

Corridors of Power: Operational Research and Atomic Weapons, 1936–1962

In his novel *Corridors of Power* (1964), one of C. P. Snow's main characters is the physicist "Francis Getliffe" who, as Snow described him,

had thought more effectively about military-scientific strategy than anyone had. . . . [H]e had not long before screwed himself up to write a pamphlet. In it he had said that there was no military rationale behind the nuclear policy. This analysis got him into trouble, mostly in America, but also in England. In some Right-thinking circles, it had seemed not only preposterous, but also heretical, and something like wicked.¹

The Getliffe character is largely modeled on Blackett.² Lord Snow knew Blackett well. During the late 1920s and early 1930s their paths frequently crossed in Cambridge where Blackett was working in Ernest Rutherford's Cavendish Laboratory and Snow was engaged in molecular spectroscopy while a Fellow at Christ's College.³ In the war years and afterwards, they met in government ministries in London, where Snow was chief of scientific personnel for the Ministry of Labour. In the 1950s they were part of the dinner group of scientists and politicians who met to advise Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson on science policy for the Labour party. Thus Snow knew precisely Blackett's position on nuclear policy, as well as the outrage it provoked in the United States and the United Kingdom. Snow further understood the roots of Blackett's views in his personal experiences in operational research during World War II.⁴

Historians have analyzed the attitudes of American scientists toward the first military use of the atomic bomb in the war against Japan, as well