

**March 25, 1955**

**F. Zeiler to SED First Secretary Walter Ulbricht,  
'Return of the German Specialists from the Soviet  
Union'**

**Citation:**

"F. Zeiler to SED First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, 'Return of the German Specialists from the Soviet Union'", March 25, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, DY 30/3732, SAPMO-Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde. Translated by Paul Maddrell.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110402>

**Summary:**

Report for Walter Ulbricht on the return of German Specialists from the Soviet Union. The report informs Ulbricht of conversations with returning German scientists on their future plans in East Germany.

**Original Language:**

German

**Contents:**

Translation - English

To Comrade Ulbricht, FZ

Technical Department

Berlin, 25 March 1955-Ze/Bö

Subject: Return of the German Specialists from the Soviet Union

#### 1. Collective of Mr. von Ardenne

Comrades Dr. Wittbrodt and Zeiler greeted each and every member of the collective, led by Mr. von Ardenne. Owing to the smooth unfolding of events and the excellent service in the Mitropa restaurant, von Ardenne said that they were immensely impressed and still could not believe that in a few hours they would be in their future home, Dresden.

After a large lunch we accompanied the transport in the train to Dresden.

During the journey to Dresden we had the opportunity, in a four-hour conversation with von Ardenne, of exchanging a number of thoughts, the essence of which I pass on [to you] as follows:

Our overall impression was that von Ardenne wants to proceed at once, with great energy and zest, to make a reality a number of excellent new inventions or developments in his field.

During the journey I had the opportunity, owing to the long absence of Dr. Wittbrodt in another compartment, to speak privately with Mr. von Ardenne. I informed him that the Deputy Prime Minister, Cde. Walter Ulbricht, had expressed the wish, if it were possible, to speak personally with him on Saturday.

This news filled von Ardenne with enthusiasm. He asked me to tell the Deputy Prime Minister that, naturally, he was at his disposal at any time and in particular would like [me] to express his pleasure that he saw in this offer the extraordinary generosity and interest of a member of the government, which, as he said, would not have been possible at all in earlier times (he meant before 1945).

Von Ardenne continued that he would like to express the modest wish, that, if it were possible, he could be allowed to set out before Mr. Ulbricht his plan of action and thoughts, and in addition, that he could with all his strength, satisfy at once all the wishes and demands that the government might have. In this regard, von Ardenne informed me that he and his collective could undertake the manufacture of all the necessary prerequisites for the operation of an atomic pile, but not the construction itself.

Furthermore, he stressed that another, smaller collective led by (Dr. of Physics) Werner Hartmann will arrive, which will be very important in co-ordinating the work of the Ardenne collective. Later in the conversation, which was continued in the presence of Comrade Dr. Wittbrodt, I had the impression that Dr. Wittbrodt and probably, through him, a number of people at the Academy, displayed extraordinary interest in the work of Mr. von Ardenne. I would like to back up this conjecture of mine by quoting a remark Dr. Wittbrodt made before the arrival of the collective in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder. He said that he could not entirely understand why he had to greet the collective as the representative of the Academy, as Comrade Ziller told him some time before that the Academy would have no connections at all with the Ardenne collective and, moreover, did not need to concern itself with it.

Although this is only conjecture on my part, I must mention all the same that even the form of the conversation which Dr. Wittbrodt conducted in my presence during

the journey from Frankfurt to Dresden led me to this view, since Dr. Wittbrodt showed particular interest, whenever possible, in learning much of the things which von Ardenne was thinking of building for us.

It should be mentioned, though, that von Ardenne was very careful and when I was alone with him also said that he would not discuss his future work at all until he had talked about it with Cde. Ulbricht and heard what he had to recommend.

Drawing conclusions from the conversation we had, I would like to make the following remarks about the discussion:

(a)Remarks were made about the situation in the GDR with regard to the influence of the West and, in particular, its efforts to lure away well-qualified scientists. In this regard, Ardenne, and in particular his wife, said that she was very afraid that when her husband went alone along the street there was a danger that he might be kidnapped and taken by force to the West.

Naturally, on this point I supplied some general explanations, but considered further advice from an authorized body to be called for.

(b)[We discussed] the relation of his activity to that of particular scientific institutions in the GDR and in the West.

(c)[There were] questions concerning his personal relation to our government bodies and particular branches of industry, which are connected with the production of devices developed by him.

It should also be mentioned that Ardenne told me that there were a number of specialists in the Soviet Union who had let it be known that they wanted to go West, but he is utterly convinced that, if they are given employment in accord with their wishes and qualifications they will remain here [in the GDR]; he is prepared, at any time, to use his own influence in our support.

In this connection I had the impression that von Ardenne's wife has very great influence over the wives of particular specialists.

On our arrival in Dresden we drove to the Hotel Astoria where, among other things, the Chairman of the District Council, Comrade Jahn, was present. He congratulated each of the specialists on their return to their homeland and expressed the hope that they would quickly settle in Dresden. He himself would do everything possible in his field.

#### 1. Some issues in connection with Prof. Dr. Max Vollmer

As I was informed by Comrade Hager and some of his colleagues, that Prof. Vollmer is the most famous authority in the field of physical chemistry in Germany.

Prof. Vollmer, Prof. Herz and Prof. von Laue (formerly head of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute in West Berlin) are known as the Big Three scientists in this field in the whole of Germany.

Prof. Vollmer, who until 1945 was a full professor and director of the Institute for Physical Chemistry at the TH [Technical University] in Berlin, in a conversation with Comrade Professor Rompe and in the presence of Comrade Reetz of our Department for Academic Life, asked for advice in the following matter:

Prof. von Laue, from West Berlin, whom I mentioned above, probably at the direction of the Americans at the Technical High School in West Berlin, had a big celebration arranged at the TH to greet Prof. Vollmer, at which Prof. Vollmer is to be awarded an honorary doctorate from the Technical High School in West Berlin.

Furthermore, his former Institute and some rooms have been named after him. Prof. Rompe suggested to Prof. Vollmer to do nothing for the time being and not to accept the invitation to West Berlin himself, but, if Prof. von Laue attends a further discussion with members of the Academy in the democratic [East] Sector, to speak with him then.

For all the reasons given, Comrade Hager took the view that, if at all possible, Comrade Ulbricht should pay a personal visit to Prof. Vollmer in Potsdam. At the same time, Prof. Herz should likewise be asked to visit Prof. Vollmer.

Moreover, I was able to discover that Prof. Vollmer, after consulting with Prof. Brucksch about his kidneys, wants to apply himself to a large research project concerned with defense against atomic emissions.

In my opinion, the visit suggested by Comrade Hager would undoubtedly be of great significance, since, as the evidence shows, Prof. Vollmer is an outstanding authority and personally refuses to take up work in the West.

2. Prof. Max Vollmer (Dr. in Chemistry), born 3 May 1885 in Hilden.

1910-1914: Assistant at Institute for Physical Chemistry of Leipzig University

1914-1918: Soldier

1918-1920: Chemist at the Auer Company

1920-1922: Full Professor at Hamburg University

1922-1945: Professor and Director of the Institute for Physical Chemistry at the Technical High School, Berlin

1945: USSR

1. von Ardenne, Manfred, born 20 January 1907 in Hamburg.

1923: High School

1923-1925: Faculty of Mathematics of Berlin University-not completed

1943: Awarded title "Private Lecturer" at Berlin University. He has published approx. 250 scientific treatises in German journals and 15 books about high frequency, superheterodyne reception[15], microphones[16] and television.

1925-1942: Head of his own scientific research institute in Berlin

1942-1945: Head of the scientific research institute of the Ministry for Post and Telecommunications.

F. Zeiler