

Atomic Energy

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the house to adopt this measure?

Mr. Green: Could we have a reply from the minister?

Mr. Speaker: If the minister speaks now, he will close the debate.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): I do not believe I need to add anything to the statement which I made the other day in the form of preliminary observations. As my hon. friend said, the objectives of this agency are such as to commend themselves to every section of this house. The purpose of this measure is to accept the proposal first made by the President of the United States in 1953 at the United Nations, namely that there should be set up an agency to provide for the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Under the traditions of this parliament a convention of this sort—although the executive has the power of ratification—is proceeded with before that ratification is given effect to by a resolution of parliament. It is because we are about to dissolve that in order to give effect to our subsequent deposit of the instrument of ratification and, conforming with custom that we are now asking parliament to approve this resolution so as to enable the government of Canada to formally submit its instrument of ratification.

My hon. friend has said that the only countries while ratified are the Soviet union, Egypt and Guatemala. I am not aware that Egypt has ratified, but I may be in error on that. It is true that the Soviet union and Guatemala have. Guatemala, of course, is not an unfriendly country, and I think my hon. friend would recognize that is the case. So far as the Soviet union is concerned, it was the wish and the effort of the original negotiating group of eight countries, of which Canada was one, that in order to make this agency fully effective the Soviet union, as an atomic energy country, should be included.

I am advised that the United States will be ratifying the treaty shortly. I just cannot say whether or not our ratification will be submitted before or after that formal act on the part of the United States, but I offer as a likelihood that our formal act would take place after the United States had deposited its instrument. I could not make that as a positive statement because I do not know. However I can say that we have been closely in touch with the United States in this matter and I do know that the United States intends to ratify as well.

[Mr. Mitchell (London).]

Mr. Mitchell (London): May I ask the minister a question? I can foresee the possibility of the 18 ratifying nations containing a majority of powers or nations with whom we are not in sympathy. My question would be simply this. Will the government use its powers now granted to it to make sure that they are not embarrassed by having entered into an instrument of ratification and deposited it at a time when this convention could come into effect and be under the control of unfriendly powers?

Mr. Martin: I am sure my hon. friend may be assured of that. In addition to the necessity of observing the traditional practice of our parliament so far as a resolution preceding ratification is concerned, the exigencies of the situation are that while there is now in being a preparatory commission which is now carrying out its tasks, nevertheless signatory governments are proceeding to ratification of the statute which will come into force only after some 18 powers, as my hon. friend has just mentioned, have deposited their instruments of ratification; but it is significant that before the ratifications of these 18 powers can be effected, at least three of the following countries must have ratified: the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, France and the Soviet union. Therefore unless three of those five countries of the 18 have submitted their instruments of ratification the agency does not come into being.

On the matter of trade, I can only say that we must look at the long-term prospects of the agency. It would be wrong to attribute to this agency available functions and achievements in the too immediate future. At the moment I can do no more than refer to the objectives stated in article III of the statute, and indicate first of all that the preparatory commission is only now preparing recommendations as to the initial program for consideration by the first general conference. It has, however, been the government's position throughout that the agency must exercise due caution at the outset to ensure proper planning and sound financing.

My hon. friend will have noted, undoubtedly, that in section 5 of article III provision is made for the supervision and control of fissionable material in such a way as not to further the military interests of any particular country or group.

Mr. Mitchell (London): May I ask one further question of the minister. I recognize what he has said as being a fact and I, for my part and I believe all members, agree with the objectives which this convention has. My worry is this. If you have 18 signatories