



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE ATOMIC ENERGY BILL

A statement by Hon. C. D. Howe,
Minister of Reconstruction and
Supply, in the House of Commons,
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Recent developments in the field of atomic energy have placed Canada in a somewhat unique position among the nations of the world, in that Canada is an important source of raw material, and, as well, shares with the United States the position of having a plant able to produce the final product from which atomic energy can be released. For that reason, it is essential that legislative action be taken by Parliament to control both the production of atomic energy and the materials from which this energy is derived. It is also of the first importance to encourage further research and development towards a peaceful and constructive application of atomic energy, under proper safeguards.

Honourable Members are familiar with the part which Canada has played in the development of the atomic bomb. The House will recall that the primary material required for atomic fission is uranium. Eldorado Mine on Great Bear Lake is the second most important deposit of uranium oxide that has been discovered to date. The importance of this material as a potential war weapon was recognized some three years ago, when the Government expropriated the ownership of the Eldorado Mine near Great Bear Lake, North West Territories, together with its refinery, located at Port Hope, Ontario.

Activities in the field of atomic energy have been carried on in close association with the United Kingdom and the United States. In 1942 the Montreal laboratory was established and leading scientists of the United Kingdom joined with those in Canada to press forward the development of the science of the atomic energy. In 1943, United States had made such progress in developments leading towards the possibility of creating a successful atomic bomb, that it became clear that Allied efforts in this field should be co-ordinated and closely integrated. Accordingly, a Combined Policy Committee, representative of the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, was formed under the chairmanship of Mr. Stimson, United States Secretary of War. Other United States representatives were President Conant of Harvard University and Mr. Vannevar Bush, President of the Carnegie Institute. The United Kingdom was represented by Lord Halifax and Field Marshal Sir Maitland Wilson. Canadian membership on the Committee was held by myself, as Minister of Munitions and Supply.

In pre-war years, the United Kingdom Government had made a substantial contribution to the development of atomic energy in the field of research. The Joint British-Canadian Laboratory in Montreal continued this work. The Montreal organization came under the administrative control of our National Research Council, and this laboratory, with a staff of over 340, became the largest organization ever created in this country to carry out a single research project.

Prior to the war, Eldorado Mine, and its refinery at Port Hope had been primarily concerned with the production of radium, with uranium as a less important by-product. Radium was in over-supply at the outbreak of war, and, as a consequence, operation of the mine at Great Bear Lake had been suspended. When the importance of uranium was recognized, the mine was re-opened and brought back into production as rapidly as possible. The refinery was enlarged, and was able to refine ore from foreign sources during the period required to bring down Eldorado ore from Great Bear Lake. Since then, the refinery has been in operation day and night, and has processed a substantial part of the uranium requirements of the United Nations.

A plant for the preparation of fissionable material has been constructed at Chalk River, Ontario, for the purpose of exploring one particular process for producing the ultimate material. This plant has certain features that make it unique, and it is believed by our partners in the United States and in the United Kingdom that Chalk River can make a substantial contribution in the field of peacetime development and use of this new source of energy. It is expected that the plant at Chalk River will provide a centre of research in Canada that will not be excelled elsewhere in the world, for a considerable time at least.

From this brief review of wartime developments, Honourable Members will appreciate the important position of Canada in the field of atomic energy. I have not traversed the field in great detail, since all Honourable Members have in mind a comprehensive review of Canada's part in these matters made by the Prime Minister in a statement to the House on the 17th of December, 1945, on the occasion of moving a resolution to approve the agreed declaration signed at Washington on the 15th of November, 1945, by President Truman and Prime Ministers Attlee and Mackenzie King.

Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were largely responsible for the surrender of Japan and the sudden ending of the war. Since the ending of the war, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada have continued their co-operation, recognizing the imperative need for the control of atomic energy as a weapon of war, as well as for its development in the service of mankind. The purpose of the Bill that will be based on this resolution will be to encourage research in this field, both public and private, while taking adequate security measures against the use of the material from which atomic energy is derived, as a weapon of war.

The three-nation declaration on atomic energy signed at Washington on November 15th, 1945, which was approved in this House on December 17th, 1945, gave recognition to the need for further co-operation, not only between the three countries which have been mainly concerned, but also for extending this co-operation to all countries through the United Nations. The declaration recommended the setting up of a Commission under the United Nations to prepare recommendations on atomic energy for submission to that Organization.

Such a Commission was set up, by resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, on January 24th last. Because of her special position in this field, Canada is the only country, apart from the Great Powers permanently represented on the Commission. General McNaughton has been appointed Canadian representative, and the Commission will hold its first meeting on June 14th. This Commission has been charged with the responsibility of enquiring into all phases of atomic energy, and, in particular, of making specified proposals with regard to certain objectives which were stated in the resolution of the United Nations Assembly setting up the Commission, as follows:-

- (a) For extending between all nations the exchange of basic scientific information for peaceful ends.
- (b) For control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes;
- (c) For the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction;
- (d) For effective safeguards, by way of inspection and other means, to protect complying States against the hazards of violation and evasions.

Much has been said and written about the form of international control that should be initiated. The Government is giving earnest study to this immensely complex problem. It seems to me that the meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission will mark only the first step on the road towards international control. It is recognized that the final solution of the problem can be attained only by stages. In the long run, the finding of a solution must depend on good-will and mutual confidence between all the nations concerned.

I am sure that the House will agree with me that the immense gravity of the issue raised by the discovery of atomic fission, and its potential danger to civilization, has made it imperative that we should approach this question in a boldly constructive manner. It may very well be that the problem of dealing with the newly-discovered force, so dangerous to human society, may afford us an opportunity of making a great step forward in the field of international co-operation.

Among the many discussions of the form which international control of atomic energy may ultimately take, the report recently published by the State Department of the United States, which was prepared by a board of consultants, all specialists in the field, under the chairmanship of Dr. Lillenthal, deserves careful study. This report constitutes perhaps the most far-reaching attempt so far made to sketch out a plan that would control the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, and turn the discovery into productive channels. I feel sure that Honourable Members will find the Lillenthal report an absorbing and enlightening document.

Until such time as the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission has made its recommendations, and has translated these recommendations into action, it remains the responsibility of Canada, as well as that of the United States and the United Kingdom, to establish and maintain conditions under which these recommendations can be made fully effective. Canada, and all other nations possessing raw materials, or productive apparatus, or special knowledge with respect to atomic energy, have a very special responsibility to establish and maintain conditions which will ensure the effective carrying out of any recommendations that may be made by the Commission to provide for international control of atomic energy.

In the United Kingdom, first reading has already been given to an Atomic Energy Bill which will empower the United Kingdom Government to establish control over the production or use of atomic energy. In the United States the McMahon Bill has been drafted by a Special Senate Committee on atomic energy, and I am informed that the administration intends to conclude legislation on the domestic control of atomic energy before the adjournment of the present session of Congress.

The House will appreciate, from the reasons I have just outlined, the necessity for introducing a Bill for the control of atomic energy in Canada, in the terms of the resolution now being considered. It remains for me to say something of the general character of the legislation proposed.

Fresh discoveries in the field of atomic energy may bring about swift developments which cannot now be foreseen precisely. Therefore, the measures for control must be not only wide, but also flexible, to meet the new situations.

The Bill that will be based on this resolution will provide for a Board that will continuously study the field of atomic energy. It will be the responsibility of the Board to propose regulations designed to meet fresh situations as they develop. Any such regulations would be issued under the authority of the Governor in Council. The Board will be organized, and will function, much along the lines of the National Research Council. Liaison with the National Research Council is provided for, by making the President of the Council a member of the Board.

There will be provision in the Bill for the incorporation of Crown Companies, and for the taking over of existing Crown Companies, should the Board decide that atomic energy operations can better be performed by separate and subsidiary organizations. It is possible that the operations at Great Bear Lake, Port Hope, and Chalk River, may be carried on by Crown Companies, under the close supervision of the Board.

The Board will report to the Committee of the Privy Council on Industrial and Scientific Research, to which presently the National Research Council reports. An annual report of the Board will be tabled in the House of Commons by the Chairman of the Committee, who, at the moment, is myself. The Board will make such other reports to the Committee as may be required, and will also, on the Board's own initiative, report any matters which the Board considers should be brought to the attention of the Government. Thus, machinery is provided for the Government being kept fully informed, and in a position to deal with any question relating to atomic energy which will deserve its attention, or which may be brought up in this House.

Apart from the proceeds of its operations, the work of the Board, and the operation of the Crown Companies, will be financed by monies voted by Parliament for this specific purpose. Any regulations made by the Board are to be published promptly and tabled in Parliament.

It is the intention of the Government to encourage scientific initiative, and research, directed towards finding constructive applications for the use of atomic energy. The Bill will empower the Board not only to itself undertake research and investigation, but also to facilitate and finance approved research, to be carried out in our universities and elsewhere, under proper safeguards.

To build up a Canadian source of raw materials, the Government will carry out its own prospecting and development program, and will encourage private prospecting, even though all the materials related to the production and use of atomic energy are to be under Government control at all stages.

Thus, the Bill will provide means for continuing the important developments that have placed Canada in the forefront of wartime developments in the field of atomic energy, as well as means for furthering and encouraging research and development in the peacetime application of atomic energy. The Bill will provide also an appropriate legislative basis, both for the domestic control of this highly dangerous substance, and for international measures which will need to be concerted by the United Nations Commission.

All Honourable Members will agree with regard to the need for legislation of the kind outlined in the resolution, as a means of bringing under control a newly discovered force of nature that promises great benefits to mankind when applied to peacetime uses, but which has great destructive potentials to mankind unless developed under strict Government control. There can be no lack of agreement with regard to the objectives of the Bill, and I feel that there will be general acceptance of its provisions.