. As a consequence, all officially recognised organisations were forced by law to tell their members that the Jewish members should declare their resignation from membership of the respective organisation. Debye as President of the Gesellschaft Deutscher Physiker with support of the members of the Governing Board of this Gesellschaft did that in the letter, which is now taken as evidence that Debye was a “Nazi collaborator”. The wording of this letter clearly indicates that this letter was not written voluntarily. Actually, the article by Dieter Hoffmann and Mark Walker published in Physik Journal 5 (2006) 53- should be sufficient to convince every person with a straight mind that it is infamous to call Professor Debye a Nazi collaborator. Independent of the “Heil Hitler” signature people can ask why Debye sent this letter. If I had to give an answer: the letter did not do harm to anybody and kept the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft out of limelight”.

It is of interest in this matter to gain insight into the opinions of Debye himself and the scientists around him. Therefore, the Debye family was asked whether they could supply any information in this matter from written or oral sources. In an e-mail message of April 17, 2006 Debye’s oldest grandson Norwig Debye–Saxinger wrote to me the following:

“I heard from Henri Samuel Sack that the reasons this missive did not cause problems with Debye’s contemporary Jewish colleagues were : (1) Debye was clearly never an anti-Semite, had taken Jewish assistants/students during the Weimar times, as the NSDAP rose to power, and after the war at Cornell, and, at considerable personal risk had coordinated Meitner’s departure; (2) he had made

his multiple dislikes of the upcoming Nazi regime crystal clear to all who knew him – even to colleagues who were in favor of the Nazi ideology; (3) Along with others such as Planck, Von Laue and Sommerfeld they repeatedly expressed their profound personal regrets to colleagues and friends, who were methodically disenfranchised and in effect driven out of their homes and livelihoods; I was given to believe that Debye and Von Laue personally contacted the affected DPG members to express the leaderships apologies (and hopes for better times). Sack, Ewald, Bethe were household names and sometimes visitors in the Debye house; my brother and I went to school and played with the Sack and Bethe children”.

6h. How other Societies treated their “non-aryan” members

- The German Chemical Society.

In “100 Jahre Deutsche Chemische Gesellschaft”, the author Walter Ruske writes on page 167:

“Nach der Veröffentlichung der Nürnberger Gesetze vom 15 September 1935 begannen auch in der Deutschen Chemischen Gesellschaft die Entlassungen der ‘nichtarischen’ Angestellten, die bis zum Dezember 1936 im wesentlichen abgeschlossen waren.” ... Drei Monate später war die ‘Entlassung von nichtarischen Angestellten..nunmehr restlos durchgeführt’.

Translation: Upon publication of the Nurnberg laws of September 15, 1935, the dismissals of the ‘non-aryan’ members of the German Chemical Society also started and they were in fact completed in December 1936. Three months later the ‘dismissal of non-aryan members was now fully completed’.

- The German Mathematical Society.

In DMV Mitteilungen 12 (2004) pag 223-245 Volkert R. Remmert describes the Deutsche Mathematiker-Vereinigung im “Dritten Reich” and how this Society dealt with its ‘non-aryan’ members. The Board of the German Mathematical Society had a long discussion about the text of the letter which had to force its ‘non-aryan’ members to resign. This was initiated by the pogroms against the German Jewish citizens on November 9-10, 1938. The final text of the letter from July 1939 was:

*“Sehr geehrter Herr Professor,
Sie können in Zukunft nicht mehr Mitglied der Deutschen Mathematikervereinigung sein. Deshalb lege ich Ihnen nahe, Ihren Austritt aus unserer Vereinigung zu erklären. Andernfalls werden wir das Erlöschen Ihrer Mitgliedschaft bei nächster Gelegenheit bekannt geben.
Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung
Der Vorsitzende*

Translation: Dear professor. In the future you cannot remain a member of the German Mathematical Society. Therefore I urge you to resign as a member of our Society. Otherwise we will announce the expiration of your membership at the next occasion.

*With high regards,
The chairman*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

- The letter of the board of the DPG signed with the name of Debye was written under great pressure from the Nazis.
- The text of the letter was formulated in a manner which, on the one hand, preserved as much as possible the dignity of the Jewish physicists and, on the other hand, contained subtle criticism of the Nazis.
- In 1938, the phrase “Heil Hitler” in official letters was required; it reveals nothing about one’s political position.

- The Nazis wanted to unseat Debye as president of the DPG because of his actions with respect to the letter and because they considered him too friendly to the Jews.
- In 1950, Debye received the most prestigious prize, which the DPG can grant. None of the victims of the letter of 1938, i.e. Jewish physicists and members of the DPG, made any objections; so, one may conclude, that no one blamed Debye for his actions. The circumstances under which this happened obviously were clear.
- Rispen's portrayal with regard to the role of Debye in this matter, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, is not supported by the historical sources.

CHAPTER 7. DEBYE'S REFUSAL TO WORK FOR THE GERMAN MILITARY

Many laboratories in Germany came effectively under Nazi rule when the Nazis had gained full power. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics successfully resisted to be a part of the Nazi war research industry. That had different reasons. First of all, the large funding by the Rockefeller Foundation and the demands of that foundation with regards to fundamental research to be done in the KWIP was of importance in that matter. Another factor that may have played a role could be that the Nazis for a long time saw no role for elementary physics and its research equipment for their war industry. A third factor was that KWIP director Debye did not want to be involved in research for the German military.

Rispens writes in his article in *Vrij Nederland* of January 21, 2006:

- *Dat hij voor de Tweede Wereldoorlog een bijdrage leverde aan Hitlers belangrijkste militaire onderzoeksprogramma is vergeven en vergeten.*
- *Debye was daarmee opeens directeur geworden van een van de belangrijkste militaire onderzoeksprogramma's in nazi-Duitsland.* [Opmerking Van Ginkel: Rispens doelt hier op de ontdekking van de kernsplijting van Uranium-235 door Otto Hahn, Fritz Strassmann en Lise Meitner in het Kaiser Wilhelm Instituut voor Chemie in Berlijn].
- *Uit nieuw historisch onderzoek blijkt echter dat zijn (= Debye) handen vuiler zijn dan gewoonlijk wordt aangenomen. Zijn beslissing te vertrekken naar Amerika nam hij allerminst uit afkeer van het naziregime.*
- *Terwijl de Duitse legers half Europa al onder de voet hadden gelopen, verlangde Debye terug naar zijn onderzoeksinstituut.*

Translation:

- *That he (=Debye) contributed before WWII to Hitler's most important military research program, is forgiven and forgotten*
- *Debye had suddenly become director of one of the most important military research programs in Nazi-Germany.* [Note of Van Ginkel: Rispens is pointing to the discovery of atomic fission by Otto Hahn, Fritz Strassmann and Lise Meitner in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry in Berlin].
- *From new historical research it is evident however that his hands are dirtier than is generally presumed. He did not make his decision to go to America in the least because of his disgust with the Nazi regime.*
-While the German armies had trampled half of Europe under their boots, Debye longed to return to his research institute.

Rispens does not provide a single source to support these statements. They are wrong, as I will show below. Rispens does not mention that Debye refused to give a lecture in Danzig in May 1939, because the Nazis did not want him to discuss the work of Jewish scientists. This information can be found in an article by Horst Kant in the book: "Naturwissenschaft und Technik der Geschichte" [Physics and Technology in History] from 1993, which is also included in the list of sources of Rispens book.

After the discovery of atomic fission by Otto Hahn and Lise Meitner in 1938-1939 in Berlin, its importance was quickly understood [Van Ginkel: Hahn and Meitner worked in the KWI Chemistry whereas Debye was Director of the KWIP, the Physics branch of KWI. The KWIP and the KWIC had two separate buildings]. Debye was dismissed from his function as a director of the KWIP in September 1939 since he did not want to be involved in research for the German military. He received an *Institutsverbot*. That Debye contributed to "Hitler's most important military research program", the discovery of atomic fission by Otto Hahn, is fully wrong; between the discovery of nuclear fission of

uranium atoms and the creation of a nuclear bomb, there lay still a formidably long road, as the Manhattan project in the US for the production of atomic bombs has shown.

In “Hitler’s Uranium Club” (Bernstein, 1996) on page 272 a letter from Prof. Werner Heisenberg to Prof. Patrick M.S. Blacket of September 17, 1945 is printed.

[Note. Prof. Blacket was a British physicist and naval officer and one of the original British workers on the atomic bomb program. He was one of the officers who was responsible for the secret reports from Farm Hall, the English country manor that housed in 1945 the captured German scientists who were involved in nuclear physics research for the Nazis during WW2].

It says:

“The Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut for Physics was built by Debye [in 1936] and was under his direction until January 1940. After Debye’s departure, Diebner was in charge of the administration for some time. He was responsible for the conversion of the institute to nuclear physics. From spring 1941 onwards, I was practically in charge and later also officially. Since that time the bulk of our work was done on uranium and on nuclear physics in general (high tension apparatus).....

As the first aim of our scientific work we had intended to build a Brenner (burner) [reactor] with D₂O (heavy water), graphite and uranium metal. This burner was to be a strong source of neutrons. In wartime, naturally, these results would be followed by technical developments, which would have been aimed at a practical use of the energy.”

Further on in this letter Heisenberg makes an interesting remark about his view on the future of the KWIP after WW2 and the possible role of Debye in it:

“The first question regarding the future of the institute is whether Debye will return and take charge once more. We managed for Debye to be still in charge officially, therefore it depends only on him whether he is willing to take charge again and, if so, there would probably be no political difficulties since he is of Dutch nationality”.

And on page 270 of the book a conversation between Heisenberg and Hahn is printed, which says: *“Heisenberg: I would say that, if they (= the Allied forces) are determined to curtail nuclear physics, then Debye is certainly a good solution. Debye would then reorganize the institute completely to suit his own work. Hahn: No, I mean that you should be there, only that a man like Debye, being definitely “non-Nazi” should be there as well “.*

This clearly shows that Debye did not do and would not do any uranium or nuclear fission research in the KWIP. Debye knew about the nuclear research in the Chemistry Division of Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. In FBI report 62-6887 wm, dated October 2, 1940, Dr. Warren Weaver from the Rockefeller Foundation is recorded to state about this matter:

“Since coming to this country, Debye has told Weaver that the army officials of the present German government came to him and stated that they were going to direct the work at Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, and requested that he give up his Dutch citizenship and become a German citizen, so that he could personally take charge of their war research at Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. Debye informed Weaver that he ridiculed this idea and absolutely refused to become a German citizen or to engage in war research. The suggestion was made that he resign from the Institute, but Debye refused to do this, stating that he would be willing to take a leave of absence, and told them that if they wanted to get rid of him, they certainly knew how to do it.”

In FBI report 62-194 dated October 8, 1940, Dr. Gregory Breit, Professor of Physics at the University of Wisconsin, states:

“He (=Breit) related that he based his uneasiness upon Debye’s background, fearing that he might have been strongly influenced by the Nazi regime while in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, with the very remote possibility – but still a possibility – that he might be working in the United States against his will for the

benefit of the Nazi government. Debye, he went on, was not, in his opinion, in favor of the Hitler regime because he really paid no attention to politics except when they interfered with his research work and the Hitler forces had adversely interfered with his research work, which brought him to the conclusion that, undoubtedly Debye looked upon the present conditions in Germany with antipathy. He stated that Debye had told him that he had been requested by the Nazi government to take charge of military research work but that he had refused; that they then requested him to turn over to them his research work, which he likewise refused to do. As a consequence it became necessary for him to leave the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute because they put another man in his place. Breit stated that at that time Debye had been doing research work with a high potential machine, which the Nazis wanted, to be used to make atomic power. This he had refused to turn over to them.”

As soon as Debye arrived in the US he told his American colleagues about the nuclear research in Berlin as we conclude from a letter dated March 23, 1940 (from Frank Aydelotte's papers at the IAS in Princeton (Received from science historian Mark Walker/Nordulf Debye). This letter, and private conversations that evidently followed, prompted the IAS immediately to begin to help secure academic positions for several of the key European physicists who would later join the Manhattan Project. The inference about Debye is subtle but significant).

March 23, 1940

Dr. Frank Aydelotte, Institute for Advanced Study

Princeton, New Jersey

Dear Dr. Aydelotte:

The Dutch physicist, P. Debye, who has been Director of the Physics Institute of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft in Berlin (supported by the Rockefeller Foundation), has been sent abroad by the German authorities in order to free his Institute for secret war work. When one of us met him at dinner the other evening, he made no secret of the fact that this work is essentially a study of the fission of uranium. This is an explosive nuclear process, which is theoretically capable of generating 10,000 to 2,000,000 times more energy than the same weight of any known fuel or explosive. There are considerable deposits of uranium available near Joachimsthal, Bohemia, as well as in Canada. It is clear that the Nazi authorities hope to produce either a terrible explosive or a very compact and efficient source of power. We gather from Debye's remarks that they have brought together in this Institute the best German nuclear and theoretical physicists, including Heisenberg, for this research--this in spite of the fact that nuclear and theoretical physics in general and Heisenberg in particular were under a cloud, nuclear physics being considered to be "Jewish physics" and Heisenberg a "White Jew". There is a difference of opinion among theoretical physicists about the probability of reaching practical results at an early date. This, however, is a well-known stage in the pre-history of every great invention. The tremendous importance of the utilization of atomic energy, even if only partly successful, suggests that the matter should not be left in the hands of the European gangsters, especially at the present juncture of world history. Work of the sort, which the German physicists are supposed to be doing has been going on for some time at Columbia University under Professor Fermi and Dr. Szilard, but at a slow rate because the expense of the experiments exceeds a normal departmental budget. Some effort, not entirely successful, has been made to enlist the help of the United States Government, but this process is slow and cumbersome and has met serious obstacles. It seems to us, therefore, that the problem is one, which might well be brought to the attention of the Rockefeller Foundation, which would be in a position to act

in a simple and direct manner. We are not going to suggest a very definite way of attacking the problem, but suppose that if the officers of the Foundation were interested they would consult with physicists who are familiar with the practical questions involved.

We have quoted Professor Debye rather freely in writing to you, but obviously we should have to be very cautious in using his name any further. In any case his only role was unintentionally to stimulate us to bring up a question which we have had on our minds for several months, without knowing what, if anything, to do about it.

*Very truly yours,
John von Neumann
Oswald Veblen*

Debye also informed his colleagues Einstein and Szilard and thus the American authorities after his arrival in the USA. Debye's information about the German research on atomic fission was therefore the direct cause for the second letter from Einstein to President Roosevelt, as can be read on page 331 of the book: "The Making of the Atom Bomb" by R. Rodes from 1986. It reads:

"He (=Szilard) travelled again to Princeton to see Einstein, They worked up another letter and sent it under Einstein's signature to Sachs (= their contact with Roosevelt). It emphasized the secret German Uranium research at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, about which they had learned from the physical chemist Peter Debye, the 1936 Nobel laureate in chemistry and the director of the physics institute in Dahlem, who had been expelled recently to the United States, ostensibly on leave of absence, when he refused to give up Dutch citizenship and join the Nazi Reich".

That second letter from Einstein was the catalyst for the Manhattan Project, resulting finally in the production of the atom bomb by the US. If Debye had been that important for the military research program of the Nazis, as Rispen suggests, they certainly would not have let him go to the US. Moreover not a single source has been produced to my knowledge to show that Debye was ever involved in nuclear fission research in Germany or in the US.

In the New York Times of August 6, 1951, six years after the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, New York Times reporter William Lawrence cites Dr. George B. Pegram, who recounted the initial research for the Manhattan Project at Columbia University five years before the bomb fell. (Van Ginkel: Dr. Pegram was in charge of the early work, that later led to the atomic bomb.)

"How Race for Existence Began.

'President Roosevelt had appointed an advisory committee on uranium to keep him advised on developments', Dr. Pelgrim said. On April 28, 1940, at the second meeting of the committee, further alarming news was reported. "Dr. Peter J.W. Debye, A Dutch chemist and winner of the Nobel Prize in 1936, had been working at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute at Berlin. Abruptly he was informed that his laboratory was needed 'for other purposes'. He made a few discrete inquiries and learned that a large part of the institute was turned over to uranium research. He fled Germany and came to the United States (where he has since become a chairman of the chemistry department at Cornell University). Upon his arrival he notified his fellow scientists about the new emphasis the Germans were placing on nuclear research. 'His tidings', Dr. Pegram said, 'started a race between our scientists and the German. From then on we worked day and night in a race to get ahead of the Germans, knowing that should the Germans get there first it would mean the end of our way of life' he went on."

Until September 1939 Max Planck, Peter Debye and the Rockefeller Foundation were able to keep the KWIP out of the control of the Nazis and the KWIP while under the guidance of Debye was not involved in any military war research programme, see also Beyerchen (1977).

CHAPTER 8.

1933-1939: TO STAY OR NOT TO STAY IN GERMANY UNDER NAZI RULE

When preparing this report I came across certain publications and I was confronted with individuals who were of the opinion that a person who stayed in Germany until 1938 or 1939 was, solely on the basis of that fact, culpable. With our knowledge of history in 2006, such opinions are understandable, but they do not help us to get a better comprehension of the complexity of the situation at that time, nor of the position of the people who had to live and to work in that time of history. Beyerchen describes, on pages 199-200, the following dilemmas with regard to the question of whether to stay in or to leave Germany under Nazi power:

“The foremost concern of the members of the physics community during the Nazi years was the protection of their autonomy against political encroachment. The vast majority of the scientists under Hitler were neither anti-Nazi nor pro-Nazi. They were committed solely to independence in the conduct of professional affairs. The challenges to the autonomy of the physicists came primarily from two quarters. The National Socialists in the state administration sought to rid the government of undesired elements and concentrate control of academic affairs in the hands of the ministers of education. The National Socialists in party agencies, and the small band of disaffected followers of Lenard and Stark, wanted to remold the standards and conduct of the entire discipline. The efforts of the government authorities achieved considerable success. The desire of the ideologues to create an Aryan physics met with failure.

It was not at all clear at first that the design of the Nazi government in 1933 was to force the emigration of Germany’s Jews. The Civil Service Law of April 7 was couched in confusing terms with qualifiers such as the cut off date of September 30, when procedures were supposed to return to normal. This, coupled with the staggered manner in which the dismissals and forced leaves were announced, made effective protests nearly impossible. As was demonstrated in the case of the Göttingen physics and mathematics faculty, no clear focus for action could be decided upon. The academicians were also severely hampered by the superficial legality of the Nazi measures. Yet, in contrast to popular belief, the scientists did not passively accept their fate. The resignations by Einstein, Franck, Haber, Schrödinger and Stern were demonstrative attempts to face the basic issue. The ineffectiveness of resignation lay in the fact that it accomplished the Nazi purpose of removing opponents from the scene.

An alternative was to fight through legal channels to stay on. As Courant discovered, however, this was a losing battle. When he realized his position was untenable, he was forced to accept one of the diminishing number of posts abroad. The international communication available to German scientists (particularly physicists) made emigration a more viable option for them than for members of many other segments of German society. The relative ease of emigration was all too apparent to those leaders of the German physics community unaffected by the Nazi ordinances. Planck, Von Laue, Sommerfeld, Heisenberg and others signed petitions, counselled those who were included in the provisions of the decrees, and sought as best as they could to hold their community together. The watchword was that those who could should stay. The goals of these leaders were to minimize individual hardships, reverse the dismissals and resignations when possible, and, above all, to maintain the international standing of German science. The Nazis, or at least the Nazi excesses, were regarded in 1933 and early 1934 as transitory phenomena. The worst of National Socialism would pass, these men felt, but the importance of science for Germany’s reputation would endure.

To a certain extent, the appeals of the physics community’s leaders were heeded. The scientists who joined the exodus of talent were overwhelmingly the individuals

affected by the new laws. A few non-Jews, notably Erwin Schrödinger and Martin Stobbe, followed their colleagues into exile. Most remained at their posts, and even a number of Jewish scholars who were not forced to leave, such as Gustav Herz and Lise Meitner, chose to stay as long as they could”.

In an interview by Carolyn Harding in July 14-September 11, 1978, Prof. Emeritus of Biology, Max Delbrück, describes his experiences in Germany from the late 1920s until 1937 (Ref. Archives California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California, USA, http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechOH:OH_Delbruck_M).

[Max Delbrück was trained in Göttingen as a theoretical physicist and later switched to biology. After postgraduate work at Bristol and Copenhagen, he switched to Berlin to work for Lise Meitner. In 1937 Delbrück left Berlin for Caltech on a Rockefeller Fellowship.]

“But of course there was also the business of having these wonderful lectures by reliable party members, and everybody was terribly nervous because you really didn’t know what was going on, and what you could say and couldn’t say, and so and so forth.....Anyhow it was pretty clear that a University career was not likely to be open for me. I went to considerable lengths to prove that I was not Jewish, which was also part of the business, which involved supplying real authenticated copies of all the baptismal certificates of your four grandparents, and their Christian marriage certificates, maybe even to the great-grandparents; in the Archives there is a file of all thisSo when this Rockefeller thing came around it seemed like a good idea to see something of the world and see what was going to happen, because at that time it was anybody’s guess how long the mess was going to last. Some people said six months and some people said much longer. I was immensely lucky that I had this opportunity. Many nasty things have been said about those who could have left and didn’t leave, like Heisenberg, he’s the most outstanding case, I don’t agree at all with these derogatory comments. I don’t think that it was anything to my credit that I left at all. I think it was a question which could be answered one way or the other, and there is great merit on both sides.

Harding: *What is the moral argument for staying?*

Delbrück: *Well I mean, what is the moral argument against running away? It’s just running away, that you take the advantage that you can run away. If you imagine that the thing may last only a short while, then it’s important to see that some of the good people are staying.*

Harding: *Laue was an example of someone who stayed and persistently fought the regime.*

Delbrück: *Well, you could cite also here he had to make his compromises like everybody else. He was telling me a story that he and Otto Warburg wrote a letter to the Nazi Minister of Education, where they wanted to get something done, and then the question was how would they sign it, with “Heil Hitler” or not? The choice was either “Heil Hitler” or the old conventional formula, “Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung” (With our great respect). They discussed it for a while and finally Laue said, if he said “with great respect” it would be just a big lie, so I assume they wrote “Heil Hitler.” So, if you want to stay then you have to make your compromises, and that’s what everybody had to do. Bonhoeffer stayed. All the Bonhoeffers stayed, and some of them were active in the Resistance and some of them were not active in the Resistance. That was a second choice. It was whether you thought you should personally get involved in this movement. You still had the choice of being resistant on the Communist side or on the liberal side, and whether you should wait until the generals would agree, join you and act, and so on. These are very difficult questions.*

Harding: *It seems that the choices seem to be much more clear-cut in retrospect than perhaps they were at the time.*

Delbrück: *Of course, yes..It's not that the choices seem clear-cut in retrospect, but they seem clear-cut to people who have no sense of the reality of the situation. I mean going away was in any case only a chance...Going away without any kind of security – that means having a job somewhere else – was limited to those who had professions that were salable in another country and who had already professions or had some other ways of having private funds, or large funds that they could transfer, and could start a new life in a different country. But that was an infinitesimal part of the population. And if you were a Jew and didn't have funds and left, you could certainly count on the help and cooperation of the Jewish communities in other countries. If you were non-Jewish and left you were certainly very suspect and couldn't expect much help from the Jewish organizations. I mean that's what I did find when I left, that I was constant under suspicion. Why would the fellow leave if he didn't have to? That was more the attitude really at the time. I mean I wasn't applauded for leaving, but I was suspected of leaving by having some sinister motive imputed. And rightly so. There were certainly quite a few Nazi agents did leave posing as adversaries”.*

That Debye only left at the end of 1939 had a number of reasons.

(1) To start with he felt responsible for the agreements he made with the American Rockefeller Foundation for the building and running of the KWIP. He states this in fact in a letter of December 30, 1939 to Sommerfeld:

“Ich lasse mir nicht nachsagen ich sei davon gelaufen”.

Translation: *I will not let it be said about me afterwards that I ran away.*

(2) In addition he believed, according to his family, that the German generals would depose Hitler. From the books of Kershaw en Gisevius, which I mentioned in Chapter 2 (see also the list of references), it is clear that this was not such a fantastic idea. Before the outbreak of the Second World War there were different occasions when plans were made for a take-over of power by the generals and the army but such plans went wrong at crucial moments. According to Gisevius, up to the end of 1938 and even in 1939 the leading German generals did not believe that Hitler would dare go to war. After the misery of the First World War, the German people did not want a new war. The action in 1938 of the British primeminister, Chamberlain, who gave Hitler carte blanche in annexing Sudetenland, had a disastrous effect in that it stimulated the aspirations of Hitler (cf. Gisevius).

(3) A problem was, of course, that Debye and his family were caught in a trap of the Nazi regime and could not easily escape. In particular, the situation with his daughter made it difficult for him to get away from Germany. When the situation finally became impossible, he found an ingenious way to “flee” to the US.

(4) Care for his coworkers and their escape from Germany may have been another reason why Debye stayed so long in Germany. Evidence for it, is found in an interview of Debye's sister, Caroline Niël- Debye, and her daughter Mia Niël on April 1, 1970 by Mrs. Judith L. Schotman and Mrs. Joke Rijken (tapes and transcripts are in the Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht). In that interview Mrs. Rijken asks on page 11 of the transcript:

“Mrs. Rijken: *waarom denkt u dat hij toch nog zo lang gebleven is, als er toch die angst (bedoeld is de angst voor de nazi's) was?*

Why do you think that he stayed so long if there was that fear (meant is fear of the Nazis)?

Mia: *Om de mensen die hij had en die hij weg wilde werken, om die uit het land te werken. ... Voor alle mensen die weg wilden heeft hij gezorgd dat ze weg kwamen...Medewerkers van hem, professoren ook....Zijn naaste medewerkers, dat waren er 11. Maar daar heeft hij allemaal voor gezorgd, dat ze weg kwamen. Een van zijn laatste medewerkers is Van der Grinten uit Venlo geweest. Ja, die is mee naar Amerika gegaan”.*

Translation: To help the people he had and who he wanted to get away, to get them out of the country.... For everybody who wanted to get away he has ensured that they could get away... His coworkers, also professors...His own coworkers, he had 11 in total. But he took care that they all got away. One of his last coworkers was Van der Grinten from Venlo. Yes he also went with him to America”.

Note: Kant published a list of Debye's coworkers in the KWIP in the chapter “Peter Debye und das KWIP in Berlin” in the book edited by Albrecht (1996):

“Nach einer Institutsstruktur von Anfang 1937 hatte das KWI für Physik neben den drei Professoren Debye (Direktor), Laue (stellv. Direktor) und Hermann Schüler (Leiter der Spektroskopischen Abteilung) sechs Assistenten (L. Bewilogua, W. van der Grinten, W. Ramm, F. Rogowski, C.F. von Weiszäcker und K. Wirtz) sowie ein Hausmeister, 1 Heizer (Grobmechaniker), 3 Mechaniker, 1 Glasbläser, 1 Tischler, 1 Laufbursche, 1 Mechaniker für das Kälteinstitut, 2 Sekretärinnen und 2 Frauen für Reinigung. Dazu kamen in den Jahren 1936-1939 eine reihe wissenschaftlicher Gäste (Prof. Sho Miyamoto (Tokio), A. Budò (Budapest), F.C. Frank (Oxford), Frl. Z.W.U. Ku (Schanghai), A. Peterlin (Ljubljana), M.H. Pirene (Lüttich), J. Roig (Paris), A. Mercader (La Plata) sowie Doktoranden und Mitarbeiter (darunter A. Deubner, E. Fischer, H. Golnov, H. Haber, J.W. Hiby, H. Korsching, F. Matossi, G. Menzer, W. Wefelmeier).

(5) One cannot ignore that Debye had the official permission of the Dutch government to accept the position as the Director of the KWIP in Berlin (both the Dutch parliament as well as the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina had permitted Debye to take his position in Berlin as a Dutch citizen upon his petitions to the government in this matter, see Chapter 4).

(6) Information on the matter of Debye staying in Germany is also found in some FBI reports on an investigation of Debye. As already mentioned in previous chapters, the National Defense Research Committee initiated an investigation of Peter Debye, which was carried out by the FBI from September to November 1940. The investigation was to determine if Debye should be allowed to work on classified research. It was triggered by a letter from Professor Samuel Goudsmit of the University of Michigan dated August 31, 1940 to the FBI. In it he suggested that Debye could be in the US to serve German government interests.

When one studies the reports of the FBI investigation different aspects are obvious. Firstly three categories of interviewed can be distinguished:

- Supporters of Debye. Generally these are people who knew Debye very well personally.
- Persons who were neutral towards Debye
- Opponents of Debye.

Secondly one finds all aspects of human psychology in the interviews: integrity, prejudice, gossip, envy, judging without knowing the facts etc. so it is important to look critically at the reports, especially when the interviewed did not know Debye personally and had their information through hearsay.

Aspects of interest for this report are:

Goudsmit and Kajans raise the question as to why Debye stayed in Germany while he had received an offer of a professorship in physics of the University of Amsterdam in 1938. The interviewed scientists actually did not know why he did not take the offer, but they speculated that the position at the KWIP was too attractive for Debye and they also speculated about his KWIP salary, which they thought must be very high, although they did not know the exact facts. Goudsmit himself was also asked in 1938 for the Professorship in Physics at the University of Amsterdam. In FBI report 62-1132 dated September 27, 1940, the following statements of Goudsmit and Fajans are found:

Dr. Goudsmit advised that he has known Dr. Debye since 1926, having met Debye in Germany at professional meetings of physicists. He says that he last saw Debye in Rome in 1931, where both were attending a physics meeting....

Dr. Goudsmit stated that he has had much correspondence with other physicists about Debye, as both Debye and Goudsmit were offered positions at the University of Amsterdam about 1938. Goudsmit stated that he (Goudsmit) did not take the position at the University of Amsterdam because of the political situation in Europe and because he had a good position at the University of Michigan.....

Dr. Fajans stated that there are possibly two reasons why Debye turned down the attractive offer made to him by the University of Amsterdam in 1938. He said that Debye might have stayed at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute because of the fact that Debye had no teaching obligations and was devoted his full time to research or that the cause might have been that the Rockefeller Institute had created such a beautiful set-up for Debye at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute.

In a letter dated August 24, 1967 from Prof. C.J. Gorter of Leiden University to Prof. E. Verweij from Eindhoven as a reaction on Prof. Verweij's article about Debye and his work in the Yearbook of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Gorter also refers to the position in Amsterdam (Ref. The Debye Archive in Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht). He wrote:

“Wat betreft je vraag over de leerstoel van Zeeman, heeft men inderdaad in de jaren tussen Zeeman's aftreden 1935 en mijn benoeming in februari 1940 bij mijn weten Raman (officieel) en Debije en Goudsmit (officieus) gepolst. Raman wilde wel, maar de Curatoren waren ertegen. Debije en Goudsmit wilden niet. Ik heb gehoord dat Debije de zaak zeer lang in beraad had gehouden. Sinds 1934, toen wij onze bekende samenspraak in Bad Pyrmont over het gebruik van atoomkernen in de adiabatistische demagnetisatie hielden, waren Debije en ikzelf op zeer goede voet. In 1938 heeft hij zelfs een aardige thermodynamische bijdrage geleverd tot de theorie der paramagnetische relaxatie en, als voorzitter van de Duitse Natuurkundige Vereniging, Kronig en mij uitgenodigd om inleidingen op dat gebied op het congres in Baden-Baden te geven. Ik heb toen veel met hem over de politieke situatie gesproken. Hij sympathiserde inderdaad geenszins met de nazi's maar was a-politiek. Hij had vrij veel contact met leidende nazi's. Goebbels vond hij een onmogelijke drijver, maar met Göring was wel te praten als je hem goed aanpakte. Zijn Nederlandse nationaliteit wilde hij toen beslist niet kwijt. Ook na de oorlog waren wij nog heel goed met elkaar..... Hij was werkelijk een fantastische kerel en ook heel hartelijk...”

Translation: With regards to your question about the chair of Zeeman (Note of Van G: this is the chair of physics at Amsterdam University), in the years between the resignation of Zeeman in 1935 and my appointment in February 1940 one indeed approached, as far as I know, Raman (officially) and Debije and Goudsmit (unofficially). Raman was willing but the administrators were against it. Debije and Goudsmit were not willing. I heard that Debije considered the matter for a long time. Since 1934, when we had our well-known dialogue in Bad

Pymont about the use of atomic nuclei in adiabatic demagnetisation, Debye and I myself were on very good terms. In 1938 he even gave a nice thermodynamic contribution to the theory of paramagnetic relaxation and, as Chairman of the German Physical Society, he invited Kronig and me to give lectures on that topic at the congress in Baden-Baden. I talked then a lot with him about the political situation. He indeed did not sympathise with the Nazis but he was a-political. He had a fair amount of contact with leading Nazis. He found Goebbels an impossible fanatic, but with Göring one could talk if one dealt with him appropriately. He definitely did not want to lose his Dutch nationality. Also after the war we were still on very good terms He was really a marvellous guy and also very amicable."

The reasons why Debye did not take the offer of the University of Amsterdam in 1937 are not clear. However, we know that his experiences with Dutch universities, as with Leiden University, which chose Ehrenfest instead of Debye and with Utrecht University in 1912-1914, which did not give him the necessary experimental facilities for performing his research, were not very encouraging. We also know that Debye had committed himself to the agreement with the Rockefeller Foundation and he was not the kind of person easily to break such agreements. Moreover, he was bound in 1937 by the start of the freshly built KWIP, so he must not have found it appropriate towards his associates to walk away from the appointments he had made, despite the difficult political situation in Germany. That these considerations played an important role for Debye is illustrated by the letters, which Debye wrote in 1937 to Zeeman (Ref. Rijksarchief Noord Holland, Zeeman Archive. Copy obtained by courtesy of Dr. Martijn Eickhoff of the NIOD):

Letter of Debye to Zeeman dated February 23, 1937:

“Waarde Collega Zeeman, Het is voor mij een heel gemakkelijke taak op Uw vraag te beantwoorden, zoals ze in Uw brief staat. Nergens zou ik liever werken, dan in mijn eigen land; U en de fakulteit zouden mij geen grooter genoegen hebben kunnen doen als dat door uw schrijven is gebeurd.

Ik heb echter overwogen, dat ik niet zoo maar, in beginsel, op Uw brief mag antwoorden. Ik heb gemeend niet te mogen nalaten ook te overwegen, welke moeilijkheden uit den weg te ruimen zijn en hoe dat zou kunnen gedaan worden. Daarmee ben ik in gedachten bezig geweest sinds ik Uw schrijven ontving, dat heeft mij veel moeite gekost en toch niet tot een resultaat geleid. Zoo heb ik van dag tot dag mijn antwoord uitgesteld en zodoende U veel te lang laten wachten. Mag ik U verzoeken, dat niet al te streng te willen beoordelen; ik zou zoo graag geschreven hebben: Ziehier, een weg om het doel te bereiken heb ik gevonden, het gaat op die en die manier.

Mag ik tenminste de moeilijkheden uiteenzetten, die ik zie?

Ik moet voorop stellen, dat ik er aan gewend ben mij steeds af te vragen op welke manier ik het beste voor de natuurkunde kan werkzaam zijn. Dat is mij de hoofdzaak en andere meer persoonlijke overwegingen spelen een meer ondergeschikte rol. Nu heb ik twee jaar lang niet veel kunnen doen, omdat ik het nieuwe laboratorium, waarvoor de Rockefeller Foundation het geld gegeven heeft, moest bouwen. Dat is nu bijna klaar en ik heb natuurlijk zóó gebouwd, dat de inrichtingen geschikt zijn voor de uitvoering van mijn plannen. Mag ik nu op dit ogenblik als het ware deserteeren? Is er iemand te vinden, die mijn taak zou kunnen overnemen? Eenige maanden geleden heeft de Harvard University mij gevraagd of ik daar het laboratorium van Lyman zou willen overnemen. Ik heb mij tot nu toe er niet van kunnen overtuigen, dat ik dat doen mag. Bestaat er een mogelijkheid nu, dat het om een plaats in Nederland gaat, er anders over te denken?

Daarmee heb ik wel de hoofdzaak gezegd. Resultaat: ik weet niet, wat ik moet doen. Maar misschien heb ik het verkeerd aangepakt en ziet U de dingen anders

en beter. Ik laat mij graag overtuigen en indien U, nadat U dezen brief gelezen hebt, nog met mij over de heele zaak wilt spreken, zal ik U gaarne in Amsterdam opzoeken. Ik moet gedurende de maand Maart (de datum staat nog niet vast) naar Holland komen en sta met het meest genoeg ter beschikking. Met vriendschappelijke groeten, Uw w.g. P. Debye.'

And a second letter from Debye to Zeeman, dated July 14, 1937.

"Ik zie in dat er een besluit moet worden genomen. Ik zie het al lang in, maar het is zóó moeilijk, van zóó veel belang voor mij, ik mijn dralen eenvoudig niet kon overwinnen.

Ik heb met niemand van mijn onmiddellijke omgeving gesproken. Daarentegen heb ik, in Rome, met Schrödinger en Bjerkness over mijn geval gediscuteerd. Allebei en vooral Schrödinger waren van meening, dat ik naar mijn vaderland moest teruggaan, indien de mogelijkheid daartoe bestond.' etc etc. ... Voor eigen belang zou ik dus moeten gaan, maar het lab hier is nog niet klaar. Ik kan hier nu niet loskomen, ben onmisbaar (geen hoogmoed, dat weet u). Het was een heel grote eer geweest als ik, hoogachting, Debye,

Translation: *"Dear colleague Zeeman, It is a very easy task for me to answer the question as you have formulated it in your letter. Nowhere would I like more to work than in my own country; you and the faculty could not have given me a greater pleasure than as you have done with your writing. I have, however, thought it over that I cannot in principle answer your question off-hand. I thought I could not avoid taking into consideration which difficulties would have to be overcome and how this could be done. This has been in my mind since I received your letter it has given me a lot of difficulty and has not yielded a result. Thus I postponed my answer day after day and as a consequence I kept you waiting far too long. May I ask you to judge that not too hard; I so dearly would have liked to have written: Look here, I have found a road to reach the goal, it proceeds in the following manner. Can I at least explain the difficulties, which I see? I have to state first, that it is always my custom to ask myself in what way I can be most useful for physics. That is the first consideration for me and other more personal considerations play a more secondary role.*

Now I have not been able to do much for two years because I had to build the new laboratory for which the Rockefeller Foundation supplied the money. It is now almost finished and, of course, I have built it in such a way that its equipment is suited for the implementation of my plans. May I now, at this moment, act as a deserter? Can somebody be found who could take over my task? Several months ago, Harvard University asked me whether I would be willing there to take over the laboratory of Lyman. I have not been able to convince myself up to now that I can do this. Is there now a possibility to think otherwise as it concerns a position in the Netherlands? With this I have formulated the main point. Result: I do not know what to do. But perhaps I have approached the matter incorrectly and you see the matter differently and better. I would gladly like to be convinced and if you still want to talk with me about this matter after you have read this letter, I would like to visit you in Amsterdam. I must come to Holland in the month of March (the date is not fixed yet) and I am at your disposal with the utmost pleasure. With friendly greetings, your P. Debye.

And a second letter from Debye to Zeeman dated July 14, 1937: *"I realise that a decision has to be made. I realise it already for a long time, but it is so difficult, of so much importance to me, that I simply could not overcome my delay. I spoke with none in my immediate environment about it. However, in Rome, I discussed my case with Schrödinger and Bjerkness. Both and especially Schrödinger were of the opinion that I should return to my home country, if that possibility was offered etc...etc. For my own interest I should go, but the laboratory is not yet finished.. I cannot yet leave I am indispensable (no pride, you know that). It would have been a great honour if....Yours sincerely, P. Debye".*

The role his family circumstances played in this matter will be discussed in this report in Chapter 12.

CHAPTER 9. DEBYE AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY

In September 1939, the Nazis gave Debye the choice: become a German citizen and remain director of the KWIP or to withdraw as KWIP director. Debye decided to go to the US to give the George Baker Fisher lectures at Cornell University. He left Germany on January 15, 1940 and he arrived in the USA on February 1, 1940. Very quickly after his arrival in the US, he decided to stay in the US permanently. He could do so because Cornell University gave him a permanent position. Albert Einstein learned that Debye had left Germany and that he had arrived in the US. Some time after Debye's arrival in the US, Einstein wrote a letter to Cornell University that he had received a letter addressed to him. In the letter Einstein had received, Debye was accused of activities from a political point of view related to German politics.

9a. EINSTEIN AND DEBYE

Rispens reports with much aplomb on pages 182-183 of his book that Einstein sent a protest letter to his American colleagues when Debye travelled to the US to give guest lectures at Cornell University. Rispens writes the following about it:

“Einstein, de man die tientallen vluchtelingen uit Europa aan een baan en onderdak geholpen heeft, schrijft een brief aan zijn collega's, waarin Debye's doopceel wordt gelicht. Einstein schrijft daarin dat hij uit betrouwbare bron vernomen heeft dat Peter Debye contacten met het nazi-regime onderhoudt heeft. Bovendien geeft de bron aan dat Debye nog steeds in nauw contact staat met de Duitse bevelhebbers. Einstein roept zijn collega's op dat te doen wat ze 'als Amerikaanse burgers als hun plicht beschouwen'.”

Translation: *“Einstein, the man who helped dozens of refugees from Europe to a job and shelter wrote a letter to his (American) colleagues, in which he unveiled Debye's past. Einstein wrote in the letter that he had heard from a reliable source that Peter Debye kept contacts with the Nazi regime. Moreover, the source indicated that Debye was still in close contact with the German leaders. Einstein asked his colleagues to do what they 'as American citizens consider as their duty'.”*

Rispens supplies references 83 and 84 on pages 216-217 of his book as a support for Einstein's protest letter to his American colleagues. References 83 and 84 can be found as numbers 9-145 and 9-146 of the Einstein archives and they are respectively the letter of Debye to Einstein dated June 12, 1940 and the response letter of Einstein to this letter dated June 15, 1940. The contents of these letters are described in more detail in FBI report 77-148 from September 14, 1940, see below. Rispens references 83 and 84 do not “unveil” Debye's past at all. In the letter of June 15, 1940 to Debye, Einstein writes that he had informed Cornell University that a letter reached him with a warning regarding Debye's activities from a political point of view. However, Einstein also clearly indicates that he has no opinion with regard to the truthfulness of these reports. Einstein even says with regard to this question, among other things:

“I did not know what to do with that letter, throw it in the paper basket or forward it. I just forwarded it”.

Rispens becomes even more definite about the Einstein letter in De Volkskrant of February 4, 2006. Volkskrant journalist Martijn van Calmthout states in the article:

“Vraag aan Rispens, toch maar even, wat er eigenlijk nieuw was aan zijn bevindingen over Debye?'. 'Veel', zegt hij, vanuit zijn woonplaats in Berlijn. 'Ten eerste Einsteins felle brief over Debye. Die was nieuw en gaf opeens een heel andere betekenis aan de paar dingen die we wel wisten'. In de archieven

vond hij vervolgens nieuwe stukken, die lieten zien, hoezeer Debye, ook in de oorlog nog, steeds van plan was terug te keren naar Duitsland.”

Translation: “*Question to Rispens: After all, what is new about your findings about Debye? A lot, says Rispens from his hometown Berlin. First, Einstein’s sharp letter about Debye. This was new and it suddenly gave a completely different meaning to the few things we already knew. In the archives, Rispens found then new documents, which showed how much Debye, also during the war, wanted to return to Germany”.*

Rispens makes strong statements about the Einstein letter in his article in *Vrij Nederland* of January 21, 2006 in which he writes about Debye’s reaction to Einstein’s letter:

“Debye was flink in zijn wiek geschoten toen hij van Einsteins pamflet tegen hem hoorde. Zijn toekomst in Amerika stond op het spel. Hij ontkende alle beschuldigingen met klem en hij verzekerde Einstein dat hij gedwongen werd zijn positie bij het Kaiser Wilhelm Instituut neer te leggen, dat hij geen enkel contact met Duitsland meer onderhield, en dat hij nooit terug wilde naar Berlijn. De Cornell University nam uiteindelijk geen maatregelen tegen hem, maar Debye sprak hier op geen van de punten de waarheid.”

Translation: “*Debye was very much upset when he got notice of Einstein’s pamphlet against him. His future in America was at stake. He denied all accusations and he assured Einstein that he was forced to leave his position at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut, that he did not have any contact with Germany and that he did not want to return to Germany at all. In the end, Cornell University did not take measures against him, but Debye did not tell the truth on any of these points.”*

I will describe below how the historical sources show that Rispens’ description of the Einstein letter in his book on pages 182-183 is not in agreement with the historical facts.

- First, I will address the details of the Einstein letter on the basis of the information extracted from FBI files.
- Second, I will consider the reaction of Cornell University to the vague accusations of Einstein and
- Third, I will discuss the claim of Rispens that Debye wanted to return to Germany during WW2.

9b. EINSTEIN’S LETTER

Einstein’s letter is not at all new; it is described (with the context in which this letter was written) on p. 320-321 of the book “*Einstein. A life.*” by Dennis Brian in 1996. He treats the Einstein letter in a summarized version of FBI Report 77-148 from September 14, 1940 based on an FBI interview of Einstein about Debye, which I will describe in more detail below.

At the initiative of the then newly created National Defense Research Committee, an investigation was carried out by the FBI from September –November 1940, to ascertain if Debye, who had worked for such a long time in Germany, was a security risk, see also chapters 4 and 8. This investigation was set in motion because of a letter from Professor Samuel Goudsmit to Mr. Hugh H. Clegg from the FBI, dated August 31, 1940; he feared that Debye was in the United States in the interests of the German Government. In his letter to the FBI Goudsmit writes:

*“Dear Mr. Clegg,
Your attention has probably already been called to the case of Professor Pieter (Note: the FBI agent has mis-typed Debye’s first name) Debye at Cornell University at Ithaca, N.Y., who came to this country a short while ago. Some of my colleagues have asked my opinion about him and have voiced their suspicions...”*

Some of my colleagues think that his new position here may bring him in contact with scientific defense work and that he may have an influence upon the choice of personell for that work. They fear that he is not reliable. My own opinion is that these suspicions are primarily caused by professional jealousy, I hope that I am right. Nevertheless the case seems important to me. Debye is such an outstanding man in his field with broad practical experience that it would be a serious handicap if, in an emergency our country would be unable to use his valuable knowledge because of unfounded suspicions. It seems in any case highly advisable to make sure just where he stands."

Goudsmit himself was interviewed by the FBI and stated in the report in this regard (FBI Report 62-1132 dated September 27, 1940) that he saw Debye for the last time in 1931.

The FBI report goes on to state:

"[Goudsmit] Says that the colleagues of Debye are a bit jealous of his abilities to sell himself and get a lot of money. States that he is suspicious of him, but that this has no basis in facts".

In other words: Goudsmit says that he does not trust Debye but does not have a single fact to support this statement. In any case, this is honest. As a consequence of the FBI interviews, the US Navy decided on December 31, 1941 that Debye should not be appointed to "classified Navy research". However, see below the activities of Debye with Bell Labs. On April 18, 1944 the Army Services Forces issued a report, in which Debye was completely cleared of every suspicion. The report does not see a single reason why Debye could not be assigned to "classified military research".

During the FBI investigation of Fall 1940, Einstein was also interviewed. The report of the FBI interview produces a curious portrait and sheds light on the background of the letter from Einstein to Cornell University.

The FBI report about the interview of Einstein, (who was followed for years by the FBI because they did not trust him; they thought he was a communist sympathizer, see also Grundmann (2004)) says the following:

"After numerous attempts, Professor Albert EINSTEIN was finally contacted at his home at 112 Mercer Street. He advised that he has known PETER DEBYE and of DEBYE for the past twenty years although he has never been a close friend of his. He stated that PETER DEBYE was born in Holland, spent part of his boyhood in Holland and then studied in Germany and Switzerland, spending the greater part of his life in Germany. According to EINSTEIN, DEBYE was Director of Physics at the KAISER WILHELM INSTITUTE at Dahlem, Germany, and is a very eminent physicist. DEBYE has studied at Munich and Leipzig. EINSTEIN further stated that he spent part of his life in Berlin was never there while DEBYE was there and that he has seldom seen DEBYE.

In connection with the letter concerning DEBYE, EINSTEIN stated that sometime last spring a British Agent came to his home and exhibited to him a letter addressed to EINSTEIN from a man abroad which letter had been removed from the mails by the British censors. As far as EINSTEIN could recall, the letter was from a man named FEADLER (phonetic spelling) in Switzerland who EINSTEIN stated probably does not know DEBYE. EINSTEIN advised that he does not know FEADLER personally but knows of him. He also stated that he does not know what nationality FEADLER is.

EINSTEIN related that the gist of the letter was to the effect that DEBYE had been in close personal relationship with GOERING when DEBYE was at the KAISER WILHELM INSTITUTE and that DEBYE was afraid of GOERING; That DEBYE when coming to America last spring went through Switzerland but did not visit his old friends there which was very unusual and unlike DEBYE to do (Van Ginkel: from Debye's diary we know that Debye left Germany on January 15, 1940 and that

he had a direct train connection with Italy, without a delay in Switzerland, see also the PWJD chronology); that therefore FEADLER was suspicious of DEBYE and requested EINSTEIN to ascertain if DEBYE was in the United States for a secret purpose.

EINSTEIN pointed out that DEBYE might be in close relationship with GOERING merely for the purpose of securing more funds with which to carry on the work at the KAISER WILHELM INSTITUTE.

EINSTEIN advised that he has never heard anything wrong concerning DEBYE but that he knows the man well enough not to trust him; that he EINSTEIN would accept things that DEBYE says as a scientist as being true but would not accept things that DEBYE says as a man as necessarily being true.

EINSTEIN continued that DEBYE is a very shrewd man of extraordinary intelligence, very versatile and having extraordinary ability to reach his goals and knows what to do to obtain immediate and personal advancement. EINSTEIN said that he believes DEBYE is not a person of high loyalty and will use anything for his own advantage.

EINSTEIN stated that DEBYE acted very suspiciously abroad and did not act as a Dutchman. In explanation of this, EINSTEIN said that DEBYE'S colleagues abroad had been persecuted since 1933 and that he DEBYE in no way tried to help them and did not attempt to aid them in securing positions elsewhere.

(Van Ginkel: Einstein obviously did not know that Debye helped quite a few people to get away from Germany: the Jewish engineer Dr. Henri. S. Sack in the period 1927-1933, whom Debye helped to get a safe position outside Germany at Cornell university, Debye's Jewish help in the house in 1934, Prof. Salmang and his family in 1935, Prof. Lise Meitner in 1938 and Dr. van der Grinten in May 1940).

According to EINSTEIN, he has heard that DEBYE has made the statement that the KAISER WILHELM INSTITUTE is now being used for military purposes.

EINSTEIN said that he does not believe DEBYE'S work concerns military affairs but that DEBYE is capable of performing such work.

He said that DEBYE may be all right but that if DEBYE'S motives are bad he is a very dangerous man. He also stated that DEBYE would be a good man for espionage work as he has the facility of organization to perform such work.

He said that it was his unbiased opinion that DEBYE should not be trusted with military secrets of the United States Government, unless it has first been ascertained that DEBYE had severed all relations with German officials which he EINSTEIN does not know. EINSTEIN made it clear, that he felt that DEBYE should be watched for a while to ascertain his motives.

EINSTEIN, however stated, that now that he knows that DEBYE has a son with him in the United States, perhaps DEBYE does not intend to return to Germany."

EINSTEIN said that when he observed the letter he considered the matter serious and felt it his duty to inform the authorities at CORNELL UNIVERSITY. He related that he acquainted Professor A. Lowe of PRINCETON University with the facts and that LOWE accompanied the British agent to CORNELL UNIVERSITY to advise the authorities there of the facts. He said that he told these men to see that CORNELL UNIVERSITY kept the matter confidential but that the CORNELL authorities did not do so and had advised DEBYE of the charges. EINSTEIN exhibited to Agent a letter he received from professor J.G. KIRKWOOD of the Department of Chemistry at CORNELL UNIVERSITY which letter is dated June 7, 1940. In this letter KIRKWOOD stated that he was very concerned over the recent visit of two men to CORNELL UNIVERSITY who made vague charges that DEBYE was acting as a secret representative of the German Government; that he KIRKWOOD believed such charges were untrue and that DEBYE was not engaged in a research of military importance to the German Government.

EINSTEIN also exhibited to Agent a letter dated June 12, 1940, which he received from DEBYE. In this letter DEBYE wrote that he had been advised of the charges

against him and that he wished to acquaint EINSTEIN with the true facts; that he left Germany because he was asked to change his Dutch citizenship into a German citizenship; that he had refused to make this change although at the same time he had been informed that if he did not comply with the wishes of the German Government he would have to resign his position as director of the KAISER WILHELM INSTITUTE; that he came to this country as a BAKER lecturer at CORNELL UNIVERSITY and has decided several months ago that under no circumstances would he return to Germany

(NOTE. This is in agreement with the information in the letter written by Debye on May 9, 1940 to Prof. Birkhoff of Harvard University, see chapter 9 for a copy of this letter. The letter comes from the Debye family archives);

that during his stay in America he has had no connections with German officials

(Van Ginkel: This is in agreement with the information in a letter by Max von Laue to Debye, dated August 24, 1940 (Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg) , in which Von Laue writes: *“Weder ich noch sonst jemand aus dem KWI hat seit Ihre Abreise eine Nachricht von Ihnen erhalten. Auf Umwegen hörte ich von einem Telegramm, das Sie an Telschow gesandt hätten mit dem Inhalt, Sie hätten Ihren Vertrag mit den Amerikanern um 3 Monaten verlängert. Ich möchte mich hier nicht über den ganzen Fragencomplex äussern, sondern nur der Hoffnung Ausdruck geben, dass Sie schließlich doch nach Berlin zurückkehren”*.

Translation: *“Neither I nor anyone else from the KWI has received since your departure any message from you. Through the grapevine I heard about a telegram which you had sent to Telschow that you had extended your contract with the Americans for another three months. I do not want to go into details with regard to the whole complex of problems, but I will only express my hope that you will after all eventually return to Berlin”*)

FBI Report continues:

and has acted in every way as a Dutch citizen. EINSTEIN stated that on June 15, 1940 he wrote a letter to DEBYE advising him that he EINSTEIN had received the information from abroad and that he did not know whether the charges were true but felt it his duty not to judge him upon the facts but to turn the information over to an American citizen as it was of a serious nature.

EINSTEIN also stated that on June 17, 1940, he had written to Professor KIRKWOOD of CORNELL UNIVERSITY advising him in the same respect.

EINSTEIN advised that he believes DEBYE is of Dutch citizenship but says that he might have double citizenship Dutch and German, as many people abroad do.

EINSTEIN said that the letter addressed to him had been kept by the British Agent. He did not have the name and address of the British Agent but said that he believed Professor Lowe had it and that it would be forwarded to the Newark office. He also advised that Professor LOWE would not be able to add anything to instant investigation as he knew nothing but the incident concerning the letter.

As a reader one has no idea what to think about Einstein. This statement is not just completely at odds with the statements of James Franck, but it also is at odds with the judgment of Einstein himself about Debye in various letters, such as Einstein’s letter to Felix Klein dated March 26, 1917 in which he writes among other things:

“I am very happy to get to see Debye in the coming days...” and in a letter, dated April 7, 1911 to Heinrich Zangger: *“I have met my now almost certain successor in München, a pleasant child’s face, from which one can read the unspoiled soul. I am very happy with him and I am convinced that the position is going to be in outstanding hands. I recommend him highly to you. We spent the entire Sunday*

evening going around München with him and Sommerfeld. It was an unforgettable evening". And in 1920 Einstein writes about Debye (see Kant (1997): "Peter Debye ist Sommerfelds hervorragendster Schüler. Von selten vielseitiger und starker Begabung und wunderbarer Beweglichkeit des Geistes... Charakterisch für Debyes Leistungen ist ihre scheinbare Zusammenhanglosigkeit untereinander. Es ist eine Fülle einzelner glücklicher Gedanken".

Translation: "Peter Debye is Sommerfeld's most brilliant student. With a rare many-sided intelligence and marvellous liveliness of his brain ... Characteristic for Debye's abilities is their seemingly absence of coherence. It is an abundance of separate good ideas".

Of course, Debye also recalls his contacts with Einstein. He is unpleasantly surprised by the actions of Einstein and therefore wonders why Einstein has 'played such a game on him' (quotation from FBI report 62-6887 WM dated October 2, 1940 in which Dr. Warren Weaver of the Rockefeller Institute gives testimony). He himself thinks that it is because Einstein knows that Debye is aware of all the details of Einstein's divorce troubles. Of course, what Einstein's motives were remains speculation but one can come up with several.

From other sources describing the position and actions of Debye in the US presented in this report, it is clear that Einstein was totally wrong in his assessment of Debye. Debye was from the very beginning, loyally involved with research for the benefit of the allied cause as explained below.

For that matter Robert Ogden (Dean of Liberal Arts, Cornell) gives another description of the letter, which Einstein describes above as coming from Feadler in the FBI report 77-148 dated 14 September 1940. Ogden states there, summarized:

"In spring 1940, Professor Lowe, (Jewish, Princeton), wrote to a Jewish Cornell colleague advising that Einstein had received a letter from abroad reflecting upon Debye; that Lowe had come to Cornell with an agent of the British Information Bureau to see him. Ogden says that this letter was from a Jewish person abroad, who is not a person of much prominence in the chemistry field. Ogden could not recall the name of the letter writer, but thought it might be Stengler. In the letter it was written that Debye came to Ithaca, where there are gas regions, for the purpose of working on gases for the German government. Ogden felt that this was a letter from a personal enemy of Debye in Germany and the result of Jewish prejudice. The letter was shared with President Edmund Day, who decided the charges were untrue".

Rispens writes about Debye's letter to Einstein dated June 12, 1940 on page 183 of his book:

"Debye onderstreept de inhoud van zijn brief nog eens, door hem niet in het voor hem – en zeker voor Einstein, die zijn leven lang moeite met vreemde talen heeft – meer voor de hand liggende Duits te schrijven, maar in het Engels. Het Engels moet kennelijk suggereren dat Debye inmiddels al naadloos in de Amerikaanse cultuur is geïntegreerd en met Duitsland niets meer te maken wil hebben."

Translation: "Debye underlines the content of his letter by not writing it in German which would be an obvious choice for him – and certainly for Einstein, who had difficulty with foreign languages during his entire life- but in English. The English obviously was to suggest that Debye had already fully integrated into the American culture and that he did not want to have anything to do with Germany any longer"

Einstein was then already seven years in the US and it is very unlikely that he could not read English. Apart from the fact that it was the common language of everybody around him, it was also the language used at scientific meetings. Rispens makes this accusation

about Debye without giving sources to support it and without making it plausible in any way. His accusation contributes, however, to the unfounded negative perspective of Debye.

We do not know the identity of the person who wrote the letter to Einstein, which was intercepted by the British censor. A possible candidate might be Hans-Werner Walther Fiedler, born on January 3, 1898 in Leipzig. He performed his PhD research with Werner Heisenberg in the period 1929-1933 and the theme of his dissertation was “Über den Zusammenhang von innerer Reibung und chemischer Konstitution bei Gasen”. Among the committee members of his PhD work were quite a few scientists among whom Heisenberg and Debye.

We also do not know why Einstein wrote his letter. It could be that Einstein resented the fact that Debye remained in Germany until the end of 1939, whereas Einstein left Germany already in 1933 because of the Nazis. A report of the FBI interview with Einstein on September 1940 (FBI report 77-148) raises this argument. If this is the case, it is an understandable emotion of Einstein, but one can also look upon it quite differently, according to the reaction of the Jewish physicist and Nobel laureate Professor James Franck who, like Einstein, left Germany in 1933 in similar circumstances. In an interview by the FBI on October 1940, the FBI agent reports what Franck says about Debye (FBI report 62-2866):

“Franck has known Debye for over 30 years. He knows of his own personal knowledge that Doctor Debye assisted certain Jewish refugees to leave Germany at the time they were persecuted by the Nazi regime; that Debye is under no obligation to the Nazi regime. Debye resents the invasion of Holland. Debye is a man of high character and high ideals, he is totally trustworthy and would be totally loyal to the American government”.

Frank was right, for Debye in 1940 not only informed his colleagues (Einstein and Szilard) and thus the authorities in the USA about the nuclear research on atomic fission by Otto Hahn in Berlin, but also immediately loyally dedicated himself to research for the benefit of the allied war effort including (among other things) the development of effective radar systems and on the synthetic rubber project. See also my research of the sources quoted below.

Debye seems not to have been resentful after Einstein's actions as we can conclude from the information from two articles published in the New York Times of December 3 and December 19, 1945. They describe the organisation of a dinner in the honor of seventeen Nobel Prize scholars, headed by Albert Einstein, who are serving on a committee of scientific sponsors for a fund raising project. The dinner given by the American Friends of the Hebrew University, the American Jewish Physicians Committee and Hadassah, opened a 4 million US dollar campaign to build, equip and maintain a medical school at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Palestine. Debye was a committee member and one of the dinner guests.

Einstein (and also Niels Bohr) on the other hand voted in 1950 in favor of Debye as candidate for the Max Planck medal, which was awarded in that year to Debye (Ref. Archives of the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft).

9c. CORNELL UNIVERSITY AND DEBYE

Rispens in his article in Vrij Nederland suggests that there was at Cornell University the necessary resistance to the arrival of Debye but *Cornell University did not take measures*

against him after all and decided to hire Debye. This statement is not supported by the available historic sources.

From the documentation that we have at our disposal from various archives, Debye's diary and documents present in the Debye family archives (see the list of references) the following is evident:

- On March 20, 1939 Debye wrote to Cornell University that he would accept the invitation to give the George Fisher Baker lectures during the Spring semester of 1940
- On July 7, 1939 the son of Debye arrived on the "Hansa" of the Hamburg-American Steamship line in New York on a visitor's visa. He expected to return to Germany in September 1939, unless war broke out.
- On September 16, 1939, Dr. Telschow from the KWG gave Debye the choice: a German passport and continue as KWIP director or immediately resign as KWIP director and stay at home to write a book. Debye received an "Institutsverbot". (Note: Dr. Ernst Telschow was an assistant administrator at the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft from 1931, then second manager of the general administration from October 1933, and finally general secretary of the KWG from July 15, 1937 to May 18, 1960. He was a student of Otto Hahn and became a member of the NSDAP in 1933, see Hentschel, 1996)
- On October 7, 1939 Debye wrote a letter to Dr. Tisdale of the Rockefeller Foundation in the US that he was no longer KWIP director in Berlin and he asked for an appointment with Dr. Tisdale as soon as he arrived in the USA, see a copy of this letter below.

7th October 1939

Dr. W.E. Tisdale

The Rockefeller Foundation

49 West 49th Street, New York, U.S.A.

Dear Dr. Tisdale,

Owing to the now prevailing conditions in this country, the Max Planck Institute will have to enter a new phase of its existence. I feel it my duty to inform you of the new development, which is unavoidable.

Until now the Institute has been dealing with purely scientific research only. I have been informed that the government itself from now on to decide the kind of questions to be treated in the Institute and does not want that this shall be done under my directorship, because of my Dutch nationality, I agree with the government that for the time being I cannot act as a director. As a result of an interview between the leading director of the governmental department and myself, which took place the day before yesterday, we came to the following agreement. I do not resign, instead a leave of absence will be granted for the time of the occupation of the Institute during which I will be free to direct my activities, as I think best. During this time my salary will be paid as usual. For the second term of the academic year 1939-40 I have been invited to a lectureship at Cornell University. It is also with the consent of the government that I have now officially accepted this invitation.

I am very sorry that for a lapse of time, of which the duration cannot be evaluated in this moment, my work in the Max Planck Institute has to be ended. It would give me great pleasure if in a few months at my arrival in New York you will be able to spare half an hour, in order that I may see you.

Sincerely yours.

P. Debye

- On November 20, 1939, Cornell University released the announcement that Professor Peter Debye had accepted the offer to be the George F.

Baker lecturer in chemistry at Cornell University for four months, beginning with the second term of that academic year (Ref. FBI report 62-87 dated September 27, 1940)

- In December 1939 (before Christmas), Debye and his wife made a visit to Debye's mother in Maastricht. That was made possible because the daughter of Debye's sister, Mrs Siemens-Niël, had sent a telegram to Berlin with the false message that Debye's mother in Maastricht was dying. That allowed Debye and his wife to travel abroad together. In Maastricht the family discussed how Debye and his family could escape from Germany. It was decided that Debye would go first, followed by his wife and daughter. Because it was not possible to obtain dollars in Berlin and because they could not transfer money out of Germany, Debye borrowed 500 dollars from his mother and she transferred 6000 guilders to a bank in Genoa in Italy in January 1940.
- On November 28, 1939 Debye received a visitor's visa for the US in Berlin.
- In December 1939 Debye made preparations for his departure to the US. That this was, very likely, an escape is clear when one reads the letter of Dr. Telschow to Debye of September 3, 1940 (Archiv der Humboldt Universität in Berlin, Personalakte Peter Debye, by courtesy of Dr. Christian Bremen): *“Kurz vor Ihrer Abreise hatte ich Ihnen erklärt, daß die Abmachungen bezüglich Ihres Instituts in dem auch von Ihnen gewünschten Sinne getroffen werden würden, und ich war auch bereit, Ihnen genaue Kenntnis von den vertraglichen Abmachungen zu geben. Dies konnte aber erst geschehen, nachdem der Vertrag durch Unterschrift perfekt geworden war. Als ich Sie – unmittelbar nachdem dies geschehen war – zwei Tage vor dem von Ihnen angegebenen Datum Ihrer Abreise im Institut aufsuchen wollte, wurde mir mitgeteilt, daß Sie vorzeitig abgereist seien. Eine Übermittlung der Abmachungen nach Amerika war selbstverständlich nicht möglich, und ich habe daher Dr. Bewilogua, der – wie ich annehmen darf – Ihr volles Vertrauen genießt, gebeten, Ihnen unverzüglich schriftlich mit zu teilen, daß die endgültigen Vereinbarungen der KWG ganz im Sinne unserer Absprache getroffen seien. Dr. Bewilogua hat – wie er mir ausdrücklich bestätigt – dies auch in einem Brief an Sie bald nach Ihrer Abreise getan. Er hat Ihnen- wie er mir mitteilt, später auch noch mindestens zwei weitere Briefe gesandt. Da er von Ihnen keine Antwort erhielt, hat er weitere Briefe unterlassen.”* Translation: *“Shortly before your departure I informed you that the arrangements regarding your institute would be made in accordance with your wishes and I was also prepared to inform you precisely about the contractual arrangements. That could only be done after the contract was signed. **When I wanted to see you – immediately after this had occurred – in the institute two days before the date of departure you had given me, I was informed that you had prematurely departed.** Forwarding the settlements to America was not possible, of course, and I therefore asked Dr. Bewilogua, who I assume, has your full confidence, to inform you in writing that the final agreements of the KWG had been made in full accordance with our agreement. Dr. Bewilogua did this in a letter soon after your departure – as he has confirmed to me. He informed me that he later sent you at least two additional letters. Because he did not receive an answer from you he desisted from sending further letters.”*
- On January 15, 1940 Debye departed from Munich by train at 9.19 p.m.
- On January 16, 1940 around midday Debye passed through the Brenner Pass and he travelled from there straight to Milan.

- Between January 18 and 23, 1940 Debye sent a telegram from Genoa to his niece Mrs. Siemens-Niël, to congratulate her on her 15th birthday on January 17 and he wrote “Everything all right” which meant that the money had arrived in Genoa.
- On January 23, 1940 Debye departed from Genoa on the *Conte di Savoia*, via Naples to New York, to give the George Fisher Baker lectures at Cornell University. He left instructions with his family about how they could flee from Germany in three different ways, if necessary see FBI report 62-6887 WM dated October 2, 1940. (Debye had ensured that his wife already had a valid Dutch passport. The date of issuance is not certain. There are two dates: December 7, 1937 and March 17, 1939. This indicates, in any case, that they made the necessary arrangements to be able to leave Germany.)
- On February 1, 1940 Debye arrived in New York and was directly admitted to the US on his visitor’s visa. He then immediately met with Dr. Warren Weaver of the Rockefeller Foundation.
- In the “*Notes on conversations with Peter Debye*” by Warren Weaver in the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RG 12.1, RAC, the conversation is listed on the date of February 6, 1940. Weaver assured Debye during that conversation that the Rockefeller Foundation had no objection if he accepted a position outside of Germany. Debye decided to take action in order to get his family out of Germany unharmed.
- In March 1940 Mrs. Debye travelled to Lausanne in Switzerland on her Dutch passport, where she found lodging at 80 Avenue de Bethusy. She was supposed to have been very sick and, for that reason, she was able to obtain a German exit visa for Switzerland.
- *On May 10, 1940 German troops invaded Holland.*
- On June 3, 1940 Mrs. Debye sent a telegram to Debye from Lausanne, that she had been refused a visa for the US, because she was born in Germany and she reported that an exit visa had been applied for for their daughter, who was in Berlin.
- During the period 6-10 June, 1940 M.I.T. President Compton, Dr. Warren Weaver of the Rockefeller Foundation and Cornell President Edmund Day contacted the US State Department in order to request assistance in providing a US immigration visa for Mrs. Debye. In FBI report 77-2476 dated September 30, 1940 one can read:

“On June 6, 1940 Karl T. Compton, President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology writes a letter to the Secretary of State. In this letter Mr. Compton states that he had known Debye for a long number of years. Mr. Compton advised that Debye was one of the most distinguished chemists in the world and was held in high esteem by scientists throughout the United States...This file further contained a letter dated June 6, 1940 from Mr. Warren Weaver, Director of the Rockefeller Foundation, New York City...In this letter Weaver stated that Debye was of Dutch birth but had spent most of his time being associated with German Universities. Mr. Weaver further advised that Debye expected to remain permanently in the United States and that he was one of the leading scientists in the field of theoretical physics, experimental physics and physical chemistry... In conclusion, Mr. Weaver stated in his letter that the Rockefeller Foundation has the highest regards for Professor Debye’s ability and character.”

- On June 17, 1940 Cornell University offered Debye a three-year contract with a salary of 12,000 dollars per year as Professor and Chair of the Chemistry Department.
- In June 1940 (probably on June 20, see FBI report 62-87 pk, dated September 27, 1940) Debye travelled to Toronto (Canada) in order to apply for a US immigration visa. He was in the possession of a visitor's visa and he now needed an immigration visa, because he wanted to stay in the US.
- In a letter, dated June 25, 1940 President Edmund Day of Cornell University reassured Debye (who was then in Toronto) that the job offer for a position as a professor at Cornell was limited to three years only for technical reasons and that his intention was to make it a position until Debye's retirement, see a copy of this letter below.

*Cornell University
Ithaca, New York
Office of the President
June 25, 1940*

Dear Dr. Debye,

I am glad to know that you are at last in Toronto with prospects that you may be able to work out one phase of your problems without serious delay. I have to go down to Washington on the sleeper tonight and will have your needs in mind when I am there.

I am sorry that you felt at all disturbed over Mr. Meigs' strong citation of the fact that your new appointment is for three years only. The reason for this limitation has to do entirely with the financial arrangements, which we have been compelled to set up for the time being. Your appointment for this three-year period is on the Baker Foundation, which is quite allright for the present, but would not do for an indefinite future. Sooner or later we shall have to transfer your appointment to general University funds, but there does not seem to be anything pressing about that just now. I am sure you need not feel that your connection with Cornell is a temporary one. It is the hope of all of us that you may stay on here for the remainder of your active years. At any rate, that is the prospect which I like myself to entertain, and I can assure you that, if the arrangements work out as satisfactorily as I expect they will, I shall do all within my power to keep you permanently attached to Cornell.

*Sincerely yours,
Edmund E. Day*

*Dr. Peter Debye
Royal York Hotel
Toronto, Canada*

- On June 26, 1940 Debye took the train again from Canada to the US and was admitted to the USA with his new immigration visa (Ref. FBI report 77-2476 dated September 30, 1940).
- On June 29, 1940 Mrs. Debye sent her husband a telegram from Lausanne in Switzerland congratulating him but asking that the news be kept secret for two weeks because of the pending request for a departure visa for their daughter so that she could leave Berlin. (Please note: apparently the exit visa was eventually not issued).
- On September 25, 1940 Debye's mother passed away in Maastricht, the Netherlands.

- On October 24, 1940 Mrs. Debye applied again for a US immigration visa at the American Consulate in Switzerland, which she obtained on October 29, 1940 in Zürich.
- On December 4, 1940 Mrs. Debye appeared to be in Lisbon. It is puzzling how she got there from Switzerland, because at that time transit visas were no longer issued by Vichy, France and Spain.
- On December 21, 1940 Mrs Debye sailed aboard the “*Marques de Comillas*” from Lisbon to the New York, where she arrived on January 8, 1941.

From all the documents I have seen so far, it is beyond doubt that Cornell did not undertake the slightest action against Debye. There are reports of an FBI investigation of Peter Debye in the period September-November 1940, formally initiated by the National Defense Research Committee, to check whether Debye could be permitted to work in official US defense research; this, because he lived and worked in Germany for such a long time. In an FBI report of September 27, 1940 (FBI Report 62-87 PK) it is stated:

“President Day and Cornell professors express absolute confidence in Debye’s integrity. Wife is still in Switzerland, daughter (19) in Germany, son at Cornell, working on a PhD. Pres. Day expresses full confidence in him. John Kirkwood expresses full confidence in him. J.R. Johnson reports Debye to be entirely loyal with no interest in promoting himself or Germany. Louis Boochener (Cornell Director of Public relations) states that Debye is openly anti-Nazi... Dr. Edmund Ezra Day, President of Cornell University, advised that Dr. Debye had been a professor in the Chemistry Department who had been appointed Chairman of the Department with the approval of President Day. He further advised that the Chairman of the Chemistry Department held a position similar to that of an administrative adviser; that the position was obtained not only through the approval of the President but on the recommendation of the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the advice of the professors and assistant professors in the Department of Chemistry...Dr. Day further advised that subject has had very flattering offers from both Yale and Harvard Universities and that he knows, of his own personal knowledge, that Dr. Debye has been awarded an honorary degree by Harvard University. President Day stated that such degrees are not awarded on the spur of the moment but only after a thorough and complete investigation has been made of the person to whom they are awarded.”

N.B. Among the Cornell professors was the Jewish physicist Hans Bethe who, like Einstein, left Germany after 1933 because of the Nazis. Apparently he also backed Debye. Bethe was in 1944 a member of the oral exam committee at the PhD examination of Debye’s son Peter P.R Debye at Cornell University.

In the same FBI report 62-87 PK referred to above about Cornell one finds with regard to Einsteins’ letter:

Information was obtained that Professor Albert Einstein of Princeton had received a letter concerning subject (=Debye) and had sent some individuals to President Day of Cornell University who had squelched the matter.”

There is also the testimony by Professor Robert Ogden, Dean of the College Arts and Sciences of Cornell University, who states in FBI report 10-37 PM dated September 18, 1940:

“Ogden related Einstein incident and said Cornell authorities did not believe charges and that they were thought to be the result of Jewish prejudice.”

Cornell quickly and easily made the decision to hire Debye on the basis of fact that there was absolutely no reason to take any action against him.

The written notes by Debye himself make it clear that he had a faculty appointment at Cornell University from 1940-1952. Funds for research were not at his disposal. Therefore, he had to find funding for his research himself, which he did until his death in 1966. When Debye retired at the age of 68, he had no pension from Cornell but was reappointed as part-time research professor.

On the basis of my investigations of the sources, I conclude that Rispens' implications with his claim in his Vrij Nederland article "*Cornell finally did not take any action against him*" are patently false.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

- Einstein received a letter addressed to him, which was intercepted by and brought to him by the British censor. The letter contained vague accusations against Debye. Einstein used this letter to write a letter to Cornell University after Debye had arrived at Cornell. Einstein and Ogden give a different description of the letter which was intercepted by the British censor.
- This letter which Einstein received via the British censor poses a number of questions: which letter are we talking about now and who is right, Einstein or Ogden? Does Einstein act for personal reasons and, if so, what are they?
- The matter raises in fact more questions about Einstein than about Debye. Particularly, because Rispens uses the Einstein letter to discredit Debye, one would expect him to proceed here with great accuracy. That is not the case.
- Cornell University dismissed Einstein's vague accusations and gave Debye a professorial post immediately after his Baker Lectures; first for three years, but with the immediate intention of a position until Debye's retirement.
- Debye immediately set to work on research benefiting the allied war efforts, and succeeded in making significant fundamental contributions within a short period, both to designing effective radar systems and to the synthetic rubber project, vital for warfare.
- The security screening of Debye was superfluous, since no evidence was found that he was a threat to the security of the US.
- Rispens states wrongly that the Einstein letter is new. Moreover, the Einstein letter did not have any impact, as Cornell University showed displeasure about the vagueness of Einstein's accusations and, therefore, disregarded the letter.
- Rispens describes Debye as a liar. This description is not supported by the sources.

In the next chapters I will present sources, which show that Debye had no intention of returning to Germany during the war. The documents, which suggest such an intention, have to be read as a smoke screen for the protection of his family, who had stayed behind in Berlin.

CHAPTER 10. DEBYE'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ALLIED MILITARY EFFORT.

The bias and inaccuracy of Rispens' remark, that "*Cornell did not take action against Debye in the final analysis*", was discussed in Chapter 9. In addition this bias and inaccuracy is also confirmed by the sources, which describe how Debye, immediately after his arrival in the US, made himself available for military research for the benefit of the US.

The sources describe how, already in August 1941, Debye calculated for Bell Labs the mean dipole moment of long molecules in solution, rotating around their axes. With this, the production of high purity polyethylene became possible for use as a dielectric for radar systems. In October 1941 he calculated for Bell Labs the mean dipole moment of long molecules with limited rotation, as in polymers. That led to new formulas for the dielectric loss in insulators, again important in radar systems. In 1942 Debye was recruited by the Bell Telephone Laboratories for research that benefitted the synthetic rubber project, so important for use during the war. On March 15, 1943 Debye developed for Bell Labs a technique for measuring light scattering, which made it possible to determine the molecular weight of polymers, a result of great importance for the synthetic rubber project.

The sources confirming this are detailed. First we have the statement of the science historian Peter Morris of London, author of a book about the American Rubber Project, in an e-mail to Dr. Ernst Homburg from Maastricht on March 3, 2006:

"Debye was very much involved with the synthetic rubber work and produced an important report on molecular weight determination in 1943. The key aspect of security I came across was his collaboration with Bell Labs. The president of Bell Labs, who had sought to employ Debye as a consultant, was asked by the American Government not to apply for security clearance for Debye as it would be refused. The official reason given was that he had relatives in Nazi-occupied Europe. As a result Debye had to be accompanied by an uniformed policeman whenever he visited a defense-related plant. In March 1942, there was a petition got up by the staff at Bell Labs protesting at his ban from entering the labs signed by 15 people including Calvin Fuller and Bill Baker. His security clearance was finally restored on 18 May 1945. All this is in the Bell Lab archives, papers of Oliver Buckley, Box 77".

At Bell Labs they thought it nonsensical that Debye was seen as a security liability and they made sure that he could continue his work normally with them. Dr. William O. Baker, at the time the driver behind the Bell Labs Rubber Reserve project and later the director of Bell Labs, described the episode and the impact which Debye had had on various aspects of military research for the benefit of the allied war effort in "Peter Joseph Wilhelm Debye", The Robert A. Welch foundation Conferences on Chemical Research, 20 (1977) pp 154-200 as follows:

"Then fate favoured the still wider sharing of Debye's abilities. World War 2 and its Nazi tyranny first drove him from a lifetime post as the eminent director of the Max-Planck Institute in Berlin-Dahlem. Having already had a lectureship appointment at Cornell, he went there in 1940 and soon became a regular member of the faculty and chairman of the department of chemistry. Once more we are vastly indebted to the enterprise of universities in cultivating and recognizing genius. Mindful of looming changes, well before our entry in the war, and with full support of the university, Debye agreed to engage in an association

with Bell Laboratories, in addition to certain other consulting activities in which he became interested. Our work on solid state and materials science was at an early stage but had strong orientation towards dielectrics, ferroelectrics and, of course, the surging fields of synthetic polymers, which were soon to be the principal insulating media for all telecommunications and other electrotechnology. So Debye quickly found a variety of things that interested him (and gave an expressive inattention to those that did not!; but the latter were a very small minority and were derived from careful estimates of what the chances of doing something significant seemed to be).

Hence, during this fruitful time, he exerted an important influence on our understanding of the behaviour of dielectrics and ferroelectrics, such as electrical filter elements. As the war worsened, and the US began its role as an arsenal for democracy, British and American efforts indicated that radar systems would be crucial. Their function, however, depended on the waveguides already invented by Southworth at Bell Labs' Holmdel laboratory and on related rugged dielectrics of highest quality. The latter seemed possible through the British discovery of polyethylene. Although we had first used polyethylene practically as a dielectric, in a small quantity obtained directly from the British research reactor, in a coaxial cable linking Washington and Baltimore, it was recognised that the substance was impure and contained significant amounts of polar groups. These were particularly carbonyls from oxidation or other sources. It was important to be able to recognize and characterize the effect of these groups on engineering quality, which would be decisive for adequate performance of the radar systems. Yager and I had already measured much of carbonyl polarity in polymer crystallites, through studies of polyesters prepared according to Carothers' procedures.

Thus in August 1941, Debye derived the average moment of a dipole turning around the axis of a long-chain molecule in a general form more useful than the earlier efforts for solutions. This was of broad interest in our further, indeed even continuing now, specification and improvement of hydrocarbons as superior dielectrics for the most sensitive applications. (These include, for instance, the new high-capacity transoceanic cables.) Thus, the vital qualities of polyethylene as the primary insulator, which it discharged so effectively during World War 2, were brought to new values.

Debye's approach to both the dielectric polarization and loss are typically compact. After discussions on the 27th of August at Bell Labs' Murray Hill laboratory (Debye's notes are shown in Figure 22), while en route back to Ithaca on the New York Central Railroad the next day, Debye wrote a letter to Morgan laying out the derivation – one of his first enterprises with macromolecules. These enterprises were soon to help ensure our victory in the resources battle so necessary in World War 2. In later notes, particularly of October 15, Debye also carried out an improved treatment for the movement of dipoles with restricted rotation, such as would be encountered in polymer solids, and thus new expressions of the dielectric loss were obtained.

But matters were soon to change, to move away from these important but selective studies, as Pearl Harbour forced an immediacy into our science and technology as never before. The armoured encounters necessary for the Allied liberation of the European continent, or indeed the survival of the free world, would require synthetic rubber to replace the Hevea sources lost to Japan. Indeed, some rubber had to function in several new weapon systems as rubber had never served before. This required an unprecedented mobilization of industry, universities and government.

When, with my associates R.R. Williams and C.S. Fuller, we were assigned to organize the research and development of this effort, an early theme was to seek finest university participation, as represented first by C.S. Marvel and his associates from the University of Illinois. Professor Debye eagerly responded to our

approaches. However, as an alien then (the nation gained him as a citizen in 1946), since he had loyally retained his Dutch citizenship, he was progressively excluded by a mechanistic blanket of security from either entering Bell Laboratories or participating fully in the numerous conferences of the Rubber Reserve Program. This program had taken shape by the end of 1942 as a technical guide for our immense oncoming synthetic rubber plants.

The latter problem of constraint was alleviated, until orders from the highest authorities could be obtained to counteract it, by having a uniformed policeman sit with Debye in meetings held in sensitive areas, such as laboratories of rubber or other defense plants. Presumably, this arm of the law would prevent Professor Debye from blowing up the facility. He took it with immense good humour and, of course, endeared himself so quickly to the guards that they probably could have been enlisted on his side in any venture that he wished.

However, the procedure first adopted for Professor Debye's part in the national synthetic rubber effort was to give him a series of briefings. These I was assigned to give in his room at the Barbizon Plaza Hotel, facing the south end of Central Park in New York. There, it was evidently concluded by the security forces, he did not endanger the country. These tranquil surroundings, rather isolated from the mainstream of laboratory activity, provided excellent occasions for reporting the basic features that were emerging in the bold adaptation of empirical and often mystical emulsion polymerization. This had to be applied to ways of making three quarters of a million tons per year of GR-S, the styrene-butadiene copolymer, which helped to win the war.

Various histories have recorded how this was done – indeed, with the help of a number who are here today and of others whose careers we are celebrating – Marvel and Kolthof were especially active. But it would be hard to access adequately the aid which Debye contributed by characterizing the emulsion micelles and then the polymer molecules generated within them”.

Essential for the use of the styrene–butadiene copolymer in synthetic rubber, which Baker describes above, was the knowledge of the molecular weight of the polymers. Baker describes on page 189-190 of his article how Debye proposed a method for the exact determination in a letter dated March 6, 1943. This was based on light scattering measurements. Baker then continues on page 190:

“By March 10th we had provided some samples for his examination in the Cornell Laboratory, and by March 30th the essential functions for deriving average molecular weights from light-scattering extrapolations as function of concentration were laid out. His letter of March 30 reflected his utterly cooperative attitude toward the whole program in noting that he had a student, Billmeyer, now professor at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, who would start experimental study. Debye went on “could you tell me what I have to do in order that Billmeyer may be permitted to work? In other words, what is the official procedure? Or should I not ask you but somebody else?” Needless to say, everyone was charmed to have Billmeyer and Debye begin at once!

Through April of 1943, as the national program gained momentum, Debye also undertook a penetrating estimate of conventional theories of high elasticity and explanation of stress-strain curves for rubbery substances. These were again of first importance in characterizing the new synthetic product and in trying to assure its quality. He had always interacted skilfully with chemists of all sorts, as well as with physicists and engineers, and thus he facilitated a level of sophisticated collaboration of disciplines which was most encouraging”.

On the basis of Baker's report it is clear that Debye was accepted at Cornell immediately upon his arrival in the US and that, together with Baker at Bell Labs, he performed very

important measurements for the synthetic rubber program of the US, a program that played a vital role in the success of the allied war efforts.

SUMMARY

- Debye immediately set to work on research benefiting the allied war efforts, and succeeded in making significant fundamental contributions within a short period, both to designing effective radar systems and to the synthetic rubber project, vital for warfare.
- The security screening of Debye was superfluous, since no evidence was found that he was a threat to the security of the US.

CHAPTER 11. DEBYE'S "RETURN" TELEGRAM FROM 1941

Rispens writes on page 183 of his book that:

"Op 23 juni 1941 stuurt Debye een telegram naar het Generalkonsulat in Berlijn. In dat telegram verklaart Debye 'te allen tijde bereid te zijn de leiding van het Kaiser Wilhelm Instituut op basis van oude voorwaarden, weer op mij te willen nemen."

Translation:

"Debye sent a telegram on June 23, 1941 to the Generalkonsulat in Berlin. In that telegram Debye states that "he is prepared at all times to take over the directorship of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute again."

N.B. The text starting with "he is prepared at all times etc." is not that found in Rispens' reference, which is based on a note of Dr. Telschow. Rispens obviously has made his own translation of this text, which is very negative for Debye.

The telegram Rispens mentions has not been found. There is, however a note of the Nazis, dated January 26, 1942, in which a telegram from Debye is mentioned. I will elaborate on this matter below.

- On January 26, 1942 Dr. Ernst Telschow (general secretary of the KWG and a member of the NSDAP) reported in Berlin that Debye had sent a telegram on June 23, 1941, that he: *"erklärt das Institut zu alten Bedingungen wieder zu übernehmen, sobald dies von dort aus möglich sei"* (Translation: *"declares that he is prepared to take over the institute again under the old conditions, as soon as this is there possible"*).
- Dr. Telschow's report about Debye's telegram raises questions. No telegram has, in fact, been found: it is only mentioned in the note of Telschow. However, if Debye had sent it, we can surmise the following. On the one hand, we know from Debye's conversations with Weaver in the US on February 6, 1940 that the Rockefeller Foundation did not insist on his obligations as the Director of the KWIP in Berlin. Debye was free to seek a position outside of Germany. Returning "under the old conditions" would mean a return as director of the KWIP, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and Debye had already closed the doors on that in his conversation with Weaver. A telegram could be explained by the following information from the Debye family archives (told to the family by Debye's sister-in-law "Aunt Lisi"): *"Debye's daughter was not allowed by the German authorities to leave Germany, as long as her father was abroad. The Nazis made one exception. If she could arrange that Debye went to a conference in Sweden or Spain, she could meet him there. The family thinks this was a trap of the Nazis in order to arrest Debye. The daughter declined the offer of the Nazis. Peter Debye therefore continued the negotiations with the KWIP in order to keep drawing a salary during his absence. That has two aspects: On the one hand this was a source of income for his family members left behind in Berlin, to keep a roof over their heads in his KWIP house in Berlin; on the other hand, he gave the Nazis the impression that he wanted to return, so that they would not take action against his family"*. Meanwhile, Debye had emigrated to the US and had started immediately with research on behalf of the allied war efforts and had arranged for a camouflaged flight of his wife to the US. Their son was already in the US, but they did not succeed in getting their daughter to come to the US. That could also explain why a telegram might have been sent, when Debye had already decided to stay in the US. In the first half of

1941 political tensions between the US and Germany increased as shown from the measures taken by the American Government.

- On June 14, 1941 US President Roosevelt ordered a freeze on all German bank balances in the US (Ref. 'Der Zweite Weltkrieg', 1968)
- On June 16, 1941 the government of the USA required the closing down of all German consulates. (Ref. 'Der Zweite Weltkrieg', 1968).
- The measures of June 14 and June 16, 1941 by the US government may have been alarming for Debye, since they made it virtually impossible to transfer money and/or letters to or from Germany and his daughter and his sister-in-law still lived in Berlin. Providing funding for them from the US was not possible. Mrs. Debye had also arrived by June 1941 in the US. One might expect that she also had a lot of worries about her daughter and sister left behind in Berlin. This may have urged Debye to send a telegram, which would give the KWI the impression that he wanted to come back. By doing so he tried to guarantee housing and income for his daughter and sister-in-law.
- That the position of his family in Berlin forced Debye to operate very carefully is shown by letters in the Archive of the Humboldt Universität in Berlin (by courtesy of Dr. Christian Bremen, RWTH Aachen University). The first is a letter from Debye, written in New York City on May 2, 1941 and sent to Dr. Telschow, General secretary of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft:

“Ich habe von meiner Tochter telegrafisch erfahren, dass Sie beunruhigt sind und eine klare Stellungnahme wünschen. Ich habe schon versucht, Ihnen die Lage auseinanderzusetzen in einem Briefe, den ich im Herbst des vergangenen Jahres schickte. Als Antwort habe ich ausser ein Telegramm, das meinen Urlaub bis zum 1. April dieses Jahres in Aussicht stellte niemals etwas von Ihnen erhalten. Herr Konsul Hirschfeld in New York sandte mir vor kurzem eine Mitteilung des Ministeriums, in der mir Urlaub bis zum 1. April 1941 erteilt wurde. Es muss jetzt für die Zeit nach diesem Datum etwas getan werden und Herr Hirschfeld hatte die Freundlichkeit, mich zwecks Klärung der Sachlage zu einer Besprechung einzuladen, die heute stattgefunden hat. Ich habe erklärt, dass ich nach wie vor an meinem früheren Entschluss festhalte und bereit bin, das Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Physik und die Professur an der Universität wieder tatsächlich zu übernehmen, sobald Sie wieder in der Lage sind, mir die Möglichkeit der Durchführung der damit verbundenen Aufgaben nach den Bestimmungen meines alten Vertrages zu gewährleisten.

Für die Zwischenzeit möchte ich um Urlaub bitten, im einzelnen in solcher Weise geregelt, das es Ihren und meinen resp. meiner Tochter Interessen entspricht....”

Translation:

“I heard by telegram from my daughter that you were alarmed and that you wanted a clear decision. I have already tried to explain the situation in a letter, which I sent in the autumn of last year. Apart from a telegram in which my leave of absence until April 1 of this year was approved, I did not receive anything from you. The consul Mr. Hirschfeld in New York recently sent me a communication from the Ministry by which I was granted leave of absence until April 1, 1941. After this date something must be done and Mr. Hirschfeld was so kind as to invite me for a meeting to clarify the situation. This meeting took place today. I stated as before that I am sticking to my earlier decision and that I am prepared to resume my position at the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute for Physics and the Professorship at the University as soon as you are again able to guarantee that I will have the possibility to fulfil the corresponding obligations according to the conditions of my old contract. In the meantime I ask for a leave of absence

arranged such that it is in accordance with your, mine and my daughter's interests."

[Van Ginkel: Note the prominent connection Debye makes between his request of the extension with the welfare of his daughter.]

There are additional sources to show that Debye had to operate with great caution, because the Nazis were collecting information about him from German sympathers in the USA, as shown by a letter from Dr. Telschow to Debye dated September 3, 1940 and a report about Debye in the US signed by Mr. Borchers of the German Consulate in New York dated June 12, 1941. In his letter to Debye, Dr. Telschow shows displeasure about the three-year appointment Debye has accepted at Cornell University. He also shows displeasure about news that reached him through newspaper articles in the Netherlands and through talk in scientific circles:

"Eigentümlich ist, das bereits von ungefähr 4 Wochen in einer holländische Zeitung eine Mitteilung erschien, nach der Sie sich entschlossen hatten für dauernd in Amerika zu bleiben. Das Gleiche wurde mir hier mehrfach in wissenschaftlichen Kreisen erzählt."

Translation: *"It is peculiar that approximately four weeks ago an announcement was published in a Dutch newspaper, stating that you had decided to remain permanently in America. The same was told to me repeatedly in scientific circles."*

The German Consul Borchers in the US goes even further. He writes in his report of June 12, 1941 that he has collected newspaper articles in the US about Debye and he has checked whether Debye had made anti- German statements in Cornell. He ends his report with the comment:

"Sein Verhalten wird hier beobachtet werden. Der hiesige Hoheitsträger der Partei, Konsul Dr. Drager, bittet, die zuständige Abteilung der Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP entsprechend zu unterrichten."

Translation:

"His behavior here will be watched. The representative of the Party here, Consul Dr. Drager, requests that the responsible department of the Foreign Office of the NDSAP be correspondingly informed"

In short, the Nazis keep a very careful eye on Debye. Debye knew this so he had to balance as high wire walker to protect his family in Berlin and at the same time build up a future in the US without raising too much suspicion with the Nazis.

- There may be another reason why the telegram, if it exists, could have been sent. The Germans discovered somewhere in 1941-1942, that Debye had been able to get himself and his wife out of Germany along with the necessary money and that he would not return to Germany. They wanted to know how Debye succeeded in smuggling money out of Germany and they suspected that his Dutch family in Maastricht might have been involved. Since the health of Debye's sister was such that she could not be interrogated, they arrested Debye's brother-in-law, Mr. Hubert Niël. First, he was put for two weeks in a prison (Huis van Bewaring) in Maastricht and interrogated by the Germans; then, because he did not give any information, he was brought to the prison "Kamp Amersfoort" in The Netherlands. He still refused to give any information and was finally released after six months of imprisonment (Ref. Mrs. Siemens-Niël).

Numerous documents from the US make it clear that Debye did not consider returning to Germany. These documents include a letter dated May 9, 1940 to Professor Birkhoff of Harvard University, in which Debye writes that he had decided a while ago not to return to Berlin, see the text of this letter below

May 9th, 1940

Prof. G.D. Birkhoff, Department of Mathematics, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Dr. Birkhoff,

President Day of Cornell has asked me if I would be willing to be permanently connected with Cornell University. That was some weeks ago, and I answered that I had made up my mind not to go back to Berlin. At the same time I told him that I had discussed a similar proposition with you some years ago, that at that time I had not felt it possible to leave my institute, but that I had promised you to inform you if I changed my mind. President Day agreed that before making a decision, I should talk with you. He knew that I was going to visit Harvard some time during the first part of May and held the opinion that I should tell you frankly all he said but not by writing. He thought that he would like it better if I waited until I could see you.

I am coming to Harvard from Providence on Friday evening, May 10th, or Saturday morning, May 11th, and I will be staying with Dr. Scatchard. I will talk in the Physics Colloquium on Monday afternoon, May 13th. Could I see you during my stay in Cambridge in order to find out what you think about the present situation?

Quite apart from this I am looking forward to meeting you and, I hope, in the best of health.

Very sincerely yours.

P. Debye

There is also a letter from President Edmund Day of Cornell University dated June 25, 1940, in which a long-term position for Debye at Cornell was discussed. This also makes it clear that Debye did not want to go back, see the copy of this letter below.

Cornell University

Ithaca, New York

Office of the President

June 25, 1940

Dear Dr. Debye,

I am glad to know that you are at last in Toronto with prospects that you may be able to work out one phase of your problems without serious delay. I have to go down to Washington on the sleeper tonight and will have your needs in mind when I am there.

I am sorry that you felt at all disturbed over Mr. Meigs' strong citation of the fact that your new appointment is for three years only. The reason for this limitation has to do entirely with the financial arrangements, which we have been compelled to set up for the time being. Your appointment for this three-year period is on the Baker Foundation, which is quite allright for the present, but would not do for an indefinite future. Sooner or later we shall have to transfer your appointment to general University funds, but there does not seem to be anything pressing about that just now. I am sure you need not feel that your connection with Cornell is a temporary one. It is the hope of all of us that you may stay on here for the remainder of your active years. At any rate, that is the prospect which I like myself to entertain, and I can assure you that, if the arrangements work out as satisfactorily as I expect they will, I shall do all within my power to keep you permanently attached to Cornell.

Sincerely yours,

Edmund E. Day

Dr. Peter Debye

Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Canada

On or about August 14, 1941 Debye submitted an application for US citizenship. In order to obtain this, a waiting period of five years was required. He therefore became a US citizen no earlier than November 12, 1946. FBI reports indicate that Debye already in 1940 considered to become a US citizen, see FBI report 62-745 dated October 24, 1940:

“Subject (= Debye) now disclaims intention of returning to Germany and is reported to have taken out first papers to become citizen of the U.S.

On the basis of the above information a telegram from Debye of June 23, 1941 to Berlin, if it did indeed exist, was certainly an action meant to mislead the Nazis and thus protect his family in Berlin and in Maastricht.

Rispens closes his *Vrij Nederland* article of January 21, 2006 with the sentence:

“Het telegram bleef onopgemerkt in Berlijn en zo wachtte Peter Debye tot het eind van de oorlog tevergeefs op antwoord.” Translation: *The telegram remained unnoticed in Berlin and thus, Peter Debye waited in vain for an answer till the end of the war”.*

The note from Dr. Telschow is described in an article by Horst Kant (1993). This article ends with a quotation from Telschow’s note:

“which was laying about for months in the Kultusministerium...”

Horst Kants’ paper can be found in Rispens reference list on page 227 of his book. Rispens writes in his book on page 184:

“Peter Debye wacht tot het eind van de oorlog tevergeefs op een antwoord op zijn herhaalde vraag, of en wanneer hij terug kan keren als directeur van het Kaiser Wilhelm Institut für Physik. Hij besluit dan maar om in Amerika te blijven.”

Translation: *“Peter Debye waits until the end of the war in vain for an answer to his repeated question if and when he can return as Director of the KWIP. He then decides to stay in America”.*

First: with the knowledge of Horst Kant’s paper, Rispens has no basis for his statement that the so-called return telegram remained unnoticed in Berlin. When Rispens was confronted with the absence of the return telegram, he states, see *De Volkskrant* of March 11, 2006:

“Dat de gewraakte terugkeer telegrammen naar Berlijn niet beschikbaar zijn, vindt hij een detail. ‘Er wordt, zegt Rispens overduidelijk aan gerefereerd in andere wel bewaarde stukken die iedereen in de Berlijnse archiven kan inzien.”

Translation: *“That the wretched ‘return’ telegrams to Berlin are not available he finds a (minor) detail. There are, according to Rispens, more than clear references to it in other documents, which have been preserved, which can be seen by everyone in the Berlin archives”.*

I conclude from this that Rispens’ phrase in *Vrij Nederland* that *“the telegram remained unnoticed in Berlin”* is incorrect. The consequence is, however, that it generates an unfounded negative portrait of Debye.

CHAPTER 12. THE ROLE OF THE DEBYE FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES.

Rispens pays no attention to the possible effects of the family circumstances on Debye's actions. Instead, he makes remarks about the family's good life from Debye's salary in Berlin, when Debye had left for the US *"for a paid vacation"*. Rispens uses the term 'vacation' as a translation of the German 'Urlaub', which in Dutch better be translated as 'verlof' and in English as 'leave of absence'. Vacation has in this context a much more negative meaning. Rispens writes in *Vrij Nederland* of January 26, 2006 about Debye's salary:

"Debyes vorstelijke salaris (een grap onder natuurkundigen van die tijd luidde, dat een normale 'onderzoeker van één millidebye' nog ruim zou kunnen leven) werd nog tot 1943 doorbetaald."

Translation: *"Debye's royal salary (a joke among physicists of that time was that a normal scientist could live generously from one milli-Debye) was paid until 1943"*.

In his book on page 170 Rispens mentions remarks about milli-Debyes from colleagues of Debye in 1927 in which a milli-Debye is referred to in the context of Debye's formidable abilities to raise research funds. Historically this is a sloppy mistake on the part of Rispens, contributing to his negative picture of Debye.

Rispens writes on page 183 of his book:

"Zo is er voor gezorgd dat Debyes salaris van 40.000 mark tenminste nog anderhalf jaar wordt doorbetaald. Debyes dochter en schoonzus leven er ruim van."

Translation: *"It was arranged that Debyes salary of 40,000 marks be paid for another one and a half year. Debye's daughter and his sister-in-law lived well on it"*.

Rispens' remarks are not in agreement with the facts, as shown below.

(N.B. 40,000 marks was a normal salary for a professor at that time. It corresponded to about 10,000 US dollars (Van Lang, 2006). In the letter of Minister Rust to Debye dated March 24, 1936 in which the conditions of Debye's employment in Berlin are listed, a base salary of 16,400 Reichsmarks per year is assigned to Debye for his position as Professor of Physics at the University of Berlin. On top of that a sum of 7000 Reichsmarks per year was guaranteed to Debye if he took care of teaching students at that University. Debye receives next to that a salary as director of the KWIP.

Grundman (2004) reports on page 106 of his book that Einstein received on December 9, 1919, sixteen years before Debye's contract, a yearly salary of 18,000 Marks. It was raised substantially after December 1919: *"Einstein's salary was increased repeatedly in the following months (from 1922 with reference to inflationary pressures...)"*. This suggests that Debye's salary as a Professor at the University of Berlin is not especially high at all.

In a manuscript dated June 12, 1941 signed by Mr. Borchers of the German Consulate in New York (Ref. The Debye family archives) a report is presented regarding agreements made with Prof. Debye in the US. It also contains a report of the investigations of Prof. Debye and his son in the USA to establish whether they are saying anything anti-German. Regarding payment of Debye's salary, the note says:

"Bisher hat man ihm trotz seiner langer Beurlaubung sein ganzes Gehalt sowohl von der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft als auch von der Universität Berlin weitergezahlt, was ihm auf die Dauer jedenfalls peinlich sei. Deshalb wolle er die Frage der weiteren Gehaltszahlung und dessen Höhe dem billigen Ermessen der deutschen amtlichen Stellen überlassen. Er böte nur dabei zu berücksichtigen, dass von seinem Gehalt in Deutschland

1. Die Miete für die ihm zur Verfügung stehende Dienstwohnung bezahlt werden könne und

2. *seine in dieser Wohnung lebende Tochter und Schwägerin sich unterhalten könnten (etwaige Einnahmen seiner Tochter seien ihm nicht bekannt),*
3. *dass seine Privatbibliothek dem Institut in Dahlem weiter zur Verfügung stände.*

Translation:

“Until now and despite his long absence, he has been paid his full salary from the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft as well as from the University of Berlin, something which in the long run is rather distressing to him. Therefore, he would like to give over to the German officials, the question of the continuing payment of his salary and a reduction in its amount. He only requests that consideration be given, that out of his salary in Germany

1. *the rent for the official residence placed at his disposal can be paid*
2. *his daughter and sister-in-law now living in this residence can support themselves (any current income of his daughter is unknown to him)*
3. *that his private library be made available to the Institute in Dahlem*

[Van Ginkel: Again, Debye makes it very clear that he is simply focused on being able to support his daughter and sister-in-law in Berlin with his requested extension.]

In a letter from Max von Laue to Lise Meitner dated September 8, 1943 one reads:

“Seit Peter Debye fortgegangen ist, d.h. seit Januar 1940, sass in seiner Wohnung seine Schwägerin, Frau Alberer, und verdiente sich ein Lebensunterhalt durch Vermietung. Welches Recht sie auf die Wohnung hatte, war nicht ganz ersichtlich. Werner Heisenberg meinte z.B. dass er eigentlich jetzt den Anspruch darauf hätte. Aber zu reden bei Frau Alberer nützte nichts und selbst gegenüber mehreren Räumungsklagen konnte sie sich hinter Mieter-Gesetzgebung verschanzen”.

Translation: *“Since Peter Debye left, that is to say, since January 1940, his sister-in-law, Frau Alberer lived in his house and she earned her living by taking in boarders. What right she had to the house was not very clear. Werner Heisenberg thought for example, that he had a claim to it in fact. But talking to Mrs. Alberer did not help one bit and even against some eviction complaints, she could hide behind the renter’s protection law.”)*

This creates the impression that Elizabeth Alberer (sister of Mrs. ‘Hilde’ Debye and ‘nanny’ for daughter Mathilde Debye) did not have a great deal of money to live on and that she was not about to be intimidated and kicked out. Consulting the Debye family archives in the US sheds light on yet another aspect of the circumstances of the Debye family in Berlin:

“On Elisabeth Alberer taking boarders: a) there was at one point a money issue, which Mrs. Debye tried to remedy (from the US) by giving her sister power to access the Debye bank accounts; b) Elizabeth Alberer told of being asked/required to board military personnel (under the same type of civilian “quartering” provisions available to the military in the US in the present time).”

So the question remains whether Debye’s family in Berlin actually had access to Debye’s bank account and salary paid by the KWI, immediately after Mrs. Debye had left Berlin. That does not seem to be the case, since on December 6, 1941 the U.S. Military Intelligence Division (MID) intercepted a letter of Mrs. Debye addressed to her sister in Berlin, in which she gave her sister authorized access to her Berlin bank account (see also the PJWD Chronology). In a letter from the Bayerische Hypotheken Wechsel-Bank in München to Mrs. Amalie Alberer, dated September 3, 1954 (From the Debye Archief in Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht), one finds:

“Frau Mathilde Saxinger-Debye, Delmenhorst, ist seit 1945 über das Konto ihrer Mutter bevollmächtigt.”

Translation: *Mrs. Mathilde Saxinger-Debye, Delmenhorst, has since 1945 access to the bank account of her mother.*”

This is a very strong indication that Debye’s family in Berlin did not have access to his bank accounts in the years 1940-1945. That may explain why the family members sought for additional income by taking in boarders and taking jobs.

The family circumstances of Debye played a major role in the tussle between Debye and the Nazis concerning his family and his KWIP house. When Debye departed for the US on January 15, 1940 he left behind his wife, her sister and his daughter, then 18 years old. According to the testimony of Dr. Warren Weaver in FBI report 62-887 WM dated October 2, 1940:

“Debye told Weaver that he left detailed instructions with..... (Van Ginkel: the name was made unreadable by the FBI) setting forth three separate methods that they might get out of Germany if they ever found it necessary to ‘leave in a hurry’.”

Son Peter Paul Ruprecht was already in the USA. Mrs. Debye succeeded later on and only with significant difficulty in coming to the US (see Chapter 6). In a letter dated January 11, 1940, Max von Laue wrote to Lise Meitner about the wife and daughter staying behind:

“Debye reist schon am 13.1 über Genua ab. Seine Frau und Tochter bleiben daheim, da die Tochter nicht zum Mitreisen zu bewegen war. Merkwürdig!”

Translation: *“Debye departs already on January 13 via Genoa. His wife and daughter stay home, because the daughter could not be convinced to leave. Remarkable!”*

It is not clear why daughter Mathilde Debye did not want to go to the US. According to her sons, she felt perfectly safe with her aunt, who was like a mother to her. It is possible that love played a role here, but that remains speculation. Love certainly played a role a little later, since among the German soldier-boarders in the Harnackstrasse 5 there was a Gerhard Saxinger, from Czechoslovakia (Sudetenland), of whom more later. Debye wrote about his wife and daughter staying behind in Berlin in a letter of December 30, 1939 to Sommerfeld:

“Hilde und Maida wollen lieber hier abwarten wie sich die Sachen entwickeln, sie werden nach wie vor das Haus Harnackstrasse 5 bewohnen”.

Translation: *“Hilde and Maida (=wife and daughter) prefer to wait here and see how things are going to develop, they will live as they have in the house in Harnackstrasse 5”.*

Daughter Mathilde was pregnant in December 1941 and she married Gerhard Saxinger (who was then 32 years old) on March 23, 1942 in Berlin-Zehlendorf. As a result she lost her Dutch citizenship. Their child, Norwig, was born August 18, 1942. That meant an unplanned pregnancy with a shotgun wedding as a consequence and for the Debye’s a son-in-law whom they did not know. This can also be concluded from a letter from Max von Laue to Lise Meitner dated September 5, 1942.

“Erstens ist Debye Grosspapa geworden. Seine Tochter, die vor einiger Zeit einen Herr Saxinger heiratete, hat ein Baby. Genaueres weiss ich nicht, da sie weder ihre Heirat noch diese Geburt irgend einem Kollegen ihres Vaters angezeigt hat. Auch die Schreibweise ihres jetzigen Namens ist mir nicht sicher; ihr Mann gehört dem Propaganda-Ministerium an”.

Translation: *“Recently Debye has become a grandfather. His daughter, who married a certain Mr. Saxinger a while ago, has a baby. I don’t know any more details, since she has neither told any of her father’s colleagues about her wedding nor about the birth. Also, how she writes her current name is not clear to me; her husband works with the Ministry of Propaganda.”*

Mathilde Debye assumed, as was then customary, the name of her husband and was called Mrs. Saxinger after her marriage. Gerhard Saxinger was a German Army photographer who was drafted into the German military service on May 17, 1940 in Tropa, Sudetenland. He received an assignment as Army photographer-cameraman with the "Ersatzbatallion des Infanterie Regiment IR 28". As photographer-cameraman he apparently was also part of the Ministry of Propaganda. Debye did not know Saxinger and was not aware of the relationship of his daughter with Saxinger. It is not clear where and when Debye's daughter Mathilde (or Mairi) became acquainted with Gerhard Saxinger. That may have been after Saxinger became a boarder in Harnackstrasse 5. It is also possible that they got to know each other at work, since in a letter dated August 4, 1941 (Ref. Archive of the Humboldt Universität in Berlin by courtesy of Dr. Christian Bremen) Debye's daughter Mathilde Debye states:

"Hiermit teile ich Ihnen mit, dass ich seit dem 13. Januar 41 im Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda angestellt bin, und mein Gehalt RM 40,- monatlich überschreitet".

Translation: *"Herewith I inform you that I am employed since January 13, 1941 in the State Ministry of Information and Propaganda and that my salary exceeds RM 40,- per month."*

During his negotiations with the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute and the Nazi authorities, which undoubtedly took place with the necessary letter-exchanges, Debye had to navigate with the utmost caution in order to prevent his family ending up on the street, or worse. (It seems plausible that Debye, in view of the situation, needed to choose a highly diplomatic tone in his correspondence with the Nazi authorities.) The necessity for caution is also evident, for in March 1943 his sister-in-law and his daughter with her child were evicted from their house in Berlin-Dahlem on the basis of a court decision. They sought refuge in Sudetenland, where the Saxinger family lived, the in-laws of Debye's daughter. On August 2, 1943 Mathilde gave birth there to her second son, Nordulf, in Bad Gross Ullersdorf. In the fall of 1944, Saxinger fled with falsified army-orders, with his wife, the two children, Elizabeth Alberer and a chauffeur in a German army vehicle westward, because they feared the approaching Russian troops. They returned however to Bad Gross Ullersdorf when the Russian assault stalled, the threat seemed no longer imminent, and Saxinger and his chauffeur feared that if they did not return to the front, they would be discovered as deserters and shot. In March 1945 they fled again with the family and again with fake army orders (German soldiers with falsified orders risked immediate execution by the German or Russian troops). On all those flights, the golden Nobel medal accompanied them, sewn in a diaper. The family members, who stayed in Berlin, had received it from Debye as a means to barter in case of an emergency. In June 1945 the communist authorities decreed that Germans who fled from Sudetenland could no longer return to their homes there. Debye's daughter and her family became refugees without the right to return.

Debye and his wife did not know anything about what had happened to their daughter as we can conclude from an undated letter from 2nd. Lt. Hans Wijnberg to Debye in Cornell, a copy of which is present in the Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht (Box 41). Considering the circumstances this letter must have been written after WW2, probably in 1945-1946. It says:

"Dear sir,

Several days ago I received from Mr. M. Dekker, the address from Mr. Rudolph Alberer in Munchen. Through him, Mr. Dekker said, I would be able to get some information about your daughter. Today I passed through Munchen on my way to Nurnberg and found Mrs. Rudolph Alberer at the given address. She told me the following. Your daughter Mathilde got married in 1942, to an army camera man ("Wochenschau" was partly his work). They got two sons, but unfortunately the

last news that these people received from your daughter dates a year and a half ago at which time your daughter was somewhere in Tsecho-Slovakie. Frau Alberer, the "Schwiegermutter", died in 1942. The house with all its belongings burned down during one of the bombing attacks in 1945.

I regret very much that I am the carrier of such bad news for you, and I wish to express my sympathy. As it is as yet impossible for German civilians to use the mails, I have no contact anymore with Mr. Alberer. Nevertheless, in case you have a letter for them, I will try my best to get it to them, although I cannot promise it. Sincerely yours, Hans Wijnberg"

On December 18, 1948 Debye met his daughter, two grandsons, his sister-in-law Elizabeth Alberer and his son-in-law Gerhard Saxinger in Delmenhorst in Lower Saxony. It was his first meeting with his son-in-law and his grandchildren. In August 1951 Mr. and Mrs. Debye received their daughter Mathilde with her two sons in Ithaca, NY for a planned two-year visit but the two boys ended up staying in the U.S. The marriage of Mathilde Debye and Gerhard ended in divorce during the mid-fifties; Gerhard Saxinger remained in Germany and Debye's daughter permanently joined her children in the U.S. where all three became naturalized citizens in 1960.

In addition to concerns about his family in Germany, Debye was also worried about his mother, fiercely anti-Nazi, and his sister and her family, who all lived in Maastricht, also occupied by the Germans (see the statement of Dr. Keyes in FBI report 62-745 described in Chapter 14.d.). The 90 year old emeritus Professor Frits Böttcher, who spoke with Debye personally on various occasions before WWII and afterwards, confirmed as recently as March 2006 in a conversation with Professor Homburg from Maastricht that Debye told him that he had to operate with extreme caution because of his family, and that also after 1936 he remained in Germany because of his family. From a scholarly historical perspective it seems to me important to sort out the role of family circumstances carefully, since they must have affected the actions of Debye.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

- The telegram of Debye dated June 23, 1941, to which Dr. Telschow refers in a note dated January 26, 1942, may or may not exist.
- If a telegram exists, in which it is stated that Debye wanted to return to the KWIP under the "former conditions" then it was certainly a strategy in order to protect his family in Berlin and in occupied Maastricht. We conclude this on the basis of Debye's letter of May 9, 1940 to Prof. Birkhoff of Harvard University in which Debye makes explicitly clear that he had decided already quite a while before May 9, 1940 not to return to Germany and to stay in the US.
- Immediately upon his arrival in the USA, Debye arranged for a permanent stay.
- When the basis was laid with the offer from Cornell, his decision to stay was already made. He could now provide for himself and his wife in the US.
- The negotiations with the KWI could be considered a smoke screen for the protection of his family members, still in Berlin, who then could maintain a roof over their heads. It is not clear whether his family in Berlin had access to Debye's German bank accounts before December 1941.

CHAPTER 13. PERSONAL STATEMENTS ABOUT DEBYE

We have asked former co-workers and/or colleagues for their assessment of Debye and their knowledge about the position of Debye with regard to the Nazis. Moreover, we have looked for reports, which could give further insight into the position of Debye in 1935-1945.

13a. Professor Hans Wijnberg, emeritus Professor of Organic Chemistry:

I knew Peter Debye well: Debye was a good lifelong friend of my father-in-law, the publisher Maurits Dekker. My parents had sent my twin brother and me to New York in the spring of 1939 (they themselves were murdered in Auschwitz with my younger brother). With the help of Debye and others I was admitted to Cornell in the summer 1946. My wife and I have been at picnics with the Debyes together with the family Sachs, a professor of Physics at Cornell and a student of Debye. Not only was Debye a good friend of my in-laws, but he also helped them actively with their finances by purchasing shares of Interscience, the publishing house of my parents-in-law. Interscience was not only founded by a Jewish refugee (my father-in-law) but a great number of the shareholders were Jewish refugees, among whom Isaac Maurits Kolthof, who was called “Dean” of analytical chemistry as a full professor at the University of Minnesota and Weissburger, later chief researcher of Eastman-Kodak. Debye was definitely not an anti-semite!!

13b. Prof. Benjamin Chu, Distinguished Professor of the Dept. of Chemistry in Stony Brook, New York who was for four years a postdoctoral fellow with Debye at Cornell:
The Debye I know left Germany at the height of Nazi power in 1939 by taking advantage of the opportunity of the Baker Lectureship to Cornell University and then joined the Chemistry Department at Cornell. Cornell was a good university, but it was not the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Germany at that time. Einstein had to leave, but Debye did not. For him to give up what he had as well as not to become a German citizen and to come to the United States was a very courageous thing to me. He is certainly not a Nazi sympathiser. In my four years with him he was kind and strict, certainly showed no signs as an opportunist on anything and certainly not a racist.

13c. Article in *Minerva* 27 (1989) pp. 33-57 by Kristie Macrakis with the title “The Rockefeller Foundation and German Physics under National Socialism”:

Page 44: By the summer of 1934, the Rockefeller Foundation learned about the appointment of Peter Debye. Wilbur E. Tisdale, an officer from the division of natural sciences of the office in Paris, spent an evening with Debye in Leipzig, who reported to him that “Planck and representatives of the government had approached him to ascertain if he would be willing to take charge of the construction and later act as director of the Institute. Tisdale surmised that someone was trying to “stir up those concerned with the project, in order to have it completed”. (page 42: It is likely that this was Planck.)

According to Tisdale, Debye had shown “backbone” because he had chosen an assistant in Leipzig based on his scientific abilities rather than a candidate “more active in Nazi policies”. Indeed, Debye showed active dislike of the government...

13d. Prof. Dietrich Woermann, Prof. em. of Physical Chemistry at the University of Cologne, Germany:

*“I had been a post doctoral fellow with Professor Debye at Cornell University during the time from 1959-1961. Debye is accused of “Nazi Collaboration”. What does it mean? From my point of view a Nazi collaborator is a person who identifies himself with the views clearly described in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (independent of the edition chosen) and acted in accordance with these views, doing harm to people who do not agree with these views. With this definition, I do not see any indications that Debye was a “Nazi Collaborator”. Of course you can modify this definition and call every person a “Nazi Collaborator” who closed official letters with “Heil Hitler” instead of “sincerely yours”. Why people did that is very difficult to understand today. From my point of*

view this has something to do with the climate of “obedience” which was part of education in Germany in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. In addition it had been the standard established by the dictatorship.

The “incriminating” letter has a special background: in September 19, 1935 the German “Reichstag” (elected Parliament with only one party present) passed unanimously the so-called Nürnberg Laws which separated the German people into groups: Not-Jews and Jews. The basic result of this application of the Nürnberg Law was that Jews were no longer German Citizen. As a consequence, all officially recognised organisations were forced by law to tell their members that the Jewish members should declare their resignation from membership of the respective organisation. Debye as President of the Gesellschaft Deutscher Physiker with support of the members of the Governing Board of this Gesellschaft did that in the letter, which is now taken as evidence that Debye was a “Nazi collaborator”. The wording of this letter clearly indicates that this letter was not written voluntarily. Actually, the article by Dieter Hoffmann and Mark Walker published in *Physik Journal* 5 (2006) 53- should be sufficient to convince every person with a straight mind that it is infamous to call Professor Debye a Nazi collaborator. Independent of the “Heil Hitler” signature people can ask why Debye sent this letter. If I had to give an answer: the letter did not do harm to anybody and kept the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft out of limelight”.

13e. Former Director Philips Physics Laboratory Prof. dr. H.B.G. Casimir (1990-2000) wrote in 1989 in the monthly journal “Natuur en Techniek” about Debye: *“Wie Debye persoonlijk wat nader heeft leren kennen herinnert zich zijn hartelijkheid, zijn gevoel voor humor, zijn menselijke belangstelling. Maar hij wond zich niet op over zaken waar hij toch niets aan kon doen. Hij was geen kruisridder die ten strijde trok tegen het onrecht. Nog minder was hij een Don Quichotte, die een gevecht aanbond met windmolens. Als Nederlands staatsburger voelde hij zich niet verantwoordelijk voor de excessen van het Duitse leger in de Eerste Wereldoorlog en al evenmin voor de veel ernstiger excessen van de nationaal-socialisten. Zolang hij voor zichzelf en zijn naaste medewerkers gunstige werkomstandigheden wist te bedingen (en daarin was hij een meester), kon hij blijkbaar in alle gemoedsrust in Duitsland blijven. Principeel ingestelde Noord-Nederlanders zullen dit mogelijk als laakbaar opportunisme beschouwen, maar laat ons niet vergeten dat juist deze levenshouding niet alleen zijn schijnbaar moeiteloze, maar toch zo omvangrijke en indrukwekkende wetenschappelijke activiteit mogelijk maakte, maar ook ten grondslag lag aan zijn kenmerkende fascinerende charme”.*

Translation:

“Whoever got to know Debye a little closer remembers his cordial demeanor, his sense of humor, his humane interest. But he did not get excited about matters about which he could not do anything. He was not a crusader who went on the warpath against injustice. He was even less a Don Quichote, who fought the windmills. As a Dutch citizen he did not feel responsible for the excesses of the German army during WWI, neither for the much more serious excesses of the National-Socialists. As long as he could secure a favorable work environment for himself and his co-workers (and in this he excelled), he could apparently remain in Germany with peace of mind. Principled Northern-Netherlanders will consider this as despicable opportunism, but let us not forget that this attitude not only made his apparently effortless, yet so vast and impressive scientific activities possible, but it also was the foundation of his markedly fascinating charm.”

13f. Prof. M.J. Sparnaay from Eindhoven writes in a letter to the Mayor of Maastricht, mr. C.B.M. Leers, on March 17, 2006 about Debye:

“Ik heb Debije gekend als een opgewekte geestige man die in feite het Nazi regime niet serieus nam. Een goed voorbeeld daarvan is het volgende: Debije was directeur van het Max-Planck-Instituut, dat ressorteerde onder de Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft (KWG). De naam was boven de voordeur aangebracht. Planck echter was in ongenade gevallen bij het Nazi regime omdat hij bij Hitler een pleidooi voor de bedreigde Joodse geleerde Haber had gehouden. Daarbij had hij in zijn naïviteit gezegd dat de joodse cultuur zoveel voor Duitsland betekend had. Hitler was woedend geworden. De naam Planck moest dus verwijderd worden. Debije liet een plank over de

naam Planck timmeren. Het regime had pas na twee weken door dat met dit plank-Planck gebaar iets loos was. Zeer tot hilariteit van het merendeel van de laboratorium bevolking. Debije moet welhaast geweten hebben dat zijn handelwijze riskant was. Maar hij kon de verleiding niet weerstaan. Na de oorlog werd hij, in de V.S., vaak hierom geprezen. De KWG verdween bij het eind van de oorlog en werd, nu onder de naam Max-Planck-Gesellschaft (MPG) heropgericht in 1948. De geschiedenis van de KWG/MPG is beschreven in de *Naturwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, jaargang 31 (1986): 75 JAHRE MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT.

De stemming in de MPG/KWG tijdens de oorlog kan men misschien het best typeren met het voorstel van enkele vooraanstaande leden om Hitler te wijzen op de uitzichtloze gang van zaken. Maar men bedacht bijtijds, dat Hitler dan deze leden zou laten ophangen. En Planck vond, al in 1933, dat de storm, veroorzaakt door het nazi-regime, zo heftig was dat het einde niet lang op zich kon laten wachten. Tot dan toe zou men moeten buigen. In deze context moet m.i. de houding van Debije zien.

Rispens schetst in zijn boek *Debije als een eerzuchtige leugenachtige man*. Daarin herken ik hem totaal niet. Ik ben het veel meer eens met biograaf Mansel Davies (*Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, volume 16, nov. 1970) die zijn humor en goedgegemuttheid naar voren haalt: "He was a happy man".

Translation:

"I have known Debije as a cheerful, witty man, who actually did not take the Nazi-regime seriously. A good example was the following: Debije was the director of the Max-Planck-Institute, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft (KWG). The name of Planck was placed over the front door. However, Planck had fallen into disfavour with the Nazi regime because he had made a plea for the endangered Jewish scientist Haber. In his naïvety he had pointed out that the Jewish culture had meant so much for Germany. Hitler was furious. The name of Planck had to be removed. Debije had a board (v. G: the Dutch word for board is "plank") put over the name Planck. The regime discovered only after two weeks that something was wrong. This was very much to the hilarity of the majority of the people in the laboratory. Debije must have known that this act was not without risk. But he could not resist the temptation. After the war he was often praised for it in the US.

The frame of mind in the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft/Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft during the war is perhaps most adequately typified by the proposal of some prominent members to point out to Hitler the lack of prospects. But it was realized in time that Hitler would have hanged these members. And Planck, already in 1933, was of the opinion that the tempest, caused by the Nazi regime, was so violent that the end could not be far away. Until that time one should have to concede. In my opinion the situation of Debije must be judged in this context. Rispens paints Debije in his book as an over-ambitious, untruthful man. I do not recognize Debije in that image. I agree much more with biographer Mansel Davies (*Biographical Memoirs of fellows of the Royal Society*, Vol 16, nov 1970), who emphasises his humor and even-tempered attitude: "He was a happy man".)

13g. Prof. Erich Hückel, who worked many years with Peter Debye writes in his "Erinnerungen an Peter Debye und an meine Lehrjahre" in *Phys. Blätter* 26 (1972) pages 53-57 the following with regard to his experiences with Debye:

"Mein persönlicher Verhältnis zu Debye war immer völlig ungetrübt. Obwohl ich 12 Jahre jünger als er und ein blutiger Anfänger war, als ich nach Zürich kam, behandelte er mich stets wie seinesgleichen. Als er vor einige Wochen zu Gastvorlesungen in der USA war, vertraute er mir die Vertretung für die grosse Experimentalvorlesung an. Debye hat sich auch sonst immer für mich verwendet. So verschaffte er mir die Möglichkeit, zu meinen recht bescheiden Assistentgehalt durch Vorträge vor den leitenden Persönlichkeiten einer Glühlampenfabrik in Zürich benachbarten Winthertur über Gasentladungen u.ä. etwas hinzu zu verdienen. Die "Gage" betrug 50,- sfr. je Abend und ein Kaffeestündchen mit jenen Herren dabei.

Über Debyes Arbeitsweise ist aus den vorstehenden Ausführungen schon das Wesentliche zu entnehmen. Debye fasste seine Arbeit – so meine ich – auf wie ein Künstler, der aus der Freude an die Sache und an seinem Schaffen arbeitet, der sich oft von seinen Intuitionen leiten lässt, die er

hinterher verstandesmäßig möglichst einfach und klar unter Weglassen des Unwesentlichen begründete. Obwohl ich weiss, dass Debye nichts von Graphologie hielt und ich nichts davon verstehe, möchte ich doch in diesem Zusammenhang auf die klare und schöne flüssige Handschrift Debyes weisen. Onsager äusserte über Debyes arbeiten einmal das etwas hart klingende Urteil: "Er liebt die Rätsel nicht". Es ist aber wohl nicht ganz unzutreffend. Bei Debye finden sich nicht das Hin- und Herwenden aller in einem Problem steckenden schwierigen Fragen, die tieferschürfenden Analysen aller Deutungsmöglichkeiten, wie sie N. Bohr eigen waren und wie sie in ähnlicher Weise auch bei Onsager zu finden sind. Debyes Denkweise war ganz anders als die A. Einsteins. Debye kannte auch keine philosophischen Vorurteile, wie sie etwa bei Einstein gegenüber der statistischen Deutung der Quantentheorie mit geradezu dogmatischer Hartnäckigkeit zu finden sind: "Gott würfelt nicht" (man lese hierzu den Briefwechsel zwischen Einstein und Born), wie ich überhaupt bei Debye nie etwas von Interesse an philosophischen Fragen bemerkt haben. Debyes Lebensweise erschien mir geradlinig und unkompliziert. Er ass gern gut: Als in der Diskussion nach einem physikalischen Kolloquium einmal ein Problem nicht geklärt werden konnte, sagte er etwa: "Da muss man einmal gut zu Abend gegessen haben, dann fällt einem schon etwas dazu ein.....Debye hat ein Unzahl von Ehrungen erhalten. Er machte sich aber anscheinend nicht viel daraus. Als ich ihn bei einem Besuch in Berlin zum Nobelpreis beglückwünschen wollte winkte er ab: "Jetzt kommen auch Sie doch!". Mein Glückwunsch blieb daher unvollendet".

Translation:

"My personal relations with Debye were always completely care-free. Although I was 12 years younger than he and a complete freshman when I came to Zürich, he always treated me as his equal. When he was in the USA for a number of weeks to give a series of invited lectures he trusted me with the responsibility of giving the big experimental lectures. Debye also spared no trouble on my behalf. He gave me the opportunity to earn a little extra on top of my rather small income as an assistant, by giving evening lectures on gas discharges for leading employees of a light bulb factory in Wintherthur, a neighbouring city of Zürich. My "salary" amounted to 50 Sf. per evening and a coffee hour with the gentlemen.

About Debye's way of working one can already distil the essence from the preceding statements. Debye conceived his work - in my opinion - as an artist who operates on the basis of joy in his work and its creations, and who was led often by intuition, which was then later on rationally founded in the most plain and clear way leaving out everything that was unessential. ..Onsager once made the remark about Debye's work, the rather hard-sounding judgment: "He does not like mysteries". It is however not totally without foundation. One cannot find in Debye the endless considerations of all the difficult questions, the deep analyses of all the possible explanations, as are common for N. Bohr and which can in a similar fashion also be found in Onsager. Debye's way of thinking is completely different from that of A. Einstein. Debye also did not have philosophical prejudices, as one finds in Einstein who sticks with dogmatic stubbornness to the statistical explanation of Quantum theory: "Gott würfelt nicht"(one can read the letters exchanged between Einstein and Bohr). I never found in Debye any interest in philosophical questions. Debye's way of life seemed to me rather straightforward and uncomplicated. He liked a good dinner: when a problem could not be solved after a physics lecture, he used to say: "one must enjoy a good evening dinner and then the inspiration comes by itself...

Debye received an immense number of awards. It did not seem to matter much to him. When I visited him in Berlin to congratulate him on the Nobel Prize, he interrupted: "Fine that you are here". My congratulations were therefore not completed".

13h. There is also direct information about Debye's character and his position and that of his family with regard to the Nazis from an interview by Mrs. Schotman and Mrs. Rijken on April 1, 1970 with Debye's sister Caroline and her daughter Mia. The tapes and transcripts of the interview are in the Debye archives of the Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht.

- About Debye's character and how he was for the people around him, see pages 9, 11 and 12 of the transcript of the interview:

- **Mrs. Schotman:** *Was hij (=Debye) voor zijn medewerkers ook lastig of moeilijk? Was he (= Debye) demanding or difficult for his coworkers?*
- **Mia:** *Nee, integendeel want hij werd op handen gedragen. Want dat merk je wel, omdat je meeing naar college om te luisteren en omdat we daar vrij toegang hadden. We konden in en uitlopen, dat vond hij helemaal niet erg.*
No, on the contrary, he was put on a pedestal. That was obvious, we went to listen to his lectures, we had free access there. We could walk in and out. He did not mind that at all.
- **Debye's sister Caroline:** *Hij was geweldig geliefd.*
He was liked immensely
- **Mrs. Schotman:** *Ik heb de indruk, uit verhalen van mensen die hem in Amerika gekend hebben, dat als je iets zei dat niet helemaal waar was of als je een beetje moeilijkheden had, dat hij dan misschien niet zo gemakkelijk was, dat hij erg fel was.*
I have the impression from stories of people who knew him in America, that if you said something that was not entirely true or if you had a bit of trouble, that he was perhaps not so easy, that he was very sharp..
- **Mia:** *Hij was zeer waarheidslievend. Je moest niet proberen met een onwaarheid te komen, dan lag je er ook zo uit.*
He was very truth-loving. You should not try to come with untruths. He had no time for that.
- **Mrs. Schotman:** *Ook op wetenschappelijk gebied?*
Also in the field of science?
- **Mia:** *Ook wetenschappelijk...Ik vond altijd dat hij erg op grootvader leek. Niet alleen uiterlijk, maar ook zijn manier van doen.*
Also in the field of science... I found him very much like grandfather. Not only in his appearance but also in his behaviour.
- **Mrs. Rijken:** *geeft u eens een voorbeeld?.*
Can you give an example?
- **Mia:** *Hij was verschrikkelijk recht door zee.*
He was terribly strict.
- **Debye's zuster Caroline:** *Hij kon ook goed wat missen om anderen een genoegen te doen...*
He could also spare something to please others.
- **Mrs. Schotman:** *Was hij ook sociaal voelend? Mensen die iets onwaars zeiden lagen er bij hem uit. Maar je hebt toch ook mensen die buiten hun eigen schuld in het ongeluk komen.*
Was he also socially concerned? People who said something untruthful were out of his favour. But there are also people who through no fault of their own got into trouble.
- **Mia:** *Die zal hij altijd helpen, want hij hielp eigenlijk praktisch iedereen.*
He would always help them, since he practically helped everybody.
- **Debye's sister Caroline:** *Wat hij wel deed: eerst vragen hoe het zit met de financiële toestand. En dan moesten ze hem niet beliegen, want dan was het voorbij.*
What he did: first ask them how it was with their financial situation. And they should not lie to him, otherwise it was over.
- **Mia:** *Hij was verschrikkelijk eh, ja sociaal voelend ook, want in Ithaca was hij ook kerkmeester. Ik weet niet of u dat weet.*
He was very much eh, yes socially concerned, in Ithaca he was also a churchwarden. I do not know if you knew that.
- **Mrs. Rijken:** *U bent allemaal van een katholieke familie? Hijzelf was ook katholiek? Is hij dat ook gebleven?*
You are all from a Catholic family. Was he himself also a Roman Catholic? And did he stay that?

- **Mia:** *Dat is hij gebleven. Dat is heel typisch geweest, want normaal laten grote geleerden alles los. Er is wel een periode geweest dat hij dat heeft losgelaten, hoor. Maar hij is er naderhand toch ook weer van teruggekomen.*

He stayed a Roman Catholic. That was very peculiar, since normally great scientists give up everything. There was a period that he gave it all up. But later he came back to it.

- **Mrs. Rijken:** *Wanneer heeft hij het losgelaten?*

When did he give it up?

- **Mia:** *Dat is ongeveer in '30 geweest. Toen was hij niet zo..maar naderhand weer wel, want in '38 stond hij erop dat wij naar de kerk gingen. We konden alles doen, maar dat mochten we nooit overslaan.*

That must have been in '30. Then he was not like that but later he changed, in '38 he insisted that we go to church. We could do anything, but that we were not allowed to skip.

- **Mrs. Rijken:** *En is hij dat tot aan zijn dood toe gebleven?*

And did he stay like that until his death?

- **Mia:** *Ja.*

Yes

- About Debye and politics, see page 9 of the transcript.

- **Mia:** *Hij(=Debye) zei altijd: "Ze kunnen politiek bedrijven zoveel als ze willen, daar bemoei ik me niet mee. Ik sta buiten de politiek". Dat heeft hij ook altijd trachten te doen. Want hij heeft zich nooit met politiek bemoeid. Hij zegt: 'Ik ben een geleerde en ik ben geen politicus'".*

He (=Debye) always said: "They can be involved in politics as much as they like, I do not want to have anything to do with it. I keep out of politics. He always tried to do that. Since he was never involved in politics. He said: I am a scientist and I am not a politician".

- **Mrs. Rijken:** *Is hij zich langzamerhand niet meer duitser gaan voelen dan nederlander?*

Did he not gradually feel himself more a German than a Dutchman?

- **Debye's zuster Caroline:** *Nee, nooit. Hij heeft zich nooit duitser gevoeld niettegenstaande zijn duitse vrouw, die met hart en nieren duitse was en duitse is gebleven.*

No, never. He never felt himself to be German despite his German wife, who was German in heart and soul and who stayed German.

- About the position of Debye and his family towards the Nazis, see page 7 of the transcript of the interview:

- **Mrs. Schotman:** *Heeft hij (=Debye) zien aankomen hoe het zou gaan met de oorlog? Hoe stond hij er tegenover?*

Did he (=Debye) foresee how it would go with the war? How did he feel about it?

- **Mia:** *O verschrikkelijk, hij was verschrikkelijk anti. Hij heeft toen gezegd: "Het gaat helemaal mis hier". Want Peter, mijn neef, is toen zogenaamd op studiereis gegaan naar Amerika. Die is nooit teruggekomen, is altijd in Amerika gebleven.*

Oh terrible, he was terribly anti. He then said: "It is going completely wrong here". Peter my cousin went on a so-called study trip to America. He never came back, he always stayed in America.

- **Debye's sister Caroline:** *Ik geloof, dat hij in '38 is weggegaan. Maar zijn dochter, die was voor de partij.*

I believe that he left in '38. But his daughter was in favour of the party.

- **Mrs. Rijken:** *En hoe was toen de verhouding tussen die dochter en haar vader?*

And how was the relationship between daughter and father at that time?

- **Debye's zuster Caroline:** *Die was toen niet goed.*

At that time it was not good

- **Mrs. Rijken:** *Hoe oud was de dochter toen?*
How old was his daughter then?
 - **Mia:** *Maidi was 18*
Maidi was 18..
 - **Mrs. Schotman:** *Hoe heette zij eigenlijk?*
What was her name?
 - **Mia:** *Hilde ook, maar ze werd altijd Meidi genoemd. Maida.*
Also Hilde, but she was always called Meidi. Maida.
 - **Mrs. Schotman:** *Ik heb een opgave uit Ithaca gekregen en daarin staat de naam Mayon. Misschien is dat Amerikaans.*
I received a report from Ithaca and there the name Mayon is mentioned. That may be American.
 - **Mia:** *Dat kan, maar ze werd altijd Meidi genoemd.*
That is possible, but she was always called Maidi.
 - **Debye's sister Caroline:** *Maida is ongeveer een jaar jonger dan mijn zoon. Maar die was absoluut voor de partij.*
Maida is about half a year younger than my son. But she was absolutely in favour of the party.
 - **Mia:** *Toen heeft hij (=Debye) haar nog weggebracht. Hij zei: "Misschien krijgt ze wel andere ideeën".*
He (=Debye) took her away. He said: "Perhaps she will get other ideas"
- And on page 10 of the transcript:
- **Mia:** *Toen hij (=Debye) voor Amerika gevraagd werd – dat is in de tijd geweest toen het in Duitsland beroerd ging, toen Hitler aan de macht was – toen kwam alle correspondentie van Amerika via ons. Die gingen dan zogenaamd als familie brieven daar naar toe. Want correspondentie uit Amerika die ze rechtstreeks stuurden, kwam nooit aan, die werd onderschept.*
When he (=Debye) was called to America – that was in period that things were very bad in Germany, when Hitler was in power- all correspondence from America went through us. They were sent to there as so-called family letters. Since correspondence sent directly from America never arrived, it was intercepted.
 - **Mrs. Schotman:** *Hij heeft ontdekt dat dat gebeurde?*
Did he discover that this happened?
 - **Mia:** *Dat heeft hij ontdekt. Mijn moeder vertaalde die brieven dan en ze gingen gewoon als familiebrieven naar hem toe, in het nederlands.*
He had discovered it. My mother translated the letters and they were sent as normal family letters to him, in Dutch.
 - **Mia:** *Toen is hij (=Debye) naar Amerika gegaan. Toen zijn tijd om was en hij terug moest komen, werd mijn vader in de gevangenis gezet.*
Then he (=Debye) went to America. When his time was over and he had to come back, my father was put in prison.
 - **Mrs. Rijken:** *In Nederland?*
In the Netherlands?
 - **Mia:** *Ja, wij waren toen door de Duitsers bezet en zo zonder opgaaf van redenen hebben ze hem toen vastgezet*
Yes, we were then occupied by the Germans and without reason they have put him in prison.
 - **Mrs. Rijken:** *Hoe lang heeft hij toen daar gezeten?*
How long did he stay there?
 - **Mia:** *Niet lang, 14 dagen. Toen hebben ze hem ook weer zo losgelaten, zonder reden*
Not long, 14 days. Then they released him again without giving a reason.
- (N.B. Mrs. Siemens-Niël confirmed on August 26, 2006 that her father Hubert Niël was kept in prison in Maastricht for 14 days. She was sure that her father was transferred from there to Kamp Amersfoort, where he was in prison for half a year.)
- **Mrs. Schotman:** *Wanneer is zijn (=Debye) vrouw dan vertrokken naar Amerika?*

- When did his (=Debye) wife leave for America?*
- **Debye's zuster Caroline:** *Die is voor de oorlog vertrokken. Ze is in de oorlog vertrokken, maar ze heeft in Zwitserland gezeten.*
She left before the war. She left in the war, but she stayed in Switzerland.
 - **Mia:** *Tante Hilde was toen wij bezet waren in Zwitserland. Toen is ze uit Zwitserland via Spanje, Portugal gereisd. Maar dat is in '41 geweest.*
Aunt Hilde was in Switzerland when we were occupied. Then she travelled from Switzerland via Spain, Portugal. But that was in '41.
 - **Mrs. Rijken:** *Denkt u dat het haar moeite gekost heeft om weg te gaan? Ze was toch duitse uiteindelijk?*
Do you think that it was difficult for her to leave?
 - **Mia:** *Nee, ze was het ook helemaal niet eens met het regime.*
No, she did not at all agree with the regime.
 - **Debye's sister Caroline:** *Die angst die kunt u zich niet voorstellen, als ze bij ons iets zei in Maastricht: "Kan niemand het horen? Ja kucke mal" Die angst.*
That anxiety, which you cannot imagine when she stayed with us in Maastricht: "Can nobody hear us? Quick take a look". That fear.
 - **Mrs. Rijken:** *Sinds wanneer had zij die angst?*
From when did she have that fear?
 - **Debye's sister Caroline:** *Nou, dat is van '35 geweest, want ik ben nog in '38 daar geweest in Berlijn en toen was het al zo.*
Well that was from '35; because I was in Berlin in '38 and then it was already the case.

CHAPTER 14 ABOUT ERRORS, MISCONCEPTIONS AND ROLE MODELS

From many sources found it is obvious that all those who knew Debye remember him well as an extremely amiable and inspiring man. His formidable ability to obtain funding led to envy in some circles. What he failed to do was to tend to his own public relations; otherwise, it would not have been possible for some historians to describe him as naive or as greedy. Different letters show that Debye had no interest in promoting himself or the things he did on behalf of other people in Germany under Nazi rule, see for example his letter to Miss Gloria Wagner of September 27, 1962 upon her questions about Lise Meitner (Ref. Debye Archives in Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht):

“Dear Miss Wagner,

I have indeed known Lise Meitner. I was in Berlin as a Director of the “Kaiser Wilhelm Institut” for Physics. She was a collaborator of Otto Hahn and was born in Austria. Just at that time she began to fear trouble with the Nazis since she is Jewish. Very quickly she left Germany over Holland before anything happened. The best man who could tell you whether anything has been written, which is of importance to you would be Hahn himself.. He is still living in Goettingen, Germany. I believe that the name of the street he is living in is “Gerviniusstrasse”. He is a friendly person and will certainly answer a letter in case you care to write him. Sincerely yours. P. Debye”.

It is not difficult to understand that to survive under the Nazis and to keep his family alive required insight into the machinations of the regime. That he had such insight very likely was the result of intensive contact with people such as Planck, Von Weiszäcker, von Laue, Sommerfeld and others. Erwin Planck, the son of Max Planck was military secretary in the “Rijkskanselarij” and from 1933 a fervent opponent of the system. In 1942 he gave up all hope of a putsch. In 1944 he was found guilty of collaborating in the assassination attempt on Hitler at the end of 1944 and condemned to death. He was executed on February 23, 1945 (Gisevius, 1947; Grundman, 2005).

False accusations

14a. Antisemitism

It is clear from his life story unravelled by the historical sources we found that Debye was not an anti-Semite. Nevertheless, there are historians who have used a critical and, in retrospect, incorrect statement by Debye about Ehrenfest (in a personal letter dated March 29, 1912 to Sommerfeld) to accuse Debye of anti-Semitism. Debye writes in this letter:

“Wenn Du daran denkst, Dir Ehrenfest zu holen, so kann ich nicht umhin, einige Bedenken zu äussern. Ein Jude, wie er offenbar einer ist, vom ‘Hohenpriester’ typus kann doch mit seiner bestrickenden Talmudlogik einem äusserst schädlichen Einfluss ausüben. Mancher frischer, nicht ganz fertiger Gedanke, den man sonst mit frischen Mut äussern würde, kann durch ihn gar zu leicht im Keime erstickt werden.”

Translation: *If you are thinking of appointing Ehrenfest, then I have to express some doubts. A Jew, as he apparently is, one of the “Highpriest” type can with his stifling Talmud logic exert a very damaging influence. Many fresh, not quite mature ideas, which one would otherwise express with fresh courage, can be too easily nipped in the bud by him”.*

It is a facile conclusion to read Debye’s comments on Ehrenfest as a statement of anti-Semitism. A careful reading shows that this is a sharp criticism by Debye of the supposed stifling way of thinking and working of Ehrenfest. In retrospect, it turned out that this criticism of Debye was misplaced. I contest the ease with which these remarks have been labelled “anti-Semitic”. Anti-Semitism is according to the prestigious Dutch Van Dale

dictionary “hatred of Jews”. If one is to use the word anti-Semitism then one must do that with great care and precision; otherwise, the word loses its true meaning.

If one is indignant at the remarks of Debye about Ehrenfest then Einstein should also be placed in the dock as “anti-Papist” for describing his colleagues at the Solvay conference in 1911 as “Jesuit priests” (Rispen, 2006).

The use of ethnic-religious terms with respect to each others work seems to have been common practice in that period of time, since in a letter of Sommerfeld to Lorentz from December 26, 1907 the work of Einstein is characterized as Semitic (“unanschaulich und dogmatisch”, translated: “not clear and dogmatic”) (Ref. Vol I. Sommerfeld letters, <http://www.lrz-muenchen.de/~Sommerfeld/KurzFass/00193.html>).

To be clear: to use the remarks of these men for a judgment of their character or their way of thinking is in my opinion too fast, since such a judgment can only be done by a well-founded knowledge of their opinions and behaviour over the years of their life. As shown by the written and oral sources Debye never showed any hatred of Jews and I have not found any evidence that Einstein was an anti-Papist. Therefore, judging these remarks as anti-Semitic or anti-Papist is in my opinion not very relevant. Prof. Sommerfeld ignored Debye’s advice and appointed Ehrenfest in Munich. In this case it is relevant to know how Sommerfeld thinks about Debye, see his letter of recommendation for Debye, written in 1911. (ARNOLD SOMMERFELD: WISSENSCHAFTLICHER BRIEFWECHSEL 1892-1918, Vol. I):

“Ich bin überzeugt, dass Sie an Debye Ihre Freude haben werden. Mein Verhältnis zu ihm ist das innigste...Ich schätze die absolute Zuverlässigkeit und Ehrlichkeit seines Character ebenso sehr wie seine Intelligenz, die ich mir oft überlegen fühle und seinem praktischen Blick und seine Experimentelle Geschicklichkeit in der ich mit ihm nicht vergleichen kann”.

Translation: “I am convinced that you will have a lot of joy with Debye. My relationship with him is of the closest nature..... I value the absolute reliability and honesty of his character just as much as his intelligence, which I feel frequently as being superior to mine and his practical approach and his experimental skills with which I can in no way compete”.

I have not come across any expression by Debye of hatred towards Jews. When I asked Mrs. Siemens-Niël, the 81-year old daughter of Debye’s sister and retired lawyer about this question, she resolutely rejected the suggestion of any form of hatred on the part of her uncle. She herself, her father, Debye’s brother-in-law, and her husband were at risk to their own lives, actively involved in Maastricht and in Germany (husband) during World War 2 in the rescue of Jewish children and resistance against the Nazis. I consider her a reliable witness.

In a letter dated May 29, 1956 Mr. André M.E. Siemens (Ref. Box 32-S of the Debye archives in the Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg in Maastricht), husband of Mrs. Siemens-Niël, wrote to his uncle Pierre Debye about the history of his active resistance against the Nazis during WW2. As a chemist he worked in the Chemisch-Technische Reichsanstalt in Berlin-Tegel. There he became acquainted with people who made preparations to kill Hitler and his clique in 1943 and July 20, 1944. In the laboratory he did research on explosives and chemical detonators. With that knowledge he could supply various detonators to leaders of the resistance. After the unsuccessful assault on Hitler and the suicide of General von Tresckow, he had to go into hiding from where he tried to escape with false identity documents via Warschau, Gdynia and Kopenhagen to Goteborg. That failed so he had to stay in hiding under the false name Benders. He was rescued when the Russians and the Allied Forces conquered Magdeburg, where he stayed at that time. From the tone of Mr. Siemens letter and the description of everything that had happened,

it is obvious that he considers his uncle Pierre Debye as a person who was not in any way in favour of the Nazi regime.

14b. Rumors about the family

In collecting material for this report I have come across accusations about Debye's family. For example, there is talk of a photograph in Maastricht (not available) of Debye accompanied by a young man in a uniform with a swastika on the sleeve. It was speculated that this must be his son or his son-in-law. It is impossible that this is Debye's son-in-law, since Debye saw his son-in-law for the first time in 1948.

I asked Mrs. Siemens-Niël, the daughter of Debye's sister, who grew up in Maastricht, about this matter. She was very clear in her statement that Debye's son could not be in such a photograph, since she knows for sure that her cousin was never a member of a Nazi organization. (N.B. Debye's son had a Dutch passport and therefore he was not subjected to the obligations the German youth was subjected to).

I also asked Debye's son, 90-year old Peter P. R. Debye, about this. He answered me by e-mail on April 28th, 2006:

“Regarding wildly creative stories about my sinister associations, let me repeat that neither I - nor to the best of my knowledge my father – has ever worn a uniform either with or without a swastika. Also I have never belonged to any organisation, youth or otherwise, such as the Hitlerjugend”.

There is also a note in Lise Meitner's biography written by Prof. Ruth Sime, in which was mentioned that Debye's son had been a member of a Nazi youth organization. First of all: Debye's son had a Dutch passport, so he was not subjected to the obligations of the German youth. I asked Prof. Sime which source she had to support this note. After some investigation Prof. Sime wrote me that she was unable to find a source and, confronted with my reports of Debye's son and of Mrs. Siemens, Prof. Sime came to the conclusion that her note in Lise Meitner's biography about Debye's son must be wrong. She has retracted the note and she has sent a letter of apology to Debye's son, for which she deserves appreciation, since not every science historian is able to admit a mistake. In some reports of the FBI investigation of Debye in 1940 on the occasion of his immigration to the US, rumors are mentioned that Debye's son had affiliations with Nazi ideology or a Nazi organization either in Cornell or in Cleveland, Ohio. If that had been the case, it would not have been likely that Prof. Hans Bethe, a Jewish colleague of Debye who had left Germany because of the Nazis, would have been willing to be on the PhD oral exam committee of Debye's son in 1944 at Cornell University.

I conclude that the accusations against Debye's son are false.

There are also researchers and reports that claim that Debye's wife had Nazi sympathies. After a long telephone conversation on May 10, 2006 with Mrs. Siemens-Niël, the 81-year old daughter of Debye's sister, Mrs. Siemens made it perfectly clear that Mrs. Mathilde Debye did not like the Nazis and their regime at all. The interview of Debye's sister Caroline and her daughter Mia on April 1, 1970 also shows that Mrs. Mathilde Debye did not like the Nazi regime, see Chapter 13.

During the telephone conversation with Mrs. Siemens, mentioned above, I was told that in the years 1933-1934 the Debye family had a Jewish woman as help in the house, who suffered under the anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime. Debye and his wife helped her to leave Germany and settle in Spain. Here again we see that Debye did not advertise his own deeds, which in retrospect he should have done.

14c. Gossip

The possible reasons why Debye stayed in Germany until the end of 1939 have already been described in chapter 8. In connection with Debye's stay in Germany and his supposed KWIP salary some of the scientists interviewed during the FBI hearings which have already been extensively described in previous chapters state that Debye was only interested in money and only looked after himself. This seems to be popular gossip among some scientists of that time. The question is of course: is that true, is it based on prejudice, mis-information or gossip?

It was well known that Debye had a very charming and persuasive personality. This, in combination with his scientific abilities, made him a very capable fund-raiser (see also the statement of Prof. Casimir in Chapter 13.e.) That caused envy among his fellow scientists, as Goudsmit declared himself in the FBI report of his interview. This envy obviously generated a lot of gossip and speculation among some of Debye's fellow scientists. That Debye was interested only in money or only in his own affairs is fully contradicted and well documented by those who knew him personally (see for example Prof. Hans Wijnberg in Chapter 13.b and Prof. Erich Hückel in Chapter 13.g.) Also interesting in this matter is the statement of Dr. Karl Compton, President of the M.I.T. in FBI report 62-745 dated October 24, 1940, in which he says:

“that in all dealings he had with Debye, the latter was a very nice man to deal with; that at Princeton, the officials had offered Debye an honorarium of approximately \$ 100 for lecturing at the School, but Debye had refused to take anything for his work”.

That Debye did not let himself be led by greed is also shown in his letter to Dr. W.A.H. van Wylick in Hilversum, the Netherlands dated May 15, 1958 in which he wrote:

“In Aken werd ik assistent van Sommerfeld en toen hij naar München ging, vroeg hij of ik wou meegaan. Dat deed ik, alhoewel het beteekende, dat ik minder zou verdienen. In Aken had ik 150 Mark per maand, in München was het salaris 102,50”.

Translation: In Aachen I became assistant of Sommerfeld and when he went to Munchen he asked whether I would go with him. I did, although it meant that I would earn less. In Aachen I had 150 Marks per month, in Munchen the salary was 102,50”.

The testimony of Dr. Warren Weaver, Head of the Educational Division of the Rockefeller Institute, which is recorded in FBI report 62-6887 WM dated October 2, 1940 is also relevant:

“Warren Weaver, head of the Educational Division, Rockefeller Institute, has known Debye for twenty years, rather intimately the last ten, and that he places great confidence in him, stating that he is a man of great integrity. Weaver advised that Debye apparently recognized the fact that he cannot return to Germany and has therefore accepted what is virtually a permanent position at Cornell University. Weaver asserted that everything said or done by Debye implies a dislike for the present German Government although no direct statements to that effect were made.”

The testimony of Dr. J. Williams Williams of the University of Wisconsin in FBI report 62-194 dated October 8, 1940 is in this respect also worthwhile.

“Williams stated that after finishing his University studies he had gone abroad to study under Debye at the University of Zurich in Switzerland; in 1938 and at every opportunity he had made subsequent visits to Europe to study under him at the Universities of Leipzig and Berlin....

He stated that he had lived as a neighbor to Debye while he was studying under him and had become familiar with Debye personally and with his family. He stated that he liked Debye immensely because of the many instances in which Debye had gone out of his way in order to help him. In his opinion he is honorable and

trustworthy and he felt that if he is used in the national defense work he could be counted upon to retain his own counsel.

He was certain that Debye was not connected with the Nazi government in as much as he had expressed his dissatisfaction to him.... concerning conditions in Germany when he had last seen him”.

14d. Position with regard to the Nazis

An issue of importance is, of course, Debye's position with respect to the Nazi government. In FBI report 77-148 ajk dated November 23, 1940, Dr. Charles P. Smyth, Professor of Chemistry, Princeton University, states:

“He only recalls one statement made on the political question and that was one night when the two of them were standing on a street corner, at which time Debye said he was unsympathetic with the Nazis.”

Dr. Frederic J. Keyes of Harvard University reported according to FBI report 62-745 KG dated October 24, 1940:

“Frederick Keyes also stated that Debye's son had told him in 1939, when the latter was visiting him, that the family was apprehensive of the conditions then existing in Germany. As to the feelings towards the German Government, Keyes had the following to say in reference to Debye: There was no question in his mind that Debye was out of sympathy with Hitler's views, but during his stay in Germany Debye could say nothing inasmuch as he would be put in a concentration camp if he let his feelings be known; that Debye detests thoroughly all about Hitler and the Nazi Government; that the mother of Debye is also opposed to Hitler, but gives vent to her feelings, and for that reason Debye is worried about her in view of the fact that Hitler has conquered Holland, her home; that Debye was definitely adverse to the Nazi government, even more than the average person in America, which feeling he had to suppress under penalty of considerable pain and suffering; that there was not the slightest chance of Debye being connected with the German Government; that he felt Debye would do all he could to aid the US in a conflict with either Italy or Germany or both”.

Keyes obviously knows about Debye's difficult position, but others do not and they therefore can only speculate about Debye's attitude towards the Nazis. Careful reading of all the reports shows that Debye himself is generally very cautious in what he says and to whom.

In FBI report 96-466 dated December 1, 1942, some officials from Bell Telephone Laboratories are interviewed. Their names are crossed out in the issued report. This report gives a possible explanation why (unfounded) rumors about Debye in the American scientific community were generated. One of the interviewed persons (the name is removed by the FBI) states in this report:

“He stated the subject (=Debye) is a very distinguished physicist, who is perhaps not quite as well known in the popular mind as professor Einstein, but possibly just as distinguished a man in his line, and had, in fact, succeeded Einstein as head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin. He stated that due to the subject's connection with this institution, it would not necessitate that any person had suspicions as to Debye's loyalty. However, he stated that he felt that most of what had been stated about Debye arose out of an instance which occurred two or three years ago at the meeting of distinguished scientists in New York, at which time, a controversial political question had been injected into what otherwise should have been a highly scientific meeting. He stated that the meeting had broken up in a row and that probably since Debye had joined the group, which broke away, the other group had started certain rumors about him. He stated that from his knowledge of Debye, he would say that the man was completely disinterested in politics or in the Nazi government, and has no emotional reaction whatever to the whole Nazi question. He stated that subject (=Debye) has a very

likable personality and is apt to associate with persons not connected in scientific or academic fields. He further advised that the subject was keenly American in his point of view, and that the subject is far from being German and had always made it a great point of being a Dutch citizen. He stated that Debye is a type of man to whom rank and position mean nothing.”

Apart from the FBI report of Keyes cited above we have another source, which gives a picture of Debye's position towards the Nazis. This can be found in the Debye's foreword to the book "The Contribution of Holland to the Sciences" published in 1943 (Ed. A.J. Barnouw and B. Landheer, Querido, New York, pag V-V1). Science historian Tatjana Becker writes about this foreword:

“ Er tritt ein für die Befreiung seines Heimatlandes – als Wissenschaftler betont er, die einzige Chance gegen die Diktatur sei die internationale Zusammenarbeit über Grenzen hinweg. Er spricht sich dafür aus, den von den Nationalsozialisten unterdrückten Völkern bei zu stehen. Sein Renommee verschafft den Appell Nachdruck.”

Translation: “He uses his influence for the liberation of his homeland – as a scientist he emphasizes that the only way to combat dictatorship is by international cooperation across borders. He advocates support of the nations oppressed by the Nazis. His reputation adds to the appeal.”

The FBI files also contain an anonymous letter from one or more persons from Cleveland who seem to hate the Debye family simply because they came from Germany and therefore could not be trusted. A comparable argumentation can also be found from some scientists who say that Debye is extremely clever and that alone is already the reason that he cannot be trusted. These arguments are found in scientists who are opponents to Debye. Some of them have strong opinions, which they do not support by facts and which are contradictory to the opinions of people who knew Debye well personally. A good example is given in FBI report 77-148 ajk dated October 25, 1940. It is a recording of the conversation with Roman Smoluchowski who has arranged that his colleagues Charles P. Smythe, Rudolf Ladenburg, Wolfgang Pauli and Otto Stern are also given the opportunity to utter their opinions of Debye. A short abstract of their interviews is given below (abstract made by the author).

Charles P. Smythe suggests that Debye is not in sympathy with Hitler or the Nazis. Roman Smoluchowsky stated that he knew Debye only professionally and that his contacts with him were usually very short due to the demand of other scientists for Debye's discussions. He knew nothing of his personal life and has never met his family. From conversations with Debye he felt that he was friendly with the Nazi government and that in his opinion he knew much of the present military experimental work in Germany, but he did not think that he is a Nazi agent. Furtheron Smoluchowski admits that he has a limited knowledge concerning Debye. Rudolf Ladenburg described Debye as very mercenary and very clever. He stated that Debye was not fully trusted by his colleagues and that in his opinion Debye was not loyal even to the field of science, where money was involved. The following person called in for the interview was Otto Stern. He called Debye as being “too clever to trust”. Smythe interrupted the interview to announce that Dr. Wolfgang Pauli, Prof. of Physics, Princeton University, had arrived for a visit with him and Dr. Stern and that Pauli should be included in this interview. Dr. Pauli indicated that he had known Debye since 1920. He stated very bluntly that Debye could not be trusted; that he was mercenary and that his loyalty to any group of men, was questionable. Dr. Pauli further indicated that Debye in all probability was very sympathetic with the German cause and at least had connections with the Nazi Government otherwise he could not have left Germany.

In FBI report 62-475 kg, dated October 24, 1940, Dr. Karl Compton, President of the M.I.T. states:

“that the American scientists liked Debye very well, in fact better than any other foreign scientist”.

On the basis of the FBI investigations, it was decided that for security reasons, Debye should not be involved for some time in classified research, see previous chapters on this matter.

14e. Role model

The term “role model” has been used in connection to Professor Debye. It is essential that one defines precisely what is meant with these terms. The definition has to take into account different aspects. For the purpose of science and education a scientist who is considered to be an example must be an excellent scientist and a brilliant teacher. If a scientist has to work in a totalitarian state other aspects also have to be considered. For a proper definition of this term in the context of a ruthless and cruel Nazi regime, the quotation of Willy Hartner in the paper by V.R. Remmert (2004) is relevant.

He states:

“Heldentum ist nicht jedermanns Sache. Es von Einzelnen zu verlangen ist absurd. Aber was wir fördern müssen, ist Menschlichkeit, menschliches Verhalten, menschliches Mitfühlen mit dem Bedrängten und die Bereitschaft zu aktiver Hilfeleistung”.

Translation: *Heroism is not for everybody business. To require it from every single person is absurd. However, what we have to require is humaneness, humane behavior, empathy with the oppressed and willingness to offer active help.*

To judge how Debye qualifies as a scientist, a teacher and a person as a role model, the opinion of people who have known him is of importance. We came across the following sources in this respect:

- FBI report 62-194 dated August 10, 1940: *‘Debye is one of the world’s outstanding physicists’ and ‘Debye in his opinion was too big for politics, even though they be international politics, because he considered Debye an internationalist in his own right, i.e. as a physicist and a chemist’.*
- FBI report 96-466 dated December 1, 1942: *‘the subject (=Debye) is a very distinguished physicist, who is perhaps not quite as well known in the popular mind as Professor Einstein, but possibly just as distinguished a man in his line’. and he was completely disinterested in politics or in the nazi government..subject (=Debye) has a very likable personality and is apt to associate with persons not connected with scientific or academic fields. Debye is a type of man to whom rank or position mean nothing.’*
- In an article by Irving S. Bengelsdorf in the Los Angeles Times dated March 30, 1967 he writes about Debye under the head DEBYE A LEGEND IN SCIENCE: *“In 1943 I obtained my BS at the University of Illinois and traveled to Cornell to start my graduate studies. I then learned that not only was Debye an outstanding scientist, but he also was a warm, jovial and pleasant human being. Imagine my surprise, delight and awe when Debye personally welcomed me to the Cornell campus. From the viewpoint of a ‘green’ graduate student, being greeted by Debye was equivalent to a young singer traveling to Italy to study in a school that had Enrico Caruso on the faculty and on arrival there be welcomed warmly greeted by the tenor himself. For Debye was a living legend. Not only was he one of the more decorated scientists in history – Nobel Prize, numerous medals, citations, honorary degrees, membership in 20 national academies, visiting professorships – but his name appeared everywhere in the textbooks of physics and chemistry. There are “Debye laws” and “Debye theories” and “Debye effects” and “Debye constants” – and the distribution of electric charge in molecules is measured in units called “Debyes”.* His

talents were so universal, it is difficult to pin a label onto him. Chemists refer to him as a physical chemist and physicists call him a chemical physicist. Both, however, agree that Peter J.W. Debye was one of the scientific giants of the 20th century.”

There are also other aspects, which can make a person into a role model namely how that person succeeded on the road to success. Peter Debye is certainly special on the grounds of his development from a working-class boy to one of the most prestigious scientists in the field of physics and chemistry. A good impression of how this developed is given in a short biography of Debye by Mr. Ted Reckman from Maastricht, the city where Debye was born and raised and which he loved all his life. Mr. Reckman has contributed to the discussion in the media about Debye with quite a few articles about him in the local paper “De Ster”.

Reckman writes about Debye in Maastricht:

“Als Petrus Josephus Wilhelmus Debye op 24 maart 1884 wordt geboren in de Smedenstraat in Maastricht is dat nog een typische volksbuurt in de nabijheid van de middeleeuwse brug. Er liggen kruidenierswinkels en cafés maar voornamelijk wonen er ambachtslieden met bedrijf aan huis. Judith Schotman beschrijft in “De jeugd van Peter Debye in Maastricht” hoe vader Debye die smid is, droomt van een eigen bedrijfje.

De toekomst van zoon Peter, roepnaam Pierre of Pie, is al uitgestippeld, hij zal een aantal jaren verder gaan leren, zich bekwamen in het vak, en dan gaan samenwerken met zijn vader. Pie kan op zijn vierde lezen, zijn moeder heeft het hem geleerd. Die zorgt er ook voor dat hij naar de burgerschool van de “Broeder van de Beiaard” gaat. Een uitzondering want meeste kinderen van arbeiders gaan naar de armenschool waar minder schoolgeld wordt betaald.

Als Pierre en zijn jongere zus Caroline op groeien gaat het relatief goed met het gezin Debye. Ze zijn verhuisd naar Smedenstraat no 14, een pand dat eigendom is J.H.Reumkens, de vader van Pie's moeder. De Smedenstraat verpaupert echer langzaam, de middenstanders trekken weg naar de nieuwe buurten die nu aan de rand van de groeiende industriestad Maastricht gebouwd worden. De oude huizen in de straat worden per kamer verhuurd aan arbeidersgezinnen die er vaak onder erbarmelijke omstandigheden leven. Uiteindelijk komt er zelfs een bordeel in de straat. Als Pie acht jaar oud is gaat zijn moeder werken, ze wordt bureauliste (caissiere) van de stadsschouwburg. Door haar werk komt ze in contact met de betere, vaak nog Frans sprekende, stand van Maastricht (Moder Debye ondertekent in die tijd ook wel correspondentie met de Franse schrijfwijze van de naam “De Bij”) .)

Per klas kunnen ieder jaar twee leerlingen kosteloos tot het onderwijs worden toegelaten. Vader Debye moet er wel een bedelbrief voor schrijven naar het gemeentebestuur.

Pie wordt de beste leerling van de HBS en de Smedenstraat is trots op hem. Volgens de overlevering wordt hij door zijn moeder iedere morgen naar nabijgelegen stadspark gestuurd om nog voor schooltijd een paar uur te studeren in de frisse lucht. “Goed voor de hersens”, zegt ze. Bij het eindexamen blijkt dat hij in dat jaar met de beste cijfers van heel Limburg slaagt. Moeder Debye neemt Pie regelmatig mee naar de opera; zij zorgt er voor dat hij op zijn zestiende de wereldtentoonstelling in Parijs kan bezoeken.

Als Pie vervolgens aan de Technische Hochschule in Aken gaat studeren, leeft de hele arbeidersklasse van Maastricht mee. Hij is hun kampioen. De meisjes van het bordeel claimen dat zij een goedkope kamer voor hem hebben geregeld in Aken, aan de rand van de rosse buurt. (Volksverhaal opgetekend door Ted Reckman in Stadskrant De Ster; de studentenkamer in Aken lag inderdaad in de rosse buurt).

Het zijn stads - legenden maar feit is dat standsverschil en klasse bewustzijn een rol hebben gespeeld in de jeugd van van Peter Debye. Een van de klasgenoten van de

HBS zal de hele schooltijd geen woord met hem wisselen, zelfs nadat hij de Nobelprijs al in ontvangst heeft genomen keurt die hem geen blik waardig.

Het raakt hem diep; als de hoogbejaarde Peter Debye in de jaren zestig Maastricht bezoekt, vertelt hij dat verhaal. En hij steelt opnieuw de harten van het publiek doordat hij dat in vlekkeloos oud-Maastrichts dialect doet”.

Translation: “When Peter J.W. Debye was born on March 24th 1884 in the Smedenstraat in Maastricht this was a typical working-class area in the vicinity of the medieval bridge. There were grocery shops and cafés but the population consisted mainly of trades people with their businesses in the home. Judith Schotman in “The youth of Peter Debye in Maastricht” describes how Debye’s father, a smith, dreamed of having his own business. The future of son Peter, his common name Pierre or Pie, had been decided: he would go to school for a few years, learn the trade and then work with his father. Pie was able to read at the age of four; his mother taught him. She saw to it that he attended secondary school of the “Broeder van de Beiaard”(run by brothers). This was exceptional as most working-class children went to a school for the poor, which costs much less. As Pierre and his younger sister Caroline grew up things went well for the Debye family. They moved to the Smedenstraat no. 14, a house owned by J.H. Reumkes, the father of Pie’s mother.

The Smedenstraat, however, became gradually poorer, the middle class left for new districts being built on the edge of the growing industrial city of Maastricht. The old houses in the street were rented per room to working-class families who very often lived in deplorable conditions. Finally, a brothel was even established in the street. When Pie was eight years old his mother went out to work: she was cashier in the municipal theatre. Through her work she came into contact with the better, often French-speaking classes of Maastricht. (At that time Debye’s mother also signed her correspondence with the French version of the name De Bije.) Per school class, two students were admitted each year free to higher education. Debye’s father had, however, to write a begging letter to the municipality. Pie became the best student in the HBS (former Dutch High School) and the Smedenstraat was proud of him. According to reports from his family his mother sent him each day to the nearby town park to study for a few hours in the fresh air before school started. “It’s good for the brains” she said. He passed his final examination with the best grades of the whole of Limburg. His mother regularly took Pie to the opera; at 16 she arranged for him to attend the world fair in Paris.

When Pie subsequently went to study at the Technische Hochschule (Technical University) in Aachen, the whole working-class community empathized. He was their champion. The girls from the brothel claimed to have arranged a cheap room for him on the edge of the red-light district (folk story related by Ted Reckman in the city paper “De Ster”; the student room in Aachen was indeed in the red-light district).

These are city legends. It is, however, clear that class differences and class consciousness played an important role in the youth of Peter Debye. One of his classmates at the HBS did not talk to him during his whole period at school; even after he received the Nobel Prize.

This affected him deeply; when as an old man Peter Debye visited Maastricht in the sixties he retold this story. And he stole the hearts of the public by doing this in perfect old-Maastricht dialect”.

CHAPTER 15. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This report, with the help of historical documents, interviews and letters, contains the results of my investigation of the position of Prof. Peter Debye in the period 1935-1945. Many sources show that Debye is described by everyone who knew him well as a brilliant scientist, a gifted teacher, a very able fund-raiser and an inspiring and very likable person, who showed courage under very difficult circumstances. He had no sympathy for the Nazis and he was not a Nazi collaborator. He had Jewish students and assistants during the Weimar Republic when the Nazis came to power and anti-Semitism started to take the lead. Prof. Debye and his wife saw to it in 1933-1934 that their Jewish household help found a safe escape from Germany. In 1935 Prof. Debye also helped his Jewish colleague at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, Prof. Salmang and his family, to find a safe place in Maastricht, when Prof. Salmang had to quit his job in Berlin in 1935, because of the racist laws of the Nazi regime. When the Nazis had achieved full power, Debye helped his Jewish colleague Lise Meitner escape from Germany at great risk to himself and his family as the situation of Lise Meitner was already known to the Nazi authorities.

After his disguised escape from Germany to the US, he had Jewish friends, postdocs and students at Cornell University among whom we find names well known in science history. Debye did not carry out any research efforts for the German military. Shortly after his arrival in the US at the beginning of 1940, he informed Einstein and Szilard about the Uranium fission experiments, carried out in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry (KWIC) in Berlin. This led to the second letter of Einstein to Pres. Roosevelt, which in turn led to the start of the Manhattan Project i.e. the construction of a nuclear bomb. Debye also made important fundamental contributions to the realisation of effective radar systems and to the production of synthetic rubber, both of which were very important for the success of the Allied war efforts.

In 1950, Debye received the Max Planck Medal from the German Physical Society (Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft, abbreviation DPG). The year before, in 1949, his Jewish colleague Lise Meitner received the Max Planck medal and the year after, in 1951, it was presented to his Jewish colleague and Nobel laureate James Franck. James Franck's description of Debye is documented in the report of an FBI agent on October 10, 1940:

“Franck has known Debye for over 30 years. He knows of his own personal knowledge that doctor Debye assisted certain Jewish refugees to leave Germany at the time they were persecuted by the Nazi regime; that Debye is under no obligation to the Nazi regime. Debye resents the invasion of Holland. Debye is a man of high character and high ideals, he is totally trustworthy and would be totally loyal to the American government”.

(Note of Van Ginkel. In Beyerchen (1977) the following description is given of Prof. Frank: Prof. James Franck was as frequently praised for his kindness, integrity, and deep sense of principle as for his talents as a scientist. At the beginning of WW1 he had dropped his research and engaged in front-line combat as a volunteer. Both iron crosses were among his decorations, and he received a commission as an officer even though he was Jewish. Franck left Germany on November 27, 1933. A big crowd came to say goodbye. He spent 1934-1935 with Bohr, then worked at Johns Hopkins from 1935 to 1938 before settling down as professor of chemistry at the University of Chicago. At Chicago he later became involved in the Manhattan Project, the American effort to develop the first atomic bomb. His name is particularly associated with the far-seeing committee recommendation against the use of the first atomic weapons, usually called the Franck Report.)

On March 24, 1954, Prof. Max von Laue sent a telegram to Peter Debye to congratulate him on his 70th birthday including the text:

“Die Physikalische Gesellschaft zu Berlin ist stolz darauf das Sie ihr angehört haben” (The Physical Society in Berlin is proud that you have belonged to it).”

That is an important message from a man who is known as a fierce Nazi opponent and who was chosen by Debye as his Lieutenant. They worked together very closely both at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics (KWIP) in Berlin as well as in the DPG as Board members in 1938. Von Laue is described by Beyerchen (1977) on page 66 as follows:

“Von Laue’s determination to stay in Germany, yet not to compromise, made him a truly laudable exception among German professors. As Ewald has written (Ewald was one of Sommerfelds pupils and partly Jewish, who left Germany in 1938. Ewald was in and after WW2 a friend of Debye): While many responsible scientists yielded to political pressure, first outwardly “aligning” themselves and in the end losing their spiritual independence, Laue was neither to be threatened nor bribed into subservience... Laue was a great patriot and he clearly recognized Germany’s loss in the eviction of so many of her best-trained scientists. But his human loyalty was even stronger than the patriotic appeal. What this meant to others has been recalled by Ewald: To all of us minor figures the very existence of a man of Laue’s stature and bearing was an enormous comfort. Compare it to the comfort the presence of one man gave during the war, Churchill. You felt that as long as he stood up, not all was lost”.

The above portrait of Debye as a person and scientist/teacher is presented by numerous sources among these the “Biographical Memoirs”, Vol 46(1975) of J.W. Williams of the US Academy of Sciences. There Williams writes on pages 47-48:

“As an individual Professor Debye was held in universal affection and esteem by those who knew him. One description taken from a Harvard University citation is particularly apt “a large-hearted physicist who gladly lends to the chemist a helping hand”. He was the kind of person Maurice Hindus had in mind when he wrote, “A student needs to come under the influence of only one exciting professor to feel the effects, even to have the course of his life changed”. He was readily approachable, a very friendly person to whom one could go for advice in research and come away fully rewarded. No one was beneath his personal encouragement; he was patient and understanding with all. The many honors and distinctions that came with the passing of the years did not in any way change him. He was modest and realistic about them. He never forgot his old friends and associates, nor did his interest in science diminish with increased time or fame. To the end his generosity, friendliness, and concern for others were commensurate with his mental prowess. Whether as a classroom teacher or as a special lecturer he was renowned for his facility of expression. This apparent ease of exposition must have required concerted effort at organization. At meetings his appearances invariably meant large audiences, for from his discussions at them the new and unexpected was the rule. He possessed the ability to explain scientific ideas and principles to a wide variety of audiences, and wherever he went he was received as a desirable and agreeable lecturer. It has been noted by F.A. Long in Science 155 (1967) 979, that Debye was “an affectionate husband, father and grandfather”. His hobbies were few, such as gardening, fishing and collecting cacti. There were periods when his lengthy activities in his rose garden might have brought concern to an observer, but more often than not they were followed by extraordinary bursts of scientific activity; a new idea had been elaborated during the out-of-doors time. As a result of my own relationships with him I must note that Professor Debye did indeed have true kindness of heart along with his rare vigor of intellect.”

The picture painted above is in violent contrast to that of the greedy and untruthful image of Debye to be found in the chapter “Einstein en Debye” in Rispens’ book “Einstein in Nederland”. In particular, Rispens’ image of Debye as an opportunistic Nazi collaborator in the period 1935-1945 has received much attention in the media. On the basis of that chapter and the subsequent publicity, the Boards of the Universities of Utrecht and Maastricht decided no longer to use the name of Debye.

Rispens’ publications about Debye have been severely criticised as painting a false image of the role and the position of Debye under Nazi rule (References: Letter dated May 5, 2006 of Prof. Veltman to the employees of the Utrecht Debye Institute; Dr. Herman de Lang in ‘De ‘Affaire Debye’, Ned. Tijdschrift voor Natuurkunde, pages 220-225, July 2006; Dr. Jeroen van Dongen, Academische Boekengids, July 2006, pag. 9-12; Letter dated March 7, 2006 of Professor Knut Urban, President of the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft, to Mayor Leers of Maastricht.)

Debye defied the Nazis by naming the KWIP the Max Planck Institute, even though he knew Hitler was strongly opposed to this. He mocked the Nazis by putting a plank (in German “Planke”, in Dutch “plank”) over the name of Max Planck on the building, see the description of this event by Prof. Sparnaay from Eindhoven in his letter to the Mayor of Maastricht, which can be found elsewhere in this report. The event is also described in the article by R.W. Curtis (1963).

Debye played an active role in the escape of his Jewish colleague Prof. Lise Meitner to Sweden, even though the Nazi authorities already knew about Meitner’s situation. This was at great risk to Debye himself and his family. He also assisted other Jewish citizens and colleagues to escape from the Nazis in Germany.

When the German Physical Society (DPG) in 1938 was finally forced by the Nazis to conform, he as the President of the DPG took care that his German Jewish colleagues were asked to resign on the basis of the racial laws of the German State in as a respectful manner as possible at that time. The wording of this request from the DPG leadership (Max von Laue noted his approval) not only protected the dignity of his Jewish colleagues as much as possible under these circumstances, it contained also a camouflaged criticism of the justification of these measures. This is in compliance with the approach Gisevius describes for camouflaged resistance. After having sent the letter of December 9, 1938, he and his colleague members of the DPG Board tried as much as possible to speak with and apologise to the affected Jewish colleagues. It was not an act of heroism but it certainly was an attempt to operate as humanely as possible under these very difficult circumstances. Debye refused to give a lecture in Danzig in 1939, because the Nazis did not allow him to discuss work of his Jewish colleague Simon whom he had visited at Oxford.

All together, the sources do not support the image of Nazi collaborator painted by Rispens.

The sources investigated make sufficiently clear that the letter of the DPG Board from December 9, 1938, which carries Debye’s name, is not incriminating for Debye if one takes into consideration both the circumstances of its creation and the careful way in which Debye handled this matter with respect to his Jewish colleagues to whom it was well-known that Debye was not at all an anti-Semite.

The situation and interpretation of the unavailable return telegram, which is supposed to have been sent in June 1941, is extensively discussed. From the investigations presented in

this report it becomes perfectly clear, that this telegram, if it exists, was meant as a smoke screen to protect Debye's family, who had stayed behind in Berlin.

If one wants to judge in 2006 the actions of Peter Debye, which he was forced to undertake under pressure of the Nazis, one has to take into account that the totalitarian Nazi regime was ruthless and cruel. For a judgement of the actions of a person under such circumstances the quotation of Willy Hartner in the paper by V.R. Remmert (2004) is relevant. He states:

“Heldentum ist nicht jedermanns Sache. Es von Einzelnen zu verlangen ist absurd. Aber was wir fördern müssen, ist Menschlichkeit, menschliches Verhalten, menschliches Mitfühlen mit dem Bedrängten und die Bereitschaft zu aktiver Hilfeleistung”.

Translation: *Heroism is not for everybody. To require it from every single person is absurd. However, what we have to require is humaneness, humane behavior, empathy with the oppressed and willingness to actively offer help.*

Professor Peter Debye has, in certain media, been treated in a grossly unfair way. It is in the interest of his memory, the scientific community, his family and most importantly in the interest of justice that a correct historical picture is painted of the position of Prof. Debye in the period 1933-1945. This report is written to contribute to that process.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Rispens has supplied no reliable historical evidence to support and maintain his negative conclusions about Debye.
2. On the basis of the historical sources consulted it can be concluded that Peter Debye did not sympathise with the Nazis, did not collaborate with the Nazis and never showed any hatred against Jews. In fact, he had many Jewish friends and colleagues. Moreover, he helped various Jewish colleagues and Jewish citizens to get away from the consequences of the Nazi regime.
3. Debye had to deal with a ruthless and racist regime. When that Nazi regime forced the DPG in 1938 to expel the German-Jewish physicists as members of the DPG, Debye did this as chairman of the Board of the DPG in the form of a request to the Jewish DPG members to resign. The wording of this request was at the same time a camouflaged criticism of the measures and implied their temporariness and lack of justification. With that he tried under these difficult circumstances to protect the dignity of his Jewish colleagues as much as possible. Together with other members of the DPG Board, Debye tried to approach with apologies all who were affected. Debye retained the great respect of his Jewish colleagues. The actions of Debye in this matter can be interpreted as camouflaged resistance, as described by Nazi opponent Gisevius.
4. Debye refused to do research for the German military. Immediately after his disguised escape to the US he loyally contributed to the Allied military efforts with fundamental research, which was important for the production of synthetic rubber and for the production of pure polyethylene, vital for high quality radar systems.

Chapter 16. PJWD related chronology

(PJWD stands for P.J.W. Debye)

- September 13 1883 Elisabeth Alberer ("*Tante Lisi*"), sister of PJWD's wife is born in Virnsberg (Germany)
- March 24 1884 PJWD is born in Maastricht to Johannes W. Debije and Maria Ruemkens
- January 1 1887 Mathilde Alberer, wife ("*Hilde*") of PJWD, is born in Flachslanden (Germany)
- 1888 PJWD's sister (*Caroline*) is born
- 1896 PJWD attends Maastricht City High School (Hoogere Burger School)
- 1901 PJWD graduates from Maastricht High School being ranked first in the province of Limburg; enrolls at the Technische Hochschule Aachen (TH-Aachen)
- 1904 Arnold Sommerfeld appoints PJWD as his assistant at TH-Aachen
- 1905 PJWD obtains Electrical Engineering Degree (with honours) from TH-Aachen
- 1906 PJWD accompanies Sommerfeld (as his assistant) to Munich and begins his PhD studies there
- 1908 PJWD receives PhD *summa cum laude* (Munich)
- March 5 1910 Gerhard Saxinger (future son-in-law) is born in Moravian Sternberg (Sudetenland)
- 1910 PJWD obtains his "Habilitation" (Munich); remains at Munich as Privatdozent until 1911
- April 1911 PJWD becomes Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of Zürich, the position vacated by Albert Einstein; remains there until 1912
- April 1912 PJWD becomes Professor of Mathematical Physics and Theoretical Mechanics at Utrecht University; remains there until 1914
- April 10 1913 PJWD marries Mathilde Alberer in Munich
- September 1914 PJWD becomes Professor of Theoretical and Experimental Physics at the university in Göttingen; remains there through 1920
- March 7 1916 PJWD's son (Peter Paul Ruprecht) is born in Göttingen (Germany)
- 1920 PJWD becomes Professor of Experimental Physics at ETH-Zurich replacing Pierre Weiss; remains there until 1927
- March 8 1921 PJWD's daughter, Mathilde Maria Gabriele Edeltraut ("*Maida*" or "*Maidi*") and later in the US also "*Mayon*") is born in Zurich
- January 17 1925 Niece Gertrud ("*Truus*"), later Gertrud Siemens-Niël, is born to PJWD's sister Caroline and raised by PJWD's parents
- May 1927 PJWD visits the University of Wisconsin (Madison); the book "Polare Molekeln" is written during the ocean voyage
- September 1927 PJWD accepts the Experimental Physics professorship/Physics Institute

Directorship at the university in Leipzig; remains there until 1934

1929 PJWD's book "Polare Molekeln" is published

1930 PJWD is presented the Rumford Medal

1930 Rockefeller Foundation pledges a large sum of money to the KWG to build the KWIP

January 15 1932 PJWD is issued a U.S. visitor's visa in Leipzig

June 27 1932 PJWD's wife ("*Hilde*") is issued a U.S. visitor's visa in Leipzig

July 29 1932 PJWD and his wife board the S.S. "Europa" in Cherbourg bound for New York to visit the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) and its President Compton. Both are reported to have Dutch passports

August 3 1932 PJWD and his wife arrive in New York and are admitted on visitors' visas

January 30 1933 *President Hindenburg appoints Hitler as Chancellor of Germany*

October 1 1933 Gerhard Saxinger drafted into Czech Army: Basic training

November 12 1933 *Hitler receives 92% of the votes at the elections in Germany*

November 28 1933 Max Planck makes an offer to PJWD (Leipzig) to head the new KWIP

December 8 1933 PJWD agrees in a letter to Max Planck to head the KWIP and requests that von Laue also be hired

mid-December 1933 PJWD is unhappy to learn from Stark that the KWIP directorship is to be combined with a University of Berlin faculty position because of the associated teaching responsibilities.

April 4 1934 PJWD writes to Max Wien that he has not heard anything else from Berlin

May 3 1934 Nazi activist Lenard writes to Stark that PJWD is not suited to head the KWIP

October 1934 PJWD begins as visiting professor at Liege (Belgium), which lasts until April 1, 1935

1935 PJWD is presented the Lorentz Medal

April 9, 1935 The journal of the Dutch state "Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden no. 174" Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands announces the law in which Peter Josephus Wilhelmus Debye is granted certificates of naturalization as a Dutch citizen. The law passed both chambers of the Dutch parliament

April 12 1935 PJWD writes that he has enlisted his Leipzig assistant Ludwig Bewilogua to help in planning the KWIP

April 16 1935 PJWD declines Sommerfelds' suggestion that he be his successor in Munich

July 1935 PJWD visits Oxford (Simon), Leiden (de Haas), Eindhoven (Philips Labs)

September 15 1935	<i>Nuremberg Decree passed banning Jews from public employment and forcing the retirement of Jews currently employed in public service effective December 31, 1935</i>
end-Sept 1935	The KWIP construction plans are verified
October 1 1935	PJWD's appointment as Director of the KWIP begins formally when he signs a back-dated contract in March 1936
October 1935	Excavation begins for the KWIP
November 1 1935	Building permit is issued for construction of the KWIP; the construction lasts through 1936
1935	PJWD's Jewish colleague Prof. dr. ing. Hermann Salmang is forced by the Nazis from his position in Berlin; PJWD helps him to get a new job at Sphinx in Maastricht, the Netherlands; PJWD and the Salmang family remain friends also after WW-2.
1936	Gerhard Saxinger is in the Czech army (documented by a photograph with date notation)
1936	Cornell University chemistry faculty member Albert Laubengayer visits PJWD in Leipzig to invite him to give Cornell's Baker Lectures; later recalls that PJWD was "Much disturbed by the rise of the Nazis, he hoped that in time this would subside."
March 1936	PJWD signs the KWIP Directorship contract which is backdated to October 1, 1935 because he had already been working on the construction plans during this time.
July 15 1936	PJWD moves into the KWIP Director's house in Berlin-Dahlem
August 10 1936	PJWD receives a U.S. visitor's visa in Berlin
August 21 1936	PJWD boards the S.S. " <i>Europa</i> " at Bremen, bound for New York, to visit Harvard University
August 27 1936	PJWD arrives in New York and is admitted on his visitor's visa
August 1936	PJWD receives an Honorary Degree at the Harvard University on the occasion of the Tercentenary celebration of its founding
Fall 1936	PJWD gives his first lecture at the University of Berlin during the 1936/1937 Winter semester
November 1936	1936 Nobel Prize in Chemistry awarded to PJWD
November 24 1936	The Rockefeller Foundation announces its grant of \$655,000 to fund the construction of the new KWIP
1937	PJWD is presented the Franklin Medal
1937	PJWD is appointed Ridder in de Orde van de Nederlands Leeuw (The Netherlands)
1937	PJWD is appointed Commandeur in de Orde van Leopold II (Belgium)

January 30 1937	<i>Nazi Regime declares German citizens are no longer allowed to accept Nobel Prizes</i>
Winter 1937	Gerhard Saxinger enrolls as a student at the German Karls University in Prague in Summer of 1938
Spring 1937	The KWIP opens for work but formal dedications are delayed; PJWD does not feel it politically possible to reveal "at this time that he has named it the Max Planck Institute"
April 7 1937	Gerhard Saxinger is in the Czech army: skilled
May 19, 1937	PJWD receives the Cresson medal from the Franklin Institute (Ref. New York Times, May 20, 1937)
May 20 1937	PJWD writes to Heisenberg that Lenard and Stark have filed a protest against naming the KWIP after Max Planck
May 31 1937	PJWD is in Rome for the newly organized Pontifical Academy
August 8 1937	PWJD's father passes away in Maastricht
September 1937	PJWD is elected to a two year term (1938-1939) as Chairman of the German Physical Society (replacing Zenneck) despite the opposition of Nazi activist members.
December 7 1937	A Dutch passport issued to either PJWD's wife or daughter (they have the same first/last names)
March 12 1938	<i>Germany annexes Austria (Anschluss)</i>
May 30 1938	The KWIP is formally turned over to PJWD who names it the "Max Planck Institute". This angers the Nazis. To mock the Nazis, PJWD places a plank (In German "Planke", in Dutch "plank") over the name sign "Max Planck Institute"
June 16 1938	PJWD writes to Bohr seeking help to obtain a position for Lise Meitner outside Germany
June 26 1938	Lise Meitner stays that day in PJWD's home
June 27 1938	Lise Meitner meets with Rassmussen, von Laue and PJWD in PJWD's Berlin home to discuss if she should go to Holland or Sweden. Meitner decides on Sweden
July 4 1938	Lise Meitner is in the evening with Hahn and Hertz at PWJD's home. PJWD and Lise Meitner agree that she must leave immediately because of the imminent strict enforcement of the policy prohibiting departure of scientists from Germany
July 6 1938	PJWD sends an SOS letter to Coster in Holland to get him to take Lise Meitner immediately to Holland
July 11 1938	Coster arrives in Berlin from Holland during late evening, stays with the PJWD family
July 13 1938	Lise Meitner leaves by train with Coster and arrives at six in the evening in

Groningen, Holland

- September 29 1938 *Munich Agreement: France and Great Britain agree to Germany's annexation of Sudetenland*
- October 15 1938 *Germany annexes Sudetenland*
- November 8 1938 *Carpenter Georg Elser tries to kill Hitler with a bomb In the Bürgerbräukeller in München*
- November 9/10 1938 *Outburst of violence and progroms against Jewish citizens In Germany; known as "Reichskristallnacht"*
- November 1938 PJWD receives a standing invitation from Prof. Kirkwood to deliver the Cornell Baker Lectures sometime in the future
- December 9 1938 A letter is sent out to the DPG members from its leadership under PJWD'S name requesting that its German Jewish members offer their resignation
- December 14 1938 Nazi Orthmann complains to PJWD that PJWD wrote first sentence of the DPG letter so "that it could be misunderstood"; requests a different wording; PJWD refuses to change the wording: "says it means what it says"
- March 15 1939 *Germany occupies Czechoslovakia*
- April 5 1939 PJWD writes to Klemm that he is declining the Danzig lecture invitation because, in Danzig, he surely would not be allowed to refer to the work of his Jewish colleague, Prof. Francis Simon
- April 17 1939 PJWD's wife or daughter is issued a Dutch passport in Berlin (They have the same first/last name). FBI report 77-2476 dated September 30, 1940 states that PWJD also was issued a Dutch passport on this date in Berlin.
- April 1939 PJWD writes to Cornell that he will accept the Baker Lecturer offer for the Spring term of 1940
- Late June 1939 PJWD's son visits the family in Maastricht on his way to Cherbourg to board a ship bound for the USA, traveling on a Dutch passport to visit his American girlfriend; he expects to return in early September; during his departure in Berlin, his mother tells him to stay in the U.S. if war breaks out
- July 7 1939 PJWD's son enters the US on a visitor's visa; arrives in New York on the S.S. "Hansa" of the Hamburg-American Steamship Line
- September 1 1939 *Germany invades Poland*
- September 3 1939 *France and Great Britain declare war on Germany*
- September 5 1939 *United States declares its neutrality*

- September 10 1939 *Canada declares war on Germany*
- September 16 1939 Dr. Telschow of the KWG visits PJWD to ask him to take on German citizenship or resign as Director of the KWIP. PJWD refuses to do either; PJWD is then given the option to stay out of the KWIP and write a book at home; PJWD counterproposes that he accept immediately Cornell's standing offer to deliver the Baker Lectures and be given a leave of absence
- September 17 1939 *Russian Union invades Poland*
- September 1939 German Army Weapons Office (Schumann) announces its intention of taking over the KWIP for war research
- October 6 1939 PJWD writes a letter to Prof. Kirkwood of Cornell informing him that he has accepted the offer to deliver the Baker Lectures and PJWD asks if his son could join him there to continue his own experimental work.
- October 7 1939 PJWD writes a letter to Dr. W.E. Tisdale of the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, for an appointment upon PJWD's arrival in the USA
- October 16 1939 German Army Weapons Office (Basche and Diebner) takes over the KWIP with Diebner as Provisional Head
- October 31 1939 By this date, PJWD has received a 9-month paid leave of absence from the KWIP valid from December 1939 to August 1940
- November 1939 Bronze busts of PJWD placed in the Maastricht City Hall and in the Hoogere Burger School (Maastricht)
- November 20 1939 Cornell University releases the announcement that Professor Debye has accepted the call as George Baker lecturer in chemistry at Cornell University for four months, beginning with the second term of that academic year (Ref. FBI-report 62-87 dated September 27, 1940)
- November 28 1939 PJWD is issued a U.S. visitor's visa in Berlin
- December 1939 PJWD and his wife receive a phony telegram from Maastricht stating that PJWD's mother is dying; this allows PJWD and his wife the opportunity for a quick family visit in Maastricht where they discuss the subsequent escape from Berlin
- December 30 1939 PJWD writes to Sommerfeld: his passage to the U.S. is booked, his final long term decision on the KWIP position has not yet been made
- January 15 1940 PJWD Diary: records Monday evening departure from Munich at 9:19pm with itinerary: Brenner [Pass], Milano, Genoa
- January 16 1940 PJWD Diary: records noon arrival at Brenner Pass with very simple border formalities and no suitcases being opened; evening arrival in Milan with an overnight stay
- January 17 1940 PJWD Diary: records a visit to the Milan cathedral in which he lights four

- candles and a second overnight stay; 15 cm snow
- January 18 1940 PJWD Diary: records a morning visit to the Milan cathedral and a noon departure from Milan
- mid-January 1940 6000 guilders are transferred in Genoa to PJWD from his family in Maastricht; in excess of the \$500 he had requested
- January 19 1940 PJWD Diary: records he is in Genoa and has spare time until departure; receives check in ship office for excess "paid for passage [He might actually be referring to the money transferred by his mother]; "it is cold"
- January 23 1940 PJWD Diary: records he is on board the ship "*Conti di Savoia*" "in Cabin 160; beautiful weather, cold, around 0 °C"
- January 24 1940 PJWD Diary: records ship's morning arrival in Naples; ship departs at noon; 10 °C"
- January 25 1940 The KWG is informed that Kurt Diebner has been installed as Army Commissioner of the KWIP
- January 26 1940 PJWD Diary: records 7:00am arrival in Gibraltar where ship lies still until 1:00pm; sunny, hot, 19 °C.
- February 1 1940 PJWD arrives in New York and is admitted to the U.S.; he visits the Rockefeller Foundation (Weaver) within days and asks "Weaver if the Foundation would object to him accepting a position outside Germany; is told no objection"
- Spring 1940 Albert Einstein informs Cornell of a letter from Switzerland which casts doubt on PJWD
- April 9 1940 *Germany invades Denmark and Norway*
- April 17, 1940 PJWD receives the Mendal Medal at Villanova College*
- March 23 1940 John von Neumann and Oswald Veblan write to Frank Aydelotte of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton describing how PJWD had freely discussed at dinner in the US that the Germans had taken over the KWIP to do fission research on uranium.
- March 1940 Mrs. Debye travels to Lausanne in Switzerland and is supposed to be very sick
- May 8 1940 PJWD writes to Dr. Urey (Columbia Univ) warning that the research group in Germany can figure out what is going on in the US with regards to U-235 separation from a recent newspaper article in the New York Times
- May 9 1940 PJWD writes to Professor G.D. Birkhoff at Harvard stating that some weeks ago he has decided to stay in the US. (Decision already taken in March or April 1940).
- May 9 1940 PJWD writes to E.K. Condon (Westinghouse) to help obtain a position for his former KWIP assistant van der Grinten: "van der Grinten is also

Dutch citizen and thus forced to leave KWIP; was in charge of high voltage equipment"

- May 10 1940 *Germany invades the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg*
- May 12 1940 *Germany invades France*
- May 17 1940 Gerhard Saxinger is drafted into German Army in Tropau (Sudetenland)
- May 1940 US Rubber Reserve Company (RCC) formed to stockpile rubber
- June 3 1940 PJWD's wife sends him a telegram from Geneva stating that she was refused a U.S. visa because she was born in Germany; asks PJWD to "take care of this; states that Zanker has requested their daughter's exit visa from Weizer because she is ill; that lawyer will handle rest"
- June 6 1940 Karl T. Compton (Pres. MIT and Chair, NRDC) writes support letter to US State Dept to help PJWD's Wife obtain a U.S. visa; Dr. Warren Weaver (Dir. Scientific Research, Rockefeller Foundation) advises the U.S. State Dept that PJWD's wife is a Dutch national with Dutch passport
- June 10 1940 *Italy declares war on Britain and France*
- June 10 1940 Edmund Day (President of Cornell University) calls the US State Dept to ask for help in obtaining a U.S. visa for PJWD's Wife
- June 12 1940 PJWD writes a letter to Einstein refuting the charges found in the letter sent to Einstein from Switzerland and intercepted by a British Intelligence Agent.
- June 17 1940 Cornell Board of Trustees appoints PJWD Professor and Chair of Cornell University's Chemistry Department with a 3 year contract and \$12,000 annual salary
- June 21 1940 The New York Times reports on June 22, 1940 under the headline DEBYE TO STAY AT CORNELL that on June 21 1940 "Dr. Peter J.W. Debye, Nobel prize winner in chemistry in 1936 and director-on-leave of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics at Berlin-Dahlem, has been appointed professor and chairman of the Department of Chemistry at Cornell University".
- June 22 1940 *France signs armistice with Germany*
- June 22 1940 Debye to stay at Cornell; Nobel Winner In Chemistry will be Chairman of Department (Ref. New York Times June 22, 1940 pag. 13)
- June 25 1940 Pres. Day (Cornell) writes PJWD (Toronto); reassures him that he anticipates his stay at Cornell will last until end of PJWD's active career; that the 3-yr contract is just a technical matter caused by financing

- constraints
- June 26 1940 PJWD, travelling by train from Toronto, is re-admitted to the U.S. with an immigration visa at Niagara Falls
- June 29 1940 PJWD's wife sends him a telegram from Lausanne: congratulates PJWD (apparently for obtaining his US Immigration visa and Cornell employment); requests that this Information be kept secret yet for two weeks because of daughter's departure; states that she has written concerning the exit visa today.
- July 1 1940 PJWD's 3-year Cornell University faculty contract as Professor and Dept Chairman at begins
- July 1940 PJWD writes to Dr. Telschow of the KWG informing of his acceptance of the Cornell offer and requesting an extended leave of absence from the KWIP
- July 23 1940 PJWD's wife sends him a telegram from Lausanne: asks if Berlin has received his notification; if not, when?; states that the American Consul in Zurich requires sponsorship from PJWD for his Wife's immigration and that instructions are on their way
- July 25 1940 Linus Pauling receives a letter from PJWD asking Pauling's help in finding a position in the U.S. for PJWD's former Leipzig assistant Henri Samuel Sack.
- July 1940 PJWD sends a telegram to his wife: says he has written to Berlin but, to be certain, he will send a second Clipper letter and telegram; states he is waiting for sponsorship instructions and has found a nice house
- August 24 1940 Prof. Max von Laue writes a letter to PJWD stating that none from the KWIP nor he himself has received any messages from PJWD since PJWD'S departure to the U.S. on January 15, 1940. This is in agreement with the information of PJWD in his letter to Albert Einstein on June 12, 1940 stating that PJWD did not have any contact with German officials in Berlin since PJWD's departure from Germany.
- August 31 1940 Samuel Goudsmit (University of Michigan) sends a letter to the FBI suggesting PJWD is in the US for German government interests
- September 3 1940 Letter from Telschow to PJWD in which he shows displeasure about news that reached Telschow through newspaper articles in the Netherlands and talks in scientific circles that PJWD had decided to stay permanently in the USA
- September 14 1940 FBI Report 77-148 vml, Newark, NJ: Cornell/Einstein Interviews regarding letter from abroad
- September 24 1940 FBI Report 62-87 PK, Albany (NY): Cornell interviews
- September 25 1940 The mother of PWJD passes away in Maastricht
- September 27 1940 FBI Report 62-1132, Detroit, MI: University of Michigan Interviews
- September 30 1940 FBI Report 77-2476, Washington, DC: Inquiry with the U.S. State Dept regarding the visa problems in Lausanne of PJWD's wife

October 2 1940 FBI Report 62-6887, New York, NY: Rockefeller Foundation Interviews

October 8 1940 FBI Report 62-194, Milwaukee, WI: University of Wisconsin interviews

October 10 1940 FBI Report 62-2866 Chicago, IL: University Chicago interviews

October 18 1940 "FBI Report 62-1499 ELS, Philadelphia. PA: Newspaper " "morgue"" search reports no articles on PJWD's attitudes and beliefs"

October 19 1940 The Cravath Law Firm writes to PJWD explaining that the Vichy Government has been instructed not to issue transit visas and Spain has closed the "border with France; extremely difficult to get to Lisbon from Switzerland; suggests to PJWD that his wife try to exit through" Germany and Scandinavia

Fall 1940 A telegram is sent by PJWD to Professor Palacios (Physics Dept, University of Madrid) requesting help in obtaining a Spanish transit visa for PJWD's wife

Fall 1940 PJWD sends a telegram to his wife (Lausanne) stating that he is requesting a transit visa for her through the Vichy France Ambassador in New York

October 24 1940 FBI Report 62-745, Boston, MA: Harvard and MIT interviews

October 24 1940 PJWD's wife applies again for a U.S. immigration visa in Zurich

October 26 1940 FBI Report 62-6887, New York, NY: Columbia Interviews

October 29 1940 PJWD's wife finally is issued a US non-quota immigration visa in Zurich

November 11 1940 PJWD is granted an extension to his paid Leave of Absence from the KWIP valid until March 31, 1941; however, the formal notification is not sent out to PJWD by the NY German Consulate until March 21, 1941, just days before the extension expires

November 17 1940 PJWD sends a telegram to his wife in Lausanne stating that he is very happy and everything is ready for her arrival, that her cookbook is already there, that he will meet her in NY; asks her to keep him current with her plans

November 23 1940 FBI Report 77-148 ajk, Newark, NJ: Princeton interviews

December 4 1940 PJWD's wife is in Lisbon trying unsuccessfully to obtain passage to the US on a Pan American Clipper with a ticket purchased previously in Geneva; how she got to Lisbon is unknown

December 4 1940 Heisenberg writes to Sommerfeld describing the Debye family's "emigration" to the US

December 17 1940 PJWD's wife sends him a telegram from Lisbon asking if said letter has arrived; he will then contact the Clipper Agency and then can only wait for the opportunity [she attempted in vain to obtain passage on a Pan Am Clipper from Lisbon to the US]

December 21 1940 PJWD's wife sails from Lisbon, Portugal on " *Marques de Commillas*" bound for New York; she has left the Nobel Prize medal behind with the family in Berlin in case the gold is needed to be bartered in an

- emergency
- 1941 PJWD is recruited by Bell Telephone Laboratories to support US war research effort
- January 8 1941 PJWD's Wife arrives in New York and is admitted to the US on an immigration visa
- March 21 1941 German Consul Hirschfeld (NY) sends a letter notifying PJWD of the extension of his KWIP leave of absence through March 31, 1941; the Consul states that he assumes that PJWD will want to extend his leave of absence again and invites PJWD to New York for a discussion
- March 31 1941 PJWD's paid Leave of Absence from the KWIP expires and his pay stops.
- May 2 1941 PJWD visits with the German General Consul in New York City to try to obtain support for an extension to his leave of absence
- 1941 Elizabeth Alberer ("Tante Lisi"), sister of PJWD's wife who is living In the Berlin KWIP house with PJWD's teenage daughter rents rooms to Gerhard Saxinger and another German officer
- June 12 1941 Mr. Borchers from the German Consulate in New York reports to Berlin that the Germans have collected newspaper articles about PJWD in the USA and that they have checked whether PJWD had made anti-German statements in Cornell. Borchers also reports about appointments with PJWD about extension of the payment of PJWD's KWIP salary. The appointments show that PJWD is mainly focussed on being able to support his family In Berlin.
- June 14, 1941 *US President Roosevelt orders a freeze on all German bank accounts in the USA*
- June 16 1941 *The US Government requires the closing down off all German consulates*
- June 22 1941 *Germany attacks the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa)*
- June 23 1941 Dr. Telschow from the KWG writes a notation on January 26, 1942 that PJWD has sent a telegram to the KWG on June 23, 1941.
- August 1941 PJWD derives for Bell Labs the average dipole moment of a long molecule in solution rotating on axis; this allows for production of better polyethylene dielectric for RADAR systems
- August 14 1941 PWJD fills out the Intent Form to become an American Citizen: this begins a 5 year waiting period
- August 30 1941 PJWD's son marries Marian Morrison of Oberlin, Ohio
- October 15 1941 PJWD derives for Bell Labs the average dipole moment of long molecule with restricted rotation as in polymers; this results in new expressions for dielectric loss in insulators and helps in making high purity polyethylene dielectrics for RADAR systems.

- October 25 1941 US Naval Operations sends a memo to Mr. Hoover (FBI Director) requesting an investigation of PJWD for consideration for working at Bell Labs on classified research
- December 6 1941 US Military Intelligence Division (MID) intercepts a letter from PJWD's Wife to Elisabeth Alberer giving the latter power of attorney over her bank account in Berlin
- December 7 1941 *Japan bombs Pearl Harbor*
- December 8 1941 *United States and Britain declare war on Japan*
- December 11 1941 *Germany declares war on the United States*
- 1942 The husband of PJWD's sister is arrested in Maastricht by the Nazis and after two weeks imprisonment in Maastricht, he is transferred to a prison camp (Kamp Amersfoort) for a half-year because he refuses to divulge how PJWD managed to take money out of Germany when he left for the US
- January 26 1942 Dr. Telschow reports that PJWD has telegraphed the KWG on June 23, 1941 regarding the possibility "*das Institut zu alten Bedingungen wieder zu übernehmen, sobald dies von dort aus möglich sei*"
- March 26 1942 PJWD's daughter marries Gerhard Saxinger in Berlin-Zehlendorf, thereby losing her Dutch citizenship and acquiring German citizenship
- April 11 1942 PJWD writes an explanation letter to the New York State Income Tax Bureau in response to their query about his residency and income tax filing
- April 24 1942 The High Command of the German Army returns the KWIP to the KWG effective on July 1, 1942; Heisenberg is appointed Director at the KWIP, because PJWD is still technically on leave in the U.S.
- July 1 1942 German Weapons Command returns the KWIP to the KWG
- August 18 1942 PJWD's daughter has her first child born (Norwig) in Berlin-Dahlem (Harnackstr. 5)
- 1942 PJWD is recruited by Bell Telephone Laboratories to help work on the synthetic rubber research for the U.S. war effort; this work involves the characterization of micelles and the determination of macromolecular masses
- January 12 1943 Gerhard Saxinger enrolls as a student in Humboldt University in Berlin; he is given leave for Wehrmacht duty during: Summer Semester 1943, Winter semester 43/44, summer semester 44, winter semester 44/45
- March 2 1943 *Heavy bombing of Berlin by Royal Air Force*
- March 1943 PJWD's daughter, her husband, child, and aunt leave Berlin to escape the

- bombing and stay with her in-laws in Sudetenland; they are evicted from Berlin house by court order
- March 30 1943 PJWD develops for Bell Labs an initial optical technique for obtaining molecular masses of polymers
- August 2 1943 PJWD's daughter has her second child (Nordulf) in Bad Gross Ullersdorf (Sudetenland)
- April 18 1944 Army Services Forces issues a report that completely clears PJWD and states there is absolutely no reason why he should not be employed for classified military research
- 1944 PJWD's son (Peter Paul Ruprecht) is awarded a PhD (Physics) from Cornell; PJWD is his thesis advisor; the Jewish physicist Hans Bethe is on his oral exam committee
- September 24 1944 *Red Army invades Czechoslovakia*
- Fall 1944 Gerhard Saxinger appears in Bad Ullersdorf with a jeep and driver; he flees with his wife, two sons, driver, and Elisabeth Alberer westward;" the stalled Russian advance causes fear in G. Saxinger and driver (both AWOL with falsified orders) that they would be caught by Germans; they return with his family to Bad Ullersdorf; G. Saxinger and his driver return to the Eastern front
- Jan/Mar 1945 Documentation shows that Gerhard Saxinger is at this time assigned as Wehrmacht photographer/cameraman in the in Kolin (Moravian-Ostrau) region
- 1945 Mathilde Saxinger-Debye obtains access to the bank accounts of her mother, PJWD's wife (Ref. Letter dated September 3, 1954 from Bayerische Hypotheken Wechselbank In Munchen to Mrs. Amalie Alberer)
- February 15 1945 *Dresden is destroyed by massive bombing and a resulting fire storm*
- March 1945 Gerhard Saxinger reappears in Bad Ullersdorf with jeep/driver to save his family and flee westward; all (4 adults, 2 children) travel together for about one week but then decide that it is too dangerous to stay together as a group (G. Saxinger and driver are both AWOL German soldiers facing immediate execution by the German or Russian Armies); Elisabeth Alberer takes the southern route (towards Hof) with the 2 children and the Nobel Prize medal for 6 weeks; the remaining adults take the northern route; the driver eventually leaves to find his own way home; the Debye family refugees reunite later in Delmenhorst (Lower Saxony).

- April 8 1945 *Ukrainian troops advance into northern Czechoslovakia*
- April 25 1945 *Red Army and US troops meet at the Elbe*
- May 7 1945 *Germany surrenders unconditionally*
- May 13 1945 *Red Army crushes the last German resistance in northern Czechoslovakia*
- June 1945 *Communist occupying powers in Czechoslovakia declare that the Sudeten Germans who fled have no right of return to home*
- June 1945 The members of the family of PJWD's daughter's are declared refugees with no right of return to the Sudetenland
- October 31 1945 *Gerhard Saxinger is officially withdrawn from enrollment at Humboldt University*
- November 12 1946 PJWD is granted US citizenship
- December 29 1947 PJWD is listed as a member of a group of international backers of a two million U.S. dollar fund raising project to help rebuild Nijmegen University (The Netherlands) as a memorial to the 800 men of the Eighty-second U.S. Airborne Division who gave their lives at Nijmegen in 1944 (Ref. New York Times of December 29, 1947)
- 1948 PJWD becomes Todd Professor of Chemistry at Cornell
- 1948 *Czech government permanently expels all Sudeten Germans including the parents of Gerhard Saxinger*
- December 18 1948 PJWD, visiting his daughter, her family and E. Alberer in Delmenhorst, writes to the U.S. State Dept asking for their help in bringing his medals back to the US
- 1949 PJWD is presented the Willard Gibbs Medal
- 1949 Jewish scientist Lise Meitner receives Max-Planck medal from DPG
- December 18 1945 PJWD is among the fifteen Nobel Prize winners who are honored on the occasion of the national campaign to raise 4 million US dollars to establish a medical school at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Palestine. The guests are serving on a committee of sponsors for the school project. Prof. Albert Einstein is also one of the committee members. The dinner takes place under the auspices of the American Friends of the Hebrew University, the American Jewish Physicians and Hadassah (Ref. New York Times of December 3, 1945).
- Spring 1950 PJWD and Arnold Sommerfeld meet again in Europe for the first time since PJWD's departure from Berlin
- October 13 1950 The German Physical Society (DPG) announces that it has awarded the 1950 Max-Planck medal to PJWD (Ref. New York Times of October 14, 1950). Albert Einstein voted in favour of PJWD for this award
- 1950 PJWD resigns as Department Chair at Cornell

- 1951 The Jewish scientist James Franck receives the Max-Planck medal from the DPG
- August 6 1951 PJWD's daughter with her two sons arrive on the Holland-America Line SS "*Westerdam*" for a long term visit with PJWD and his wife in Ithaca; his daughter later returns to Germany but both sons stay in the U.S. and don't return to Germany
- February 14 1952 PJWD's daughter returns to Germany leaving her two sons in Ithaca, NY for a long visit with their grandparents
- July 1 1952 PJWD retires from Cornell and receives a part-time (80%) research faculty appointment (\$16,667 salary)
- February 15 1953 PJWD's daughter applies again for a U.S. visitor's visa in Germany to go to the U.S. in order to bring back her two sons
- December 27 1955 PJWD's daughter and Gerhard Saxinger are divorced in Germany and his daughter returns to the U.S.
- 1957 PJWD is presented the Kendall Award
- September 15 1959 PJWD leaves Ithaca for a trip to Europe visiting Maastricht, München, Berlin, Madrid, Wiesbaden, Rome, Zürich
- November 3 1959 PJWD boards the S.S. "*Rotterdam*" (Holland America Line) in Le Havre for his return home
- 1960 PJWD attends a scientific conference in Buenos Aires
- March 21 1960 PJWD's daughter becomes a naturalized U.S. citizen in New York City
- August 1960 Both sons of PJWD's daughter become naturalized US citizens in New York City
- 1961 PJWD is presented the Nicholls award
- 1962 PJWD visits Maastricht in order to present the Hustinx Prizes
- 1963 PJWD is presented the Priestley Medal
- 1965 PJWD attends the IUPAC Polymer Conference in Prague
- 1965 PJWD is presented the High Polymer Physics Prize
- 1965 PJWD is presented the U.S. National Medal of Science
- April 1966 PJWD suffers a heart attack at Kennedy Airport on his way to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences conference in Rome
- October 1966 PJWD suffers his second heart attack at home in Ithaca
- November 2 1966 PJWD passes away in Tompkins County Hospital (Ithaca, NY) and is buried in Pleasant Grove Cemetery (Cayuga Heights, NY)
- July 31 1976 Gerhard Saxinger passes away in Bamberg (Germany)
- February 9 1977 PJWD's wife passes away in Tompkins County Hospital (Ithaca, NY) and is buried in Pleasant Grove Cemetery (Cayuga Heights, NY)
- October 17 1977 Elisabeth Alberer passes away in Altötting (Germany)
- October 12 1991 PJWD's daughter passes away in Kinderhook, NY (USA)
- January 27 2006 Gertrud Siemens-Niël celebrates her 81st birthday in the Netherlands
- March 7 2006 PJWD's son celebrates his 90th birthday in Sudbury, MA (USA)

CHAPTER 17.

RISPENS AND DEBYE

Dr. Sybe Izaak Rispens (1970) studied electro-technics in Leeuwarden and Enschede, philosophy in Amsterdam and history of technics at the Technical University of Berlin. He received his PhD at the Department of the History of Psychology at the University of Groningen. His thesis (2005) was entitled “Machine reason. A History of Clocks, Computers and Consciousness”. Rispens’ second publication, which appeared in 2006 is “Einstein in Nederland” (Ref. De Ingenieur, March 3, 2006). In order to promote his book “Einstein in Nederland” Rispens did the necessary preparatory work, see below.

17a. Recommendation of Rispens book by Nobel Laureate Veltman

In the preface to Rispens’ book, the Nobel prize winner Professor Martinus Veltman recommends Rispens’ work. In this he supports, without criticism, the conclusions of Rispens about Debye. Veltman’s input is meant to convey authority and credibility. That this works is evident from a review of Rispens’s book in Trouw [a Dutch daily newspaper] of April 1st (!), 2006 by Jaap de Berg, who writes:

“In order to warrant the trustworthiness of the argument, the praise of Nobel Prize winner Veltman prefaces the argument”.

De Berg has excused himself instantly; he does not need to do any more work and can resort to armchair journalism.

It is a shame that he did not take the trouble to consult an independent critical senior science historian, since he undoubtedly would have said: “Veltman is a brilliant physicist but not an historian, so what does he know about the matter”? And, if De Berg had read Rispens book properly, then he would have seen on page 11 that Veltman admits: “the book... ”contains several issues which I did not know”. Veltman is then later much more thoughtful and much less explicit about Debye in his appearance on television during the discussion of Rispens’ book on the VPRO [Dutch TV channel] program on February 26, 2006, but by then the damage has already been done.

In a special news item called “Netwerk” on Dutch television on Tuesday, April 18, 2006 Veltman said that he finds the decision of Utrecht University with respect to Debye too hasty and that the University Board should cancel it. On April 26, 2006 Prof. Veltman approached me by telephone and told me that he regretted his foreword in Rispens’ book, because he had trusted Rispens and now felt cheated by him.

Prof. Veltman wrote to Rispens and to the publisher of his book, stating that they were no longer allowed to use his foreword in reprints or translated editions of Rispens’ book. The publisher confirmed in writing to Prof. Veltman that he would not use his foreword. Prof. Veltman has now dissociated himself completely from Rispens’ work in a letter from May 5, 2006 addressed to the directorate and the employees of the research institute, which until February 16, 2006 carried the name of Debye.

17b. Science journalist Martijn van Calmthout from De Volkskrant (a daily Dutch newspaper) told us that he received proofs of the book *EINSTEIN IN THE NETHERLANDS* at the end of 2005 to be peer-reviewed. The chapter *Einstein and Debye* was missing.

17c. On January 18, 2006 the publisher of the book sent a press release along with the introduction to the Dutch media. Debye is described in it as a Nazi-collaborator. The media then, in turn, sent the press release to the related universities with the request for a

reaction. Via the journalist Martijn van Calmthout, the Volkskrant [Dutch daily newspaper] presented the question on the same day to the University of Utrecht:

"I'd like to hear as soon as possible this afternoon something regarding the question, whether the name of the Debye Institute can be maintained in view of his past during the war."

17d. On January 21, 2006 an eye-catching article by Sybe Rispens entitled: *Nobel Prize Winner with Dirty Hands* appeared in Vrij Nederland [Dutch weekly]. Peter Debye was described in it as a Nazi collaborator and opportunist on the basis of remarks of the author and some articles presented by him. The article, meant to herald his book, had a full-page photo of Peter Debye. Several media copied the conclusions unchallenged with not too flattering headlines or articles about Debye. The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) also played a role in the media strategy. NIOD was called in by the editor of Rispens' book to supply them with a seal of approval as I found out in an article in the newspaper Trouw from January 23, 2006 which reported that:

"NIOD researcher Romeijn read the chapter about the war at the request of the publisher and he calls it "a convincing story". "Rispens has done thorough research and he has made well-founded use of the sources".

17e. In September 2005, Rispens approached me by e-mail with the request for a photo of Debye, without stating for what purpose he wanted to use it. In January 2006 it became clear to me that it was meant to illustrate his article of 2006 in Vrij Nederland.

17f. In a VPRO book program on Dutch TV (Channel 3) on February 26, 2006, at 1300 hrs, the moderator asked Rispens whether he thought it justified that the universities of Utrecht and Maastricht had scrapped Debye's name. He answered YES and he confirmed the question of the moderator that Debye was a pawn of the Nazis. When the moderator said: *Debye signed his letters with "Sieg Heil"*, Rispens answered that was correct, whereas something totally different was written, namely "Heil Hitler". The term "Sieg Heil" had at that time and also now a totally different connotation than "Heil Hitler". Rispens did not correct the moderator.

17g. In the newspaper the Aachener Nachrichten of February 23, 2006 Rispens goes even further, see the quotations of his statements:

"Er (=Debye) habe aber die Situation von 1934 bis 1940 als 'Opportunist für seine eigene Zwecke genutzt'. Immerhin habe Debye "strukturell an der 'Lösung der Judenfrage' innerhalb der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft und der Deutschen Physikalischen Gesellschaft mitgearbeitet'. Nach Rispens Forschungen existieren 'einige Dutzend, mit 'Heil Hitler' unterzeichnete Briefe, in denen er mit den Behörden 'die Judenfrage diskutiert'. Vor allem habe Debye 1938 den Auftrag gegeben in einer 'Sonderaktion' die Juden aus der Deutschen Physikalischen Gesellschaft (DPG) zu entfernen". Ausserdem hat Debye 'ohne dazu aufgefordert zu werden dafür gesorgt, dass die 'Judenfrage' auch in der Satzungen der DPG geregelt wird'. Schliesslich habe Debye der 1940 in die USA übersiedelte, 'mehrfach probiert nach Hitlerdeutschland zurückzukehren, ohne das er dazu gezwungen wurde."

English translation: *"He (= Debye) used the situation from 1934 until 1940 as 'opportunist for his own goals'. Furthermore, Debye 'contributed structurally to the 'solution of the Jewish question' in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft and in the German Physical Society. According to Rispens' research some dozen letters exist signed with 'Heil Hitler' in which he discusses with the authorities 'the Jewish question'. In particular, Debye in 1938 gave the order in a 'special action' to*

remove the Jews from the German Physical Society. Moreover, Debye 'without being forced to do so, saw to it that the Jewish question was also dealt with in the meetings of the German Physical Society'. Finally, Debye tried numerous times after he had emigrated to the USA in 1940, to return to Hitler's Germany without being forced to do so."

[Van Ginkel: The use of terms such as "Lösung der Judenfrage" (solution of the Jewish question) and "Sonderaktion" (special action), with their very charged connotation, is in this context totally irresponsible. The first term points to the extermination of the Jews, the second is directly associated with the murder squads of the SS.]

17h. In the article in De Volkskrant of Saturday March 11, 2006, in which Professor Jenneskens, scientific director of the Debye Institute in Utrecht, and I were interviewed by science journalist Martijn van Calmthout, Rispens remarked as a reaction, that he was sorry that Van Ginkel had not contacted him, because then he would have been pleased to prevent the Utrecht Board of Trustees from making a hasty decision about Debye. His remark is in conflict with the information described in 17.f. Rispens did not react in De Volkskrant to the refutation with arguments, that his conclusions in relation to Debye were incorrect on the basis of the sources quoted.

17i. In an article dated March 1, 2006 in Chemical and Engineering News, devoted to the decision making in the Netherlands vis-a-vis Debye, Rispens got an opportunity to react. He offered his negative assessment of Debye. He says for example:

"Debye showed himself to be an extreme opportunist during the Nazi period. Debye in most of his correspondence shows himself as a willing helper of the regime, signing dozens of letters with Heil Hitler. There are no signs that he acted involuntarily or was threatened by the Nazis.

Rispens does not present the content and the context of the sources he mentions and he does not refer to the well documented tension between Debye and the Nazis, for example with regard to the DPG letter from 1938 and the various confrontations of Debye with the Nazis. Besides, he ignores the role of the family circumstances completely.

17j. Rispens calls Debye an "opportunist". That fits very well with the definition given by Gisevius, see the quotation of Gisevius in Chapter 2, the Historical Context, where he writes:

"the opponent within a dictatorial regime floats continuously back and forth between two evils, namely that the non-insiders call him an opportunist...."

Van Dale's prestigious dictionary defines an opportunist as: "acting without principles". In view of the actions of Debye, this term does not provide an adequate description of his actions. When his actions are compared with those of current politicians and with directors and boards of large corporations, universities and other institutions, then the term "pragmatic" seems much more fitting.

17k. Considering the manner in which he deals with Debye, Rispens is just about the last person to call Debye an opportunist. This is confirmed by a recently published interview with Dr. Ir. Sybe Rispens in De Ingenieur of March 3, 2006 by Arno Schauwers with the title: "The Computer as Hostage Taker". Even though the article deals indeed with the computer, on the heading of the article is the following text:

"Historical Scientist and Philosopher Sybe Rispens Seeks the Limelight. He made it to the front pages of the paper with the Nazi-past of the Dutch Nobel Prize Winner Peter Debye, after whom a physics institute was named".

The interview is illustrated with two large photographs of Rispens. I find this to be truly opportunistic because Rispens' book "Einstein in Nederland" is not even mentioned in the

article. Message to the reader: “*Mission accomplished: Rispens is a well-known Dutchman*”. One gets the impression that Debye was only a springboard for Rispens’ publicity, in view of the utterly sloppy way he dealt with the sources and their context.

Debye himself in a letter of December 30, 1939 to Sommerfeld clearly indicates the principles he applies to his actions:

“Also nicht verzagen und stets bereit stehen das Gute was vorbeihuscht, zu fassen ohne dem Schlechten mehr Platz zu gönnen als unbedingt nötig ist. Das ist ein Prinzip, was mir schon viel Nutzen gebraucht hat. Hoffentlich bringt das neue Jahr mehr Gutes, als unser Kleingläubigkeit in diesem Augenblick wahr haben will”.

Translation: “*Not to despair and always be ready to grab the Good which whisks by, without granting the Bad any more room than is absolutely necessary. That is a principle of which I have already made much use. Hopefully, the new year will bring more good than our little faith allows us to see at this moment.*”

17l. Conclusions about the quality of Rispens work:

On the basis of my findings above, I conclude that Rispens’ work does not meet the qualitative requirements expected of scientific historical work due to the accumulation of errors and statements not supported by sources, the selective manipulation of the sources, and the omission of the context in which events took place. In addition, he gives the impression of judging with bias and using Debye in order to place his book and himself in the limelight. Put squarely: Rispens’ work is far below the mark.

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Archief "Prof. Peter Debye" in the Utrecht University Museum, the Netherlands

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Archives of the Max-Planck Gesellschaft in Berlin, Germany

Center for History of Physics, Niels Bohr Library, American Institute of Physics, College Park, MD, USA,

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URL: <http://www.chemheritage.org/>

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Albert Einstein Archives-Online, Hebrew University, Jerusalem,

URL: <http://www.alberteinstein.info/>

Kroch Library, Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY,

URL: <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/collections/rmccollections.html>

Ava Helen and Linus Pauling Archives, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, USA

URL: <http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/specialcollections/coll/pauling/index.html>

Military Records Section, U.S. National Archives II, College Park, MD, USA,

URL: <http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/college-park/>

Sommerfeld Projekt, Deutsches Museum Archives, München,

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State Department Records Section, U.S. National Archives II, College Park, MD, USA

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State Department Records Section, U.S. National Archives, Washington, DC

URL: <http://www.archives.gov/dc-metro/>

CHAPTER 19.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This investigation could never have been completed if not so many people had helped me. I am very grateful for their help and continuous support. They were:

The Debye family:

Prof. Nordulf Debye, Towson University, USA

Mr Norwig Debye-Saxinger, USA

Dr. Peter P. R. Debye, USA

Dr. R. Eder-Debye, Germany

Mr. G. Siemens-Niël, The Netherlands

Dr. Christina Leveillee-Debye, USA

Prof. Frits Böttcher, Den Haag, The Netherlands

Prof. Wim Bras, European Synchrotron Radiation Facility, Grenoble, France.

Dr. Christian Bremen, RWTH Aachen University, Germany

Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA

Prof. Benjamin Chu, SUNY-Stony Brook, New York, USA

Ir. Jo Geuskens, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Prof. Ernst Homburg, Maastricht University, The Netherlands

Prof. Leo Jenneskens, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Dr. Herman de Lang, Ned. Natuurkundige Vereniging, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Prof. Henk Lekkerkerker, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Prof. Andries Meijerink, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Mr. Servé Minis, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Mr. Ted Reckman, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Mr. Frans Roebroeks, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Prof. Ruth Lewin Sime, USA

Prof. Roger Stuewer, Minneapolis, USA

Prof. Joshua Telser, Roosevelt University, Chicago, USA

Prof. Jan van Turnhout, Technical University Delft, The Netherlands

Prof. Dietrich Woermann, University of Cologne, Germany

Prof. Benjamin Widom, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA

Dr. Paul Wormer, University of Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Prof. Hans Wijnberg, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands

CHAPTER 20.
APPENDICES

20.1 Letter of Prof. Gispen (Utrecht University) to Prof. Blom (NIOD), January 26, 2006



Translation:

The Netherlands Institute of War Documentation (NIOD)

To the attention of Prof.Dr. J.C.H. Blom, Herengracht 380, 1016 CJ Amsterdam

Date: January 26, 2006

Subject: Questions with regard to Debye

Dear Professor Blom,

*As you know recently the publication *Einstein in Nederland* by Sybe Izaak Rispens (Ambo 2006) came out in which a number of matters are broached with regard to the way Nobel Prize winner Prof. Dr. P. Debye acted in the period before and during the Second World War. In particular mention is made of two documents by his hand, namely:*

- 1. a letter of Debye as Chairman of the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft (p. 180, note 77) dated December 9, 1938*
- 2. a telegram from the USA, directed to the General Consulate in Berlin (p. 183, note 89) dated June 23, 1941.*

Because the University of Utrecht, the University of Maastricht and the Edmond Hustinx Foundation have associated the name of Peter Debye to an institute or a prize, it is important for them to get clarity about the trustworthiness of the documents mentioned above. Therefore we ask you to give decisive answers to the following questions:

- Do you consider as authentic the document with regard to the request to the Jewish members to withdraw from the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft signed by Chairman Peter Debye? And likewise the document regarding Debye's offer to be willing at any time to resume leadership of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin?*
- On the basis of the sources provided do you consider it likely that Peter Debye of his own free will offered in 1941 to resume his position as director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute für Physik during the occupation of the Netherlands by Germany?*

Considering the timeliness and the importance of the matter we ask you to answer our questions in a time span as short as is possible for you.

Also in the name of the University of Maastricht and the Edmond Hustinx Foundation,

The Board of the Utrecht University,

Prof. Dr. Willem Hendrik Gispen

Rector Magnificus

20.2 Letter of Prof. Blom (NIOD) to Prof. Gispen (Utrecht University),
February 7, 2006

**Nederlands Instituut
voor
Oorlogsdocumentatie**
NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR WAR DOCUMENTATION

Herengracht 38a, 1017 CJ Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: 020-523 35 00 Fax: 020-523 38 88
info@niod.nl www.niod.nl
ASH-AMRO Bank: 45 05 10 581
IBAN: NL728804050910582
BIC/SWIFT: ASHANL2H

De heer prof. dr. H.W. Gispen
Rector Magnificus van de
Universiteit Utrecht
Postbus 80125
3508 TC UTRECHT

Amsterdam, 7 februari 2006
Onze referentie: 20060182/SEC_BLJ/nu

Zeer geachte collega Gispen,

In antwoord op uw vragen inzake de Nobelprijswinnaar P. Debye naar aanleiding van het recent
verschenen boek van S.I. Rispen, *Einstein in Nederland*, bericht ik u het volgende.

In zeer strikte zin kan een uitspraak over de "authenticiteit" van documenten slechts gedaan worden
na uitvoerig historisch en forensisch documentenonderzoek van de originele documenten. Zulk
tijdovend en kostbaar onderzoek naar documenten waar auteurs naar verwijzen, wordt achter zeer
zelden werkelijk verricht en alleen als er ernstige redenen is aan de betrouwbaarheid van verstrekte
informatie te twifelen. Dat is hier niet het geval.

Ten eerste is de informatie die de auteur van bovengenoemd boek over Debye verschaft niet nieuw.
In eerdere publicaties werd zij ook verschaft en daarna niet betwist. Ik voeg als bijlagen twee
voorbeelden toe. D. Hoffmann behandelt de kwestie van de verwijdering van de Joden uit de
Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft en de rol van Debye daarbij in "Zwischen Autonomie und
Anpassung: Die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft im Dritten Reich" (preprint, 2001). En H. Kant
brengt het telegram van Debye van 23 juni 1941 uit Amerika ter sprake in zijn "Peter Debye und das
Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Physik in Berlin".

Voorts heeft de heer Rispen op mijn verzoek de documenten waarop de betreffende passages in zijn
boek zijn gebaseerd in het Archiv zur Geschichte der Max Planck Gesellschaft in Berlin opnieuw
gelokaliseerd en in foto's aan mij toegezonden. Hij heeft daarbij nog gewezen op verdere, zijn
informatie ondersteunende, documentatie. Op grond daarvan is mijns inziens duidelijk dat de
verstrekte informatie betrouwbaar is. Ik merk daarbij op dat de beste bronverwijzing, enigszins
afwijkend van de tekst van de noten 77 en 89 van het desbetreffende hoofdstuk in het boek *Einstein
in Nederland*, respectievelijk is:

- Archiv zur Geschichte der Max Planck Gesellschaft III. Abteilung, Repositur 18, Nummer 1014, Blatt
93-98; en
- idem I. Abteilung, Repositur 1A, Nummer 1852; ektannotiz: Teichow d.d. 22.1.1942 (waarin naar het
telegram van 23 juni 1941 wordt verwezen).

Op grond van de door mij bekeken publicaties en bronnen ben ik als antwoord op uw tweede vraag,
namelijk of P. Debye zijn aanbod vanuit Amerika om zijn positie in Berlin weer op zich te nemen
heeft gedaan "uit vrije wil", van mening dat 'dit inderdaad het geval was. Daarbij vat ik hier vrije wil, los
van de filosofische dimensies van dit begrip, op als gehandeld zonder aanwijsbare externe dwang.

Het Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie is een instituut van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (KNAW).

Uit uw brief begrijp ik dat U mij deze vragen stelt omdat u wilt nagaan of naar aanleiding van gepubliceerde gegevens de noodzaak of wenselijkheid voortvóór te heroverwegen of de naam van P. Debye verbonden moet blijven aan een instituut, een leerstoel en een prijs. Het is u bekend dat het NIOD van mening is dat het zelf geen standpunt dient in te nemen in dergelijke politieke en morele besluitvorming doch zich wil beperken tot het verschaffen van wetenschappelijk verantwoorde informatie. In dat kader gaat dunkt mij wel dat ik er op wijs dat een dergelijke besluitvorming wellicht gebaat is bij een bredere kennis over de context waarin de beide documenten waar u naar vroeg tot stand kwamen. De heer Rispen schreef een naar mijn opvatting evenwichtig hoofdstuk over Debye en Einstein. Over Debye als wetenschapsbeoefenaar in het nationaal-socialistische Duitsland is echter, ook naar de mening van de heer Rispen, zeker meer te zeggen, ook in het licht van de recente (en oudere) publicaties over de (exacte) wetenschappen in het Derde Rijk. De beschikbare bronnen specifiek over Debye zijn ook zeker niet uitputtend bestudeerd.

In de hoop u hiermee een bevredigend antwoord op uw vragen te hebben gegeven en u en uw collega's van de Universiteit Maastricht en de stichting Edmond Hustinx wijsheid bewensend in uw bestuurlijke besluitvorming.

Met vriendelijke groet,



Prof. dr. J.C.H. Blom
Directeur

Translation:

To Mr. Prof. Dr. H.W. Gispen

Rector magnificus of the University of Utrecht

Date: February 7, 2006.

Very dear colleague Gispen,

In response to your questions with regard to Nobel Prize winner P. Debye in consequence of the recently published book of S.I Rispens, *Einstein in Nederland*, I report to you the following.

In a very strict sense a verdict about the "authenticity" of documents can only be given after elaborate historical and forensic documentary research of the original documents. Such time-consuming and expensive research of the documents to which authors refer, is however in practice rarely performed and only if there are serious reasons to doubt the trustworthiness of the information supplied. That is not the case here.

Firstly the information supplied by the author of the book about Debye mentioned above is not new. In earlier publications it was also provided and after that not disputed. I include as attachments two examples. D. Hoffmann treats the question of the removal of the Jews from the *Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft* and Debye's role in it in "Zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung: Die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft im dritten Reich" (preprint 2001). And H. Kant refers to Debye's telegram of June 23, 1941 from the USA in his "Peter Debye und das Kaiser Wilhelm Institut für Physik in Berlin". Furthermore Mr. Rispens has on my request again located in the *Archiv zur Geschichte der Max Planck Gesellschaft* in Berlin the documents upon which the relevant passages in his book are based, and he has sent photocopies of them to me. He has furthermore pointed to additional documentation, which supports his information. On that basis it is in my view clear that the information supplied is reliable.

I notice with regard to this matter that the best references, slightly different from the text in notes 77 and 89 of the relevant chapter in the book *Einstein in Nederland* are respectively:

- Archiv zur Geschichte der Max Planck Gesellschaft III, Abteilung, Repostur 19, Nummer 1014, Blatt 33-38, and

- Idem I, Abteilung, Repostur 1A, Nummer 1652, aktennotiz Telschow dated January 22, 1942 (in which is referred to the telegram of June 23, 1941).

On the basis of the information and the documents which I have seen with regard to your second question, namely whether P. Debye offered to resume his position in Berlin again "from his own free will", my answer is that I am of the opinion that this was indeed the case.

I hereby define his own free will, apart from the philosophical aspects of this term, as having acted without demonstrable external compulsion.

From your letter I understand that you ask me these questions because you want to investigate the necessity or desirability to reconsider whether Debye's name should be connected to an Institute, a chair or a prize as a consequence of the published data.

You are aware that the NIOD is of the opinion that it should not take a position in such a political and moral decision process, but wants to limit itself solely to supplying scientifically justified information. Within this framework, I believe that I have to point out that such a decision perhaps would benefit from a broader knowledge about the context in which both documents you asked for came about. In my opinion Mr. Rispens has written a balanced chapter about Debye and Einstein. There is, however, also in the opinion of Mr. Rispens, more to say about Debye as a scientist in Nazi Germany in light of recent (and older) publications about the physical sciences in the Third Reich. The available sources specific about Debye have not been studied extensively. With the hope to have supplied you with a satisfactory answer to your questions and wishing you and your colleagues of the University of Maastricht and the Edmond Hustinx Foundation wisdom in your governmental decision.

With kind regards,

Prof. dr. J.H.C. Blom

Director

20.3 Press release Utrecht University, February 16, 2006

Persbericht Universiteit Utrecht
16-02-2006

Universiteit Utrecht ziet af van naamgeving Debye

Het college van bestuur van de Universiteit Utrecht heeft zich beraden over de vraag of recent gepubliceerde gegevens die betrekking hebben op de handelswijze van de Nederlandse Nobelprijswinnaar Peter Debye voor en tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog, aanleiding vormen om te heroverwegen of de naam Debye verbonden moet blijven aan een gerenommeerd onderzoeksinstituut van de Universiteit Utrecht. Het college heeft ten behoeve hiervan aan het NIOD onder meer verzocht om de bronnen waar de publicaties naar verwijzen te verifiëren.

Het college van bestuur constateert dat het NIOD de bronnen betrouwbaar acht. Het college is er zich van bewust, zoals ook aangegeven in de reactie van het NIOD - dat er nog onvoldoende onderzoek gedaan is om een totaalbeeld van Debye in Nazi-Duitsland te schetsen. Desalniettemin meent het college dat er (voor hem) voldoende nieuwe feiten in de afgelopen jaren naar voren zijn gebracht die niet verenigbaar zijn met een voorbeeldgebruik van de naam Debye. Daarom zal vanaf heden het onderzoeksinstituut de naam Debye niet meer voeren. Deze beslissing staat los van de betekenis van het eminente wetenschappelijke werk van Debye als fysisch-chemicus.

20.4 Press release Maastricht University, february 16, 2006

Persbericht Universiteit van Maastricht

16-02-2006

"Opgeroepen beeld moeilijk verenigbaar met voorbeeldfunctie UM'

NIOD concludeert: recente publicaties over Debye gebaseerd op betrouwbare bronnen

Naar aanleiding van recente publicaties over de handelwijze van de Nederlandse Nobelprijswinnaar Peter Debye voorafgaand aan en tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog heeft het College van Bestuur van de Universiteit Maastricht zich beraden over de vraag of de universiteit nog haar medewerking wil verlenen aan de Peter Debye Prijs voor natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek. Het College heeft samen met de Universiteit Utrecht en de Stichting Edmond Hustinx het Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (NIOD) verzocht om de bronnen waar de publicaties naar verwijzen te verifiëren.

Het College van Bestuur constateert dat het NIOD de bronnen betrouwbaar acht. Het College is zich ervan bewust, zoals ook aangegeven in de reactie van het NIOD, dat er nog onvoldoende onderzoek is gedaan om een totaalbeeld van Debye in Nazi-Duitsland te schetsen. In het materiaal zoals dit recent beschikbaar is gekomen wordt in ieder geval de suggestie gewekt dat Debye zich onvoldoende heeft verzet tegen de aantasting van de academische vrijheid vanuit de verantwoordelijke positie die hij destijds had voor medewerkers en studenten als voorzitter van de Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft.

Het College van Bestuur acht het opgeroepen beeld moeilijk verenigbaar met de voorbeeldfunctie, die gekoppeld is aan een vernoeming van/bij een wetenschappelijke prijs. Het College heeft daarom besloten de Peter Debye Prijs niet meer uit te reiken en de Stichting Edmond Hustinx in overweging gegeven de naam van de prijs te wijzigen. Deze beslissing staat los van de betekenis van het eminente wetenschappelijke werk van Debye als fysicus-chemicus.

Vanwege de wetenschappelijke signatuur van Debye heeft het College van Bestuur opdracht gegeven aan de Faculteit der Cultuurwetenschappen tot het schrijven van een wetenschappelijke monografie over Peter Debye.

20. 5 Letter of Prof. M. Veltman to Directorate and employess of the Utrecht Debye Institute

Bilthoven, The Netherlands, May 5, 2006

To the Board of Directors and to
the employees of the Debye Institute
of Utrecht University

Prof. Dr. M. Veltman
Schubertlaan 15
3723 LM Bilthoven

Dear colleagues,

The decision of the Board of the Universities of Utrecht and Maastricht to remove the name Debye far exceeds the interests of the universities itself. The esteem of Debye and of Dutch physics has been seriously damaged by their decision. I have been to some degree involved in this affair, having written the preface to Rispens' book "Einstein in Nederland". The content of the book is, by the way, much less provocative than Rispens' subsequent article in Vrij Nederland, which I read only recently.

In any case if I had realised the consequences I would certainly have dissociated myself from the matter. I subsequently devoted time to investigate the question as I knew nothing about Debye and accepted Rispens' text at face value. However, it is now clear to me, that the allegations of Rispens are unfounded and should be assigned to the "realm of fables". As a scientist it would be inappropriate for me to continue stubbornly to defend my original view, and I will not, although it is annoying.

I have informed the author and the publisher, that I do not wish to have my preface included in new editions and translations of the book. The publisher has confirmed to me in writing that he will comply with my request.

In two recent television programmes I have already dissociated myself from Rispens' allegations. I am prepared to take all measures necessary to repair the damage done and prevent further repercussions.

The question remains as to who has been damaged most by this affair. The answer is clear: the Universities of Utrecht and Maastricht. A university such as Harvard or Princeton would never have acted in this way. They would assume that their predecessors knew what they were doing; they would not have raised the issue unless explicit and univocal evidence was provided. Besides, one is innocent until proven guilty! That Rispens' article in Vrij Nederland would have reached such far-reaching consequences is unimaginable. The decision of Utrecht and Maastricht is a slap in their own face. It seems to me that the universities should admit their error, revoke their decision and further forget the matter. I have an extreme aversion to having to discuss this affair abroad.

With kind regards,

M. Veltman

20.6 Press release Cornell University, June 2, 2006



Was Peter J.W. Debye a Nazi sympathizer and/or collaborator? Did he hold anti-Semitic views? Was he willing to accommodate the views of the Nazi regime? These are some of the questions being raised by Sybe Rispens' recently published book, *Einstein in Nederland* (available only in Dutch, Ambo | Amsterdam, 2006). These questions entered the public arena in January of this year (2006) after the pre-publication of excerpts from Rispens' book in the newspaper *Vrij Nederland*. Subsequently, several other Dutch newspapers, television and radio stations also covered/picked-up the story. This media coverage generated a furor in the Netherlands, a country that, because of the Nazi occupation, has a very high degree of sensitivity to anything resembling Nazi collaboration.

On February 16th the Universities of Utrecht and Maastricht announced that they had removed Debye's name from their universities. At the University of Utrecht, they stripped the Debye name from the Debye Institute of Physics & Chemistry of Nanomaterials & Interfaces. The Univ. of Maastricht (Debye's hometown) stopped awarding a Debye scientific award because in their view, Debye could no longer serve as a role model for young scientists. A spokesman from the University of Utrecht stated, "Maybe he was forced to do it [purge Jews from the DPG; (the German Physical Society)], but he did it anyway," "He did not act fiercely enough to defend academic freedom," said a spokeswoman from the University of Maastricht.

Given the close relationship that Debye had with our Department, and his extraordinary contributions to the science of chemistry, we felt that it was our duty and responsibility to investigate and respond to this situation. However, at the same time, we did not feel that a "rush to judgment" was in anyone's interest, especially when our Department did not know what the facts were, what the situation was at the time and all of the ethical complexities involved. We have looked closely at the available historical record during Debye's time as director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics (KWIP) and as president of the German Physical Society as well as after his departure from Germany to the United States and during and after the war years. This was done with the help of Mark Walker; a science historian from Union College, who coauthored with Dieter Hoffmann an article in the Dec. 2004 issue of *Physics Today* (pp 52-58) titled "*The German Physical Society Under National Socialism*" in which Debye's presidency of the German Physical Society was discussed and analyzed.

Based on the information to-date, we have not found evidence supporting the accusations that Debye was a Nazi sympathizer or collaborator or that he held anti-Semitic views. It is important that this be stated clearly since these are the most serious allegations.

On the other hand, the charge that he might have been willing to accommodate to the views of the Nazi regime presents a more difficult and nuanced case. One can ask why Debye sought positions of influence, both as director of the KWIP and as president of the DPG when he must have known that he would have to enforce the Nuremberg Laws. Why did he wait so long before

leaving Germany? Was it so that he could help the few remaining non-Aryans in the German Physical Society or the KWIP? Was his departure simply a matter of seizing opportunities to further his scientific interests? One could also ask why he never provided an explanation or rationalization for his actions at the time.

While Debye did not leave an explicit written record addressing these points, his actions in support of the U.S. war effort are well documented. For example in his 1986 book "The Making of the Atom Bomb" Richard Rhodes writes (pp 331-332):

"He (=Szilard) traveled again to Princeton to see Einstein, They worked up another letter and sent it under Einstein's signature to Sachs (= their contact with Roosevelt). It emphasized the secret German Uranium research at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, about which they had learned from the physical chemist Peter Debye, the 1936 Nobel laureate in chemistry and the director of the physics institute in Dahlem, who had been expelled recently to the United States, ostensibly on leave of absence, when he refused to give up Dutch citizenship and join the Nazi Reich".

It is worth remembering that it was this (second) letter from Einstein (to Roosevelt) that served as the catalyst for the Manhattan Project. In addition, Debye's work on polymers used in dielectrics for radar and on synthetic rubber, which was key in the U.S. war effort, and which he undertook very soon after entering this country, is well documented. (See: for example: The Robert A. Welch Foundation Conferences on Chemical Research, 20 (1977) pp 154-200.) It is difficult to reconcile these actions (and numerous others) with someone purported to be a Nazi sympathizer, collaborator or someone with anti-Semitic views. While Debye was late to leave Germany, he nevertheless, did leave causing considerable difficulties for his family and once in the U.S., he made significant contributions to the war effort. Clearly, we would like to have a written record by Debye detailing the rationale for his actions prior to leaving Germany. However, to suggest that the lack of such evidence is in and of itself, incriminating is, in our view, not a defensible position. However, should additional evidence be found in the future, we will be ready to evaluate it in a reasoned manner. Nevertheless, we firmly believe that our decisions must be based on the evidence as we know it today. Thus, based on the information, evidence and historical record known to date, we believe that any action that dissociates Debye's name from the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Cornell University is unwarranted. We acknowledge that this subject is one that will continue to be analyzed through the lens of history, and we will remain active participants in such a debate.



Hector D. Abruna Emile M. Chamot, Professor and Chair Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology
Baker Laboratory, Cornell University Ithaca, New York 14853-1301

7th October 1939
The Rockefeller Foundation
49 West 49th Street,
New York
U. S. A.

Dear Dr. Hasdala,

Owing to the now prevailing conditions in this country, the Max Planck Institute will have to enter a new phase of its existence. I feel it my duty to inform you of the new development, which is unavoidable.

Until now the Institute has been dealing with purely scientific research only. I have been informed that the government itself from now on to decide the kind of questions to be treated in the Institute and does not want that this shall be done under my directorship, because of my Dutch nationality. As I am not willing to change my nationality, I agree with the government that for the time being I cannot act as a director. As a result of an interview between the leading director of the governmental department and myself, which took place the day before yesterday, we came to the following agreement. I do not resign, instead a leave of absence will be granted for the time of the occupation of the Institute during which I will be free to direct my activities, as I think best. During this time my salary will be paid as usual.

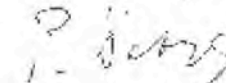
For the second term of the academic year 1939-40 I have been invited to a lectureship at Cornell University. It is also with the consent of the government that I have now officially accepted this invitation.

7th October 39

I am very sorry that for a lapse of time, of which the duration cannot be evaluated in this moment, my work in the Max Planck Institute has to be ended.

It would give me great pleasure if in a few months at my arrival in New York you will be able to spare half an hour, in order that I may see you.

Sincerely Yours,



May 9th, 1940

Professor O. D. Birkhoff,
Department of Mathematics,
Harvard University,
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Dr. Birkhoff:

President Day of Cornell has asked me if I would be willing to be permanently connected with Cornell University. That was some weeks ago, and I answered that I had made up my mind not to go back to Berlin. At the same time I told him that I had discussed a similar proposition with you some years ago, that at that time I had not felt it possible to leave my institute, but that I had promised you to inform you if I changed my mind. President Day agreed that before making a decision, I should talk with you. He ~~saw that I was going to visit Harvard some time during the first part of May and that I should tell~~ you frankly all he said but not by writing. ~~He thought~~ that he would like it better if I waited until I could see you.

I am coming to Harvard from Providence on Friday evening, May 10th, or Saturday morning, May 11th, and will be staying with Dr. Seachard. I will talk in the Physics Colloquium on Monday afternoon, May 13th.

Could I see you during my stay in Cambridge in order to find out what you think about the present situation?

Quite apart from this I am looking forward to meeting you and, I hope, in the best of health.

Very sincerely yours,

P. Debye

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
ITHACA, NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

June 25, 1940

Dear Dr. Debye:

I am glad to know that you are at last in Toronto with prospects that you may be able to work out one phase of your problem without serious delay. I have to go down to Washington on the sleeper tonight and will have your needs in mind while I am there.

I am sorry that you feel at all disturbed over Mr. Meigs' striking citation of the fact that your new appointment is for three years only. The reason for this limitation has to do entirely with the financial arrangements which we have been compelled to set up for the time being. Your appointment for this three-year period is on the Baker Foundation, which is quite all right for the present, but presumably would not do for an indefinite future. Sooner or later we shall have to transfer your appointment to general University funds, but there does not seem to be anything pressing about that just now. I am sure you need not feel that your connection with Cornell is a temporary one. It is the hope of all of us that you may stay on here for the remainder of your active years. At any rate, that is the prospect which I like myself to entertain, and I can assure you that, if the arrangements work out as satisfactorily as I expect they will, I shall do all within my power to keep you permanently attached to Cornell.

Sincerely yours,

EDMUND E. DAY

Dr. Peter Debye
Royal York Hotel
Toronto, Canada

Die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft hat vor vier Jahren ein Forschungsprojekt über ihre Geschichte im Dritten Reich angeregt und die benötigten Finanzmittel dafür bereitgestellt, damit eine in völliger Unabhängigkeit arbeitende internationale Gruppe von Historikern dieses Projekt bearbeiten kann. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung werden von der Forschergruppe im Sommer dieses Jahres im Verlag Wiley-VCH, Weinheim, in Buchform veröffentlicht. Ein Auszug davon, der unter anderem die Zeit des Vorsitzes von Debye behandelt, wird von den beiden an der Studie beteiligten Historikern Prof. Dieter Hoffmann, Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin, und Prof. Mark Walker, Union College, Schenectady, New York, im März-Heft 2006 des Physik Journals (Verlag Wiley-VCH) veröffentlicht.

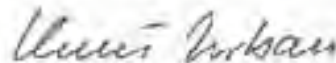
Das Ergebnis dieser Studie steht in krassem Gegensatz zu den Behauptungen Rispens' und den im Artikel der AN erhobenen Beschuldigungen mit Bezug auf das Verhalten von Debye als Vorsitzender der DPG. Vielmehr belegt die Studie anhand der Quellen, daß sich die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft unter ihrem Vorsitzenden Debye bis Ende 1938 im Gegensatz zu anderen Fachgesellschaften der Umsetzung der 1935 erlassenen Nürnberger Gesetze, welche die Mitgliedschaft von Juden ausschloß, widersetzte und erst nach expliziter Anordnung Ende 1938 ihre jüdischen Mitglieder zum Austritt aufforderte.

Die Tatsache, daß Debye in seinem im Auftrag des Vorstandes verfaßten Schreiben an die Mitglieder deutlich zu machen verstand, daß die Aufforderung zum Austritt von Außen erzwungen wurde, machte ihn unmittelbar nach Versand des Briefes zum Ziel von Angriffen von NS-Aktivisten innerhalb der Gesellschaft und von Seiten der NS-Reichsdozentenführung. In einem in der Studie von Hoffmann und Walker als „denunziatorisch“ bewerteten Brief an die Reichsdozentenführung stellte ein Mitglied aus der Gruppe der im Sinne der NS-Ideologie engagierten DPG-Mitglieder fest: „...Die Behandlung der Judenfrage durch die DPG zeigte jedoch, daß für die politischen Fragen ihn (Debye - d.A.) wie nicht anders zu erwarten, das erforderliche Verständnis fehlt.“ Dieser Brief belegt die kritische Distanz Debyes zur NS-Ideologie, die offenbar, so der Wortlaut des Briefes, zu dieser Zeit einschlägig bekannt war. Daß sich Debye, hätte er sich im Sinne der NS-Ideologie nicht beteiligt, niemals zum Vorsitzenden gewählt worden wäre, wird dadurch unterstrichen, daß sich die DPG von 1933 bis 1945 erfolgreich jedem Versuch widersetzte, Parteimitglieder zu Vorsitzenden zu machen.

Ich habe mit Herrn Professor Hoffmann gesprochen. Er hat sich mit Debye im Rahmen seiner Forschungen befaßt. Er wäre bereit, so weit er darüber Kenntnisse besitzt, auch zu anderen gegen Debye erhobenen Vorwürfen Stellung zu nehmen.

Wie eingangs betont, geht es um die Feststellung der Tatbestände, so weit das aus der großen zeitlichen Entfernung noch möglich ist. Dies muß ohne „Ansehen der Person“ geschehen. Rückhaltlose Aufklärung ist nicht nur ein Teil der Bewahrung Deutscher Geschichte sondern ein Teil der Aufgabe, Vergessen zu verhindern und einer Wiederholung vorzubeugen. Das letzte Wort mit Bezug auf die Feststellung der Wahrheit und der daraus abzuleitenden Schlüsse kann aber nicht die vielleicht publikumswirksame und damit gut verkaufbare Buchpresse sondern nur die fachlich anerkannte Wissenschaftshistorik haben.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen



Knut Urban

Anlage: Kopie des Artikels der Historiker Prof. Hoffmann und Prof. Walker

20.11 Peter Debye: A Typical Scientist in an Untypical Time

From Dieter Hoffmann, MPI for History of Science Berlin/Germany (dh@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de), Mark Walker, Union College, Schenectady/USA (walkerm@union.edu)

As directors of the research project "The German Physical Society during the Third Reich" (the results of this project will soon be published as *Physiker zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung*, Weinheim 2006), we would like to make the following contribution to the current discussion of Peter Debye's role during the Third Reich.

Unfortunately we do not read Dutch, so we have been limited to second-hand accounts. However, we are concerned about some of the arguments used and especially about the consequences they have had, because they disregard the historical context

Thus Debye has been criticized for signing letters with "Heil Hitler!" By the mid-1930s, German civil servants were required to use "Heil Hitler!" in certain forms of official correspondence with Nazi officials. As far as we know, Debye used this phrase, either because he was a Professor at the University of Leipzig, or director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Physics, or from 1937 to 1939 president of the German Physical Society (DPG). For example, one can also find letters signed with "Heil Hitler!" by the physicist Max von Laue, one of the (few) scholars who repeatedly demonstrated civil courage vis-à-vis the Nazis and, according to Einstein, someone who had remained decent under National Socialism.

Debye has also been criticized because, even after moving to the USA, he kept in contact with Germany and the authorities there. It was common for scientists leaving Germany--for whatever reason--to try not to burn their bridges with their former home. There are many possible reasons for this, including family and future pension or compensation claims. The central point of the recent criticism of Debye is the purge of "Jewish members from the German Reich" from the German Physical Society in December, 1938. The DPG was one of the last scientific societies to take this step. Before this was done, the Reich Ministry of Science had repeatedly ordered the DPG to conform its statutes to NS policy and in particular take care of the problem of its remaining "non-Aryan" members. In December 1938, a few weeks after the pogrom of Reichskristallnacht, the DPG finally bowed to pressure from the state and sent the following letter to all its members living in Germany.

Because of circumstances beyond our control the membership of German Jews as defined by the Nuremberg Laws in the German Physical Society can no longer be maintained.

With the agreement of the executive board I therefore call upon all members who are affected by these measures to communicate their resignation from the society to me.

Heil Hitler!

P. Debye Chairman

With this circular the DPG formally implemented the ministerial directive--without taking any public position or making any individual expression of enthusiasm. This reserve is nothing for the DPG to be proud

of, but at the time was also nothing to be taken for granted, as the corresponding circulars and activities of other societies and institutions document.

Moreover, this reserve was noticed by a group of Nazi-activists in the DPG, who therefore brought the "non-Aryan question" up at the subsequent executive committee meeting of December 14th. There was an exchange between Debye and a representative of this group. According to the protocol, the latter noted that: the first sentence in the letter ... *was formulated so that it could be misunderstood*. Debye asked that this sentence be understood as it was intended and accepted the responsibility for the formulation chosen.

The correspondence between the representatives of this group was more explicit and denunciatory:

However, the handling of the Jewish Question by the DPG demonstrates that Debye lacks the necessary understanding for political questions, which is what we should have expected. At that time I tried and failed to get a clear position from the Chairman and thereby come to a definitive solution of the problem.

The information service of the leadership of the Reich University Teachers League, a National Socialist organization, also commented sarcastically:

Obviously the German Physical Society is still very backward and still clings tightly to their dear Jews. It is in fact remarkable that only "because of circumstances beyond our control" the membership of Jews can no longer be maintained. Placed into their contemporary context, these events are shameful, but do not make Debye into a Nazi-activist or collaborator. Debye's conduct was not very different from other scholars or contemporaries who lived in and accommodated themselves to National Socialist Germany and loyally served the Third Reich. Moreover this service was rarely due to enthusiasm about the regime, or even out of political motives, rather reveals the technocratic self-conception of the elites of that time. Debye did this as a professor at the University of Leipzig, where he was called in 1927 from Zurich, and in 1937 in the prestigious position of a director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute for Physics in Berlin-Dahlem. He was in no way the successor to Albert Einstein, for by 1937 this institute only shared the name with the "paper" institute that Einstein had directed during his years in Berlin. In practice it was a new institute and the new building ceremonially opened in 1937 in Dahlem was even financed with American money from the Rockefeller Foundation. When Debye accepted the offer of a guest professorship at Cornell University, he did this more because he felt that his scientific authority and autonomy had been damaged, than out of political opposition to the Nazi regime. In the autumn of 1939 his institute was placed under military control in order to investigate the military potential of nuclear fission (however, Debye did not know what sort of research was planned). The National Socialist officials would only allow him to remain as director of the institute if he traded his Dutch citizenship for German. He rejected this and instead used the offer from Cornell in Ithaca, NY to take an official leave of absence and in January of 1940 to go to the USA. This was an alternative which Debye enjoyed as a Dutch citizen and internationally-recognized scientist, but which few scientists in Germany would have had. Debye was exceptional, both because he was Dutch and a Nobel laureate, but his actions were not exceptional for the majority of scientists during this terrible time.

For more on this subject, please see:

D.Hoffmann, M.Walker: The German Physical Society under National Socialism. *Physics Today* 2004, Nr. 12, S. 52-58.

D. Hoffmann: Between Autonomy and Accomodation: The German Physical Society during the Third Reich. *Physics in Perspective* 7(2005) 293-329.

D. Hoffmann: Zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung. Die Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft im dritten Reich. *Physik Journal* 5(2006) 53-58.

D.Hoffmann, M.Walker (eds.): *Physiker zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung*. Verlag Wiley-VCH Weinheim 2006 (forthcoming: ISBN 3-527-40585-2).

March, 2006

21. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gijs van Ginkel (1941) studied biochemistry at the University of Utrecht. He received his PhD at Utrecht University in 1975 at the Department of Molecular Biophysics of the Faculty of Physics and Astronomy. His thesis dealt with the identification of pigments involved in different energy conversion processes in green plants. In 1977-1979 he worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the Dept. of Biophysics of the University of Michigan in East Lansing, USA and at the Carnegie Institution of Washington in Stanford, California, USA.

Back in Utrecht he was appointed Senior Lecturer at the Dept. of Molecular Biophysics of the Faculty of Physics and Astronomy. From 1989-1995 he was a member of the University Council and from 1991-1995 he was Chairman of the Committee of Research and Education of the University Council. From 1995 he was Senior Managing Director of the Debye Institute.