DOI: 10.1070/PU2001v044n08ABEH001123

A D Sakharov's referee report on O A Lavrent'ev's paper

Top secret (Special dossier)

The refereed paper outlines two ideas:

1) To use the nuclear reactions

$$\text{Li}^7 + \text{H}^1 \rightarrow 2\text{He}^4$$
 and $\text{Li}^6 + \text{H}^2 \rightarrow 2\text{He}^4$ (1)

under the conditions of thermal explosion (produced by the explosion of an atomic bomb) and <u>under conditions of slow</u> controlled thermal combustion.

2) Implementation of a controlled nuclear reaction in a large vacuumed vessel; the author suggests that energy can be extracted by using electrostatic field. The same field will also function to confine nuclei in the reaction zone.

In item 1, I need to emphasize that reactions (1) are not among the most suitable for the conditions of a thermal explosion, because their effective cross sections are too low at temperatures existing in an atomic explosion.

As for item 2, <u>I</u> believe that the author has formulated an extremely important and not necessarily hopeless problem. What we have here is a thermonuclear reaction in a high-temperature gas (billions of degrees) and of such a low density that the available materials can survive under the resulting pressure.

The gas in a system must be maintained for a relatively long time without <u>reaching the walls</u>. This feature poses the greatest difficulties for inventors in this field. The author suggests separating the gas from the walls by a grid that will create a retarding field that would stop the nuclei moving towards the walls. The author assumes that the electrons accelerated in the field applied would leave the vessel and only nuclei would be left at the center of the vessel, creating thereby a positive space charge. The fastest nuclei moving out of the vessel during the nuclear reaction work against the field, so that the system can work as a generator of high-voltage dc current. The high temperature at the center of the vessel must be maintained at the expense of the energy of the thermonuclear reaction.

I will point to a number of difficulties.

- 1) The created density of the gas is limited by the space charge produced and by the electrostatic forces acting on the grid.
- 2) Owing to the low density of the gas, the range of nuclei relative to the nuclear reaction is very high, exceeding the dimensions of the vessel by a factor of tens or even hundreds. Therefore, a very efficient grid is necessary, with wide meshes and thin current-carrying part which must reflect almost all incident nuclei back into the reactor. It is very likely that this requirement is irreconcilable with the requirement of adequate strengths (mechanical and with respect to electron emission).

However, it cannot be excluded that certain changes in the project may correct this difficulty.

I believe that we need to organize a detailed discussion of <u>Cde</u>. Lavrent'ev's project. Regardless of the results of the discussion, it is necessary at this point not to overlook the creative initiative of the author.

August 18, 1950 A Sakharov.

