



Philip Sporn

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1896-1978

By Theodore J. Nagel

Philip Sporn, retired President of American Electric Power Company and a giant in the electric power industry, died of an unexpected heart attack on January 23, 1978.

Typical of the man, he was on his way to work-at the age of eighty-one-at the time he was stricken. He died in a subway station in mid-Manhattan while waiting for a train to take him to his consulting office downtown. Outside was raging one of the most violent snowstorms in recent New York history, through which he had just made his dogged, determined way.

That's the way Phil Sporn was his entire life. He was a Jewish immigrant from Austria, born there November 25, 1896, and brought to the United States as a child. Then nine years old, his vivid memory of Ellis Island-as recalled more than seven decades later on the occasion of his eightieth birthday-was that the lighting at the nearby Statue of Liberty was bad. He devoted his subsequent life to making things brighter, everywhere.

He received his Electrical Engineering degree from Columbia University in 1917, worked briefly for Consumers Power Company in Michigan, and in 1920 joined American Electric Power (AEP), New York. His rise with the Company was rapid, and the growth and stature of the Company itself paralleled that rise. While AEP's Chief Engineer, he built an engineering organization that was then, and remains today, eminent in the electric utility field.

On May 22, 1947, Philip Sporn became the fourth President in

AEP's history, as well as President of its seven operating companies and other subsidiaries, providing electric service in seven east-central states from Michigan to Virginia. He retired as President, at age sixty-five, on November 30, 1961, but remained as a Director until 1968.

During his career as Chief Engineer and then Chief Executive, he led the AEP System in its quest for and its success in attaining a number of technological advances. Among them: large-sized generating units, supercritical-pressure boilers, natural-draft cooling towers, tall stacks, and extra-high-voltage transmission and lightning protection. Appropriately, the Philip Sporn Plant was the first coal-fired generating station to achieve a heat rate of less than 10,000 British thermal units per kilowatt-hour. Historically, since the 1950's, AEP System plants have been among the nation's leaders in this measure of generating efficiency.

Philip Sporn was recognized as preeminent in developing the principles and practices in the design and operation of integrated and highly interconnected power systems. His book, *The Integrated Power System*, one of ten books he wrote, is regarded as the authoritative work in the field. (Today, the AEP System operates sixteen major power plants, including thirteen coal-burning stations, with four more under construction or planned. Today, the AEP System operates over 100,000 circuit miles of transmission and distribution lines, including 1,330 miles at 765,000 volts—the nation's highest voltage. And today, the AEP System is interconnected with twenty-three neighboring utilities at ninety-nine high-voltage interconnection points.)

He was very active in nuclear research and development, in lightning protection developments, and in the development and promotion of electric space heating. He introduced the heat pump to AEP System office buildings in the 1930's.

He was instrumental in the achievement of three industry milestones:

- the founding of the Ohio Valley Electric Corporation to provide the then-record electric energy requirements of the massive uranium-diffusion operation of the U.S. Department of Energy (then the Atomic Energy Commission) near Portsmouth, Ohio;

- the successful persuasion of the aluminum industry, a heavy power consumer, to move into the Ohio Valley for its electric requirements; and
- the marriage of the investor-owned and member-owned electric utility industries, represented by the joint ownership and operation of the Cardinal Plant in Ohio by AEP and Buckeye Power, Inc., the power-supply organization of Ohio's rural electric cooperatives.

Philip Sporn spent forty-eight years with AEP, including almost fifteen years as its President, and six decades in all in the power industry. To that industry he gave many of its technical advances; from that industry he received many of its highest honors.

To list all of the honors is impractical; to list a few is meaningful.

He was a Member of the National Academy of Engineering. He was one of a handful of nonacademicians ever elected a Member of the National Academy of Sciences. He was a Fellow and one of three honorary members of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers; a Fellow and Honorary Member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers; a Fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers; a Fellow of the American Nuclear Society; and an eminent Member of Eta Kappa Nu, the engineering honorary.

Fifty years before his death, Philip Sporn was recognized by the IEEE with its national first prize in the field of engineering practice. He subsequently won, among other honors, IEEE's Edison Medal; the Columbia University Engineering Alumni Association's Egleston Medal; Columbia's Medal of Excellence; the ASME Medal; the Faraday Medal; and in 1955 the John Fritz Medal, the highest engineering honor in the country, presented jointly by the IEEE, ASCE, ASME, and the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers. He was also a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor.

He held thirteen honorary degrees from universities and colleges in six states and two foreign countries, Israel and France. He was particularly active in higher education for decades and no more so than in his "retirement" years. At the time of his death, he was on the advisory councils at both the Cornell College of En

gineering and the Columbia Graduate School of Business. In earlier years he had been a Visiting Professor or Advisory Councilor at Columbia, Cornell, Princeton University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

He was also active in the administration of the Philip and Sadie Sporn Educational Trust Fund, established for student loans at six engineering schools. The fund began with a gift of \$100,000 to Mr. Sporn at his retirement in 1961, made up of employee contributions and company grants, and currently stands at \$275,000.

But, Phil Sporn never really retired. He didn't even slow down. Until his death he remained hard at work: as a consultant and advisor to utility and industrial clients and to the Government of Israel; as a lecturer, visiting professor, and advisory councilman at some of the nation's leading engineering universities; and as an author of books and articles for professional journals.

Nothing has been more symbolic of Mr. Sporn's "retirement" years than his work on behalf of the state of Israel, especially with the Weizmann Institute of Science, of which he was a Governor and a Director of its American Committee. Years earlier, he had helped organize and was the Founding Chairman of the American Society for Technion (Israel Institute of Technology).

Back in the middle 1960's, after he had stepped down from the AEP presidency, his grandson, Michael, one day protested that his grandfather did not have the time to join the rest of the family on an outing. "Grandfather, I thought you had retired," young Mike complained. His grandfather replied, "I did retire, but I haven't stopped working."

Philip Sporn is survived by his widow, Sadie; a daughter, Mrs. Andrew Gilbert, New York; two sons, Arthur, an attorney in New York, and Michael, a physician and head of the Lung Cancer Branch of the National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, Maryland; six grandchildren; and a brother.

