

Supply—Atomic Energy Control Board

does it not make it more possible to have a committee? I was concerned with the industrial uses rather than defence purposes. It is quite obvious now that atomic energy is to be used very widely in the industrial field, and what worries me is that parliament is completely in the dark about that development.

Mr. Howe: If the committee went to Chalk River today, they could not be shown any application of the power, because that does not exist. Development has reached a point where scientists are confident it is not very far away, but results are intangible at the moment. I think a year from now a committee would be more interested in the then situation. I doubt if the committee would find very much new to look at in Chalk River today, after having visited the plant three years ago. The equipment is not very different, but the thinking and the actual experiments have led us much farther along the trail than any results that are visible would indicate. I think a year from now you will be able to see some very interesting results. As I say, however, I am neutral on the subject of a committee.

Mr. Murray (Cariboo): In view of the strong efforts that are being made in certain quarters to divide us from the United States, do you not think it would be worth while to exchange with United States scientists and industrialists as much information as possible regarding the entry of the atomic age into Canada?

Mr. Howe: We would be delighted to exchange information with the United States, but their McMahon Act prevents any information leaving the country except under very rigid rules. We are hoping that the provisions of the McMahon Act will be relaxed to the extent that we can exchange information on civilian projects. To date, that has not been possible.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, as the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra has pointed out, the report made by the Minister of Trade and Commerce today with regard to atomic energy is a welcome one. I feel that the government, the minister and those working with him are to be commended for the active direction they are giving to the development of atomic energy and in particular to the attention they have given to developing its uses not only in the industrial field but in the field of medicine.

When atomic energy is mentioned, most of us still remember the circumstances under which we first learned of the breaking up of the atom, and we are still aware of the atom's tremendous possibilities for death and

destruction; but it is also true that it holds equally tremendous possibilities for peacetime uses. I believe that the government is certainly carrying out the will of the people to the extent that it is trying to further peacetime industrial and medical development of atomic energy. I hope that effort will be pursued with all of the capabilities the minister has. When he takes over projects such as Trans-Canada Air Lines or Polymer or atomic energy, things begin to hum. I am sure we all welcome the indication that there might be an atomic energy power plant within ten years.

I am also glad that there is no question as to the continued government ownership and control of all atomic energy operations in this country. I may say, however, that I am concerned—speaking now technically—with the wording of the particular item that is before us. I did not join in the objections to item 654, which were based on the ground that it was legislation by an item in the estimates. I think, however, that that criticism can be levelled at this item. In the case of item 654 at least it could be said that no statute of parliament was being circumvented. The agreement between the crown and Polymer which was to be amended was an agreement approved by order in council back in the war years. But item 656 provides expressly for circumventing section 3 of the Atomic Energy Control Act.

I imagine that the Minister of Finance may want to tell me that that also is a common practice, namely to word items in the estimates in such a way as to circumvent existing statutory provisions. But I would point out that the fact that it is a practice that has been followed a good deal does not consecrate it, to use the word which the minister used a little while ago. The minister could pick out items in the supplementary estimates that are now before us, where that is done. For example, some of the items under the heading of "Legislation" use this same language: Notwithstanding such and such section of such and such an act. But I point out to him that those are examples which the Auditor General pointed to when he suggested that this sort of thing was bad practice. In fact, these very items under "Legislation" are ones that he proposed should be covered by amendments to the legislation rather than by items of this kind. I therefore suggest that the Minister of Finance should not fall back on those other items that were passed in these supplementary estimates as a defence for what is being done in item 656. Here quite clearly we are being asked, by the simple expedient of an item in the estimates,