

Atomic Energy

Mr. Howard C. Green (Vancouver-Quadra): Mr. Speaker, when this resolution came up for debate two days ago there was a brief statement made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) and one even more brief made by the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) and as we had not yet seen the copy of the statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency I moved the adjournment of the debate.

This evening the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Michener) is going to deal with the terms of that statute but before that is done I should like to point out one or two facts with regard to the manner in which this measure has been brought before the house.

This proposed statute was signed by Canada on October 26, 1956 and of course it required ratification by parliament. For some reason or other the resolution which we are now debating was not placed on the order paper until March 30, in other words ten days ago. At that time copies of the statute had not been distributed to hon. members. Apparently one copy was tabled in February but even today copies of this extremely important statute are not available to all hon. members. We received five copies for our party and I think altogether there were only 30 or 40 copies for distribution.

The Minister of Trade and Commerce the other evening in his usual "do things in a hurry" fashion gave as an excuse for rushing this resolution through the house the fact that there was to be a meeting in September and if the Canadian parliament did not ratify the statute at this session then Canada could not be represented at the September meeting.

This way of doing things is unfortunate; it is very unfair to hon. members of the house, to the members of the press and to the Canadian people. I am afraid, however, that it is just typical of the attitude of the cabinet toward parliament. They either forgot that this statute had to be ratified by parliament or they did not care enough for parliament to bring it on in time to provide for proper consideration of the measure. That is the situation in which we find ourselves tonight.

This statute contains very far-reaching provisions having to do with atomic energy. Canada is vitally interested in what takes place in this field. This statute should have been placed before the house early in the session and there should have been provided an opportunity for it to be considered by a committee of the house which could have called witnesses and carried on a proper examination and could have found out all the implications which will follow Canada's ratification of this statute.

Last year we had a special committee on atomic energy and research; two fields which

never should have been linked although the government saw fit to so link them. This year there should have been, in view of the fact that this particular statute was to come up, a committee on atomic energy to review the statute very carefully. If this course had not been followed then the statute could have been referred to the standing committee on external affairs.

This way of doing the country's business is not good enough even though there is to be an election this summer. The whole field of atomic energy is probably the most important field in Canada's future and yet ever since the war we have been treated like a lot of children in so far as anything having to do with atomic energy is concerned. We have been able to get a special committee appointed in, I think, only three years. There should have been a committee of this house on atomic energy right from the start, just as there has been in the United States. I am not suggesting that this committee should have had such wide powers as the United States committee has, but there should have been a committee of our Canadian type, whose responsibility would be to keep in touch with the developments in the atomic energy field.

Now that we are faced with this question tonight I can only suggest that the next parliament, no matter which party may be in the majority and no matter which party has the responsibility of forming a government, should see to it that there is either a standing committee on atomic energy or a special committee appointed every year so that this house and the people of this country will be better able to keep in touch with what is going on in this important field.

I must express regret that the government has been so indifferent to the rights of parliament as to throw this matter before us in the last few hours of the session in the form on a little booklet published in New York, I presume by what is called the preparatory commission, and then expect this house to swallow it without having been in the position to give it the consideration which it merits.

Mr. Colin Cameron (Nanaimo): Mr. Speaker, I must endorse the remarks of the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) about the way in which this particular measure has been handled. I agree that it would have been very valuable to this house had the statute of the international atomic energy commission been referred to a committee so that there could have been a full discussion of the implications, the possibilities and also the limitations of the statute.

I think I can say at this time that this group welcomes the statute on two grounds; one,