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“Under Threat of War”

“Unfortunately, only the barest summary of the Waverley Report has been published . . .” (Lord Wilmot of Selmeiston speaking in the House of Lords Debate on the Atomic Energy Project, December 14, 1953.)

“The whole discussion on this problem, of course, is bedevilled with the difficulty of military secrecy.” (Viscount Falmouth, who moved the Motion which led to the same Debate.)

“Why is it, I wonder, that the only books one can get dealing with these subjects are American? Some are good and some are not so good. But in view of the attitude of Her Majesty’s Government on this matter one begins to wonder why they allow these books to be imported at all, so anxious do they appear to be not to let any of Her Majesty’s subjects have the least idea of these problems.” (Viscount Falmouth.)

The first of these quotations has a general application, the second and third had a technical context, but might also have a more extended application. It is the case, as has been hinted in this review earlier, that the military secrecy investing the industrial application of Atomic energy bedevils popular understanding. In this respect it may be a mask for Finance, which ultimately sets the problem now confronting Society; but in other respects also, the electorate, and as certainly its ‘representatives,’ have the choice of considering a technological development of unprecedented importance which they cannot, such are the imaginative and intellectual limitations of all individuals, follow to its conclusion, or, on the other hand of accepting or rejecting a *policy*, which they might understand, if it were frankly exhibited for their consideration.

Viscount Falmouth in his speech made two statements closely juxtaposed, *viz.*:—

“Of course, when one has unlimited public money at

one’s disposal, as appears to be the case in this instance . . .” and:

“After all we are very short of money.”

Better than other folk, our readers will know how far and in what sense either of these statements is true. They may not see, because a secrecy alleged to be military in origin conceals the data, the immediate economic effects of any Atomic Energy project. They will not see, for no one can foresee, more distant effects. Concerning the data kept from public knowledge, they can make enquiry of those who should supply it, and can insist upon plain answers. This covers all matters of redistribution of manpower, and all matters affecting the relationship between money and production. If production by Atomic energy isn’t ‘cheaper,’ what is it? What other advantage has it, and to whom?

To stimulate interest we publish the text of the White Paper of last November, on “The Future Organisation of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Project”:—

THE FUTURE ORGANISATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM ATOMIC ENERGY PROJECT

1. From the time the present Government came into office, it has thought that atomic energy development in this country has reached a stage which might require a change in the nature of the controlling organisation.

2. On the 15th November, 1951, the Prime Minister informed the House of Commons (Col. 1162) that he was considering what adjustments should be made in the existing statutory responsibilities of the Minister of Supply for atomic energy questions. On 24th March, 1952 (Col. 22), he informed the House that in view of important experiments to be made in the autumn (the atomic weapon test at Monte Bello in October, 1952) it was not the appropriate moment to make radical changes in the existing arrangements or to create a new organisation on a long-term basis.

3. Immediately after the successful completion of the Monte Bello test a review of the existing arrangements was put in hand, and on 28th April, 1953 (Cols. 1966-1972), the Prime Minister informed the House that the Government had decided in principle that responsibility for atomic energy should be transferred from the Ministry of Supply to a non-Departmental organisation, and had appointed a Committee consisting of Lord Waverley (Chairman), Sir Wallace Akers and Sir John Woods, with the following reference:—

“To devise a plan for transferring responsibility for atomic energy from the Ministry of Supply to a non-Departmental organisation and to work out the most suitable form for the new organisation, due regard being paid to any constitutional and financial implications.”

4. During the war, work on atomic energy was entrusted to a special directorate under the Department of

Scientific and Industrial Research. At the end of the war, the position of the United Kingdom in atomic energy work was such that an almost completely fresh start had to be made. Most of our leading scientists in this field had been transferred to the United States in 1943, when it was decided that the production of atomic bombs must be concentrated on the other side of the Atlantic,* and with their departure most of the work in progress here had to be closed down. Moreover, British industry inevitably had much more limited opportunities than its counterpart in the United States to take an active part in the war-time development of the completely novel techniques which had to be employed. When the war ended, large industrial concerns in the United Kingdom which might, in other circumstances, have been able and willing to undertake major tasks in the field of atomic energy found their resources fully committed to the task of re-conversion to peace-time production in order to meet the overriding need for the rebuilding of our exports.

5. In these circumstances only a Government-sponsored organisation could provide the financial and other resources needed for the novel, complicated and costly establishments which research and development would require. The choice lay between an ordinary Government Department and some form of non-Departmental organisation; and in the autumn of 1945 the Government of the day decided that the task should be entrusted to the Ministry of Supply which, owing to the contraction of its war-time responsibilities, had at its disposal a wide range of surplus facilities and resources, and much war-time experience of quasi-industrial problems. The new arrangements were given statutory form in the Atomic Energy Act, 1946.

6. From the outset it was necessary to design and construct very large factories to be run on industrial lines, for the production of fissile material, but for some years the keynote of the project was essentially research. As time went on, however, the massive size of the enterprise, and the growing importance of weapons production and the industrial applications, began to mark it out as something quite exceptional in the range of Departmental activities.

7. Although it was realised from the beginning that atomic energy had both civil and military possibilities, the latter represented for some time the only concrete objective, for, while it had been demonstrated that an atomic bomb could be made, the technical foundation for the building of a nuclear power reactor had not yet been laid. By June, 1952, enough progress had been made for the Government to be able to approve the first civil reactor programme; and the Monte Bello test in October, 1952, brought the production of atomic weapons, as well as research and development, into the project's field of activity.

8. It is, as the Minister of Supply stated in the House of Commons on 26th January, 1953 (Col. 674), "too early to say with any precision how soon electricity generated from atomic energy will be available on a significant scale for industrial purposes." Even if the experimental work at present in hand shows that industrial power can be generated successfully and economically the great magnitude of the investment required must mean that it will be decades before a large proportion of the country's electricity can be generated by nuclear reactors. It is characteristic of all great innovations—steam, electricity, internal combustion engines,

* The United Kingdom's contribution to the Anglo-American war-time effort is described in "Statements relating to the atomic bomb." (H.M.S.O., 1954.)

aircraft—that there is a considerable interval between the first demonstration that the idea is practicable and the time when the new invention becomes a common feature of everyday life. But however crude and primitive our first nuclear power reactors may appear to future generations, we can look forward with confidence to the time when industrial power from the atom will be a major factor in the world's economy. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the exploitation of nuclear energy may come to be regarded as the most important step taken by man in the mastery of nature since the discovery of fire.

9. But there is still a long way to go and much work to be done. Thanks to its pioneer work, this country is well placed to play a leading part in these developments; and because of our strained resources, and the rising cost of power from the sources which have been used hitherto it is particularly important that we should not be left behind in a race on which our industrial future may depend.

10. An enterprise of this kind, requiring the development of many entirely novel techniques, which in turn depend on many kinds of research, physical, chemical, metallurgical and engineering, on the very frontiers of knowledge, needs all the imagination and drive which we, as a nation, can provide; above all it calls for flexibility and for rapidity of decision.

11. As the industrial uses of atomic energy become relatively more prominent, the case for a form of control of the project which is more akin to the structure of a big industrial organisation than to that of a Government department becomes increasingly strong; and it will, in the Government's view become stronger with the increase in the need for closer contact and co-operation with industry, including the nationalised industries, and the widening application of atomic techniques.

12. It is considerations such as these which have led the Government to conclude that the most rapid and economical development in this field will be secured by transferring responsibility from the Ministry of Supply to a non-Departmental organisation with the necessary executive power, within the framework of an approved policy and under a financial ceiling, to settle day-to-day problems. They believe that the necessary flexibility and speed of decision can best be obtained from the Board of an organisation run on industrial lines, and with no responsibility outside the field of atomic energy. They have noted that all the other countries working in this field have adopted some special form of organisation, outside the normal framework of an ordinary Government department.

13. The Government recognised, however, that the transfer of responsibility from the Ministry of Supply to a non-Departmental organisation would present difficulties which would require careful study and which ought to be thoroughly explored before a final decision could be reached. It was also clear that, because of the need for close control of policy by the Government, and the dependence of the organisation on public funds, the form of the non-Departmental organisation would be bound to differ from that of any now in existence. The Committee under Lord Waverley's Chairmanship was therefore appointed. That Committee has considered the matter in detail, and has produced a comprehensive report which deals with many matters which, for reasons of security, cannot be disclosed. The report cannot therefore be published in full; but a summary.

of the Committee's main recommendations is contained in Appendix I to this Memorandum.

14. All these recommendations have been accepted by the Government. The Minister responsible to Parliament for the future Corporation will be the Lord President of the Council (paragraph 6 of Appendix I). The following additional arrangements should also be mentioned:—

(a) The Ministry of Supply will be responsible to the Services for the provision of complete atomic weapons (paragraph 3 of Appendix I). It will place contracts with the Corporation for the production of the nuclear components of such weapons and for research in relation to specific Service requirements.

(b) The salaries offered by the Corporation should not be seriously out of scale with those paid by other public corporations (paragraph 18 of Appendix I).

15. The necessary administrative preparations for giving effect to the Committee's recommendations are now being made. An Order in Council under the Ministers of the Crown (Transfer of Functions) Act, 1946, in the form shown in Appendix II to this memorandum, will shortly be laid before Parliament. This Order will transfer responsibility for atomic energy from the Minister of Supply to the Lord President of the Council as from 1st January, 1954. The transfer will include financial responsibility, but will involve little or no net additional expenditure. Spring Supplementary Estimates will be presented to effect the necessary adjustments for the remaining three months of the financial year, between the Votes accounted for by the Ministry of Supply and by the Lord President's Office.

16. Later, a Bill will be introduced to provide for the setting up of the Corporation.

17. In conclusion, it is desired to stress two points to which the Prime Minister drew attention in his statement announcing the setting up of Lord Waverley's Committee. First, overall policy will remain firmly in the hands of the Government. While the Corporation will be given freedom in the day-to-day management of its affairs, including its finances, its operations must be governed by Government directives which will lay down its objectives and direct its policy. Second, the rights and interests of the existing staff will be fully respected, and consultation with staff representatives will take place at the appropriate time.

APPENDIX I

Summary of the Main Recommendations of Lord Waverley's Committee.

Transfer of Responsibility

1. We recommend that an Atomic Energy Corporation should be established. This should be a statutory Corporation with an executive Board.

2. There should be transferred to this Corporation from the Ministry of Supply the responsibility for the establishments at present controlled by the Atomic Energy Research Establishment; by the Production Division; and by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment.

3. The Ministry of Supply should continue to be responsible for the conventional components of atomic weapons.

4. Well in advance of the vesting date, action should be taken to provide, in a form suitable for transfer to the Corporation, the majority of the common services, provided at

present by the Headquarters Divisions of the Ministry of Supply jointly for the Atomic Energy and other Establishments of that Ministry.

5. The question whether or not to use the Ministry of Works as an Agent for building services should be left for decision until the Corporation is established.

The designated Minister

6. There should be designated a Minister responsible to Parliament for monies provided for the Corporation and for the policy directions given to the Corporation. The main task of this Minister will be to ensure the well-being and efficiency of the Corporation as a whole and the maintenance of a balance between the use of atomic energy for defence, for power and to an increasing extent in the biological applications, in conformity with policy laid down from time to time by Ministers collectively. This Minister should be one of the existing Ministers of high Cabinet rank who has no departmental responsibilities which encroach upon the field of atomic energy. The most suitable Minister seems to be the Lord President of the Council. We do not, however, make a specific recommendation that he should be designated since there might be advantage in leaving it open to the Government of the day to consider which of the holders of the sinecure offices should be charged with this special and rather personal responsibility.

7. There should be a Ministerial Committee representative of all the Ministers whose Departments are concerned with the various aspects of atomic energy. The designated Minister should be the Chairman of this Committee.

8. The designated Minister would require a small group of officials to assist him. These officials should constitute a small department responsible solely to him and should not owe allegiance to any of the Departments having a particular interest in the application of atomic energy.

9. An Official Committee representative of all the Departments concerned with Atomic energy will be required as at present.

10. The Corporation should at the outset be given a directive requiring it to consult the Official Committee on all matters of external policy. The channel of communications for agreed decisions on such matters of policy should be through the Foreign Office or the Commonwealth Relations Office as the case may be.

11. The Ministry of Defence should remain generally responsible, after the Corporation is set up, for the allocation of resources available for defence purposes between atomic weapons and conventional arms and for the distribution of effort between the research, development and production of atomic weapons.

Finance

12. The Corporation's expenditure will be very heavy and, at least for many years to come, its receipts will be relatively small. We recommend that the money required should be voted annually by Parliament to the designated Ministry in the form of a grant, unspent money being surrendered at the end of the year.

13. We recommend that responsibility for securing observance of the conditions attached by Parliament to this yearly grant should rest, subject to the designated Minister, with an Accounting Officer who should be the official head

of that Minister's Department. There should be no insuperable difficulty about making arrangements to ensure that the Minister and his Accounting Officer are not required to answer for all the detail of the Corporation's financial arrangements.

14. We should not expect the arrangements for ensuring adequate financial control, as normally exercised by Parliament and the Treasury, to differ widely from the usual departmental pattern for obtaining approval of the annual estimate and subsequently of individual items of expenditure. It would, however, be essential to ensure that these arrangements give the Corporation freedom to conduct its affairs, including the execution of large capital projects, in a business-like way. The detailed arrangements should be left for discussion between the Corporation, the designated Minister's Department and the Treasury at the appropriate time.

15. The Corporation should be allowed rather more flexibility and discretion in respect of capital expenditure than is usual with Government Departments; it should be allowed to proceed, after the annual estimate has been approved, and without further reference to the designated Department or the Treasury, with projects up to a higher figure than is permitted to Departments.

16. Audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General will be appropriate. We presume that in the exercise of his powers the Comptroller and Auditor General would have regard to the special arrangements for delegation of financial authority to the Corporation.

The Corporation

17. The Chairman of the Board of the Corporation should discharge the functions of a General Manager. The Board should include four whole-time functional directors: one for engineering and production; one for weapons; one for research and one for administration and finance. In addition we recommend the appointment of two part-time members without a separate technical function.

18. Special arrangements will be required in respect of salaries and conditions of service to enable the Corporation to compete with industry for men for all its top level posts; below the top however all reasonable steps must be taken to avoid standards widely divergent from those in the Civil Service.

19. Security should be primarily the responsibility of the Corporation; but it should be recognised that the designated Minister may from time to time, or as occasion may require, satisfy himself as to the working of the security arrangements.

Transfer problems

20. Special consideration should be given to safeguarding, so far as possible, the interests of existing Civil Servants working in the atomic energy undertakings when responsibility for these is transferred to the Corporation. The following points (on which, however, we do not feel called upon to make any specific recommendation) were particularly mentioned to us by the Trade Union side of the Joint Industrial Council and the Staff side of the Ministry of Supply Administrative Whitley Council:—

- (a) Information on future conditions of service should be made available to the staff at the earliest possible moment.

- (b) There should be full and timely consultation on problems arising out of the transfer.
- (c) The Corporation should recognise the appropriate Unions and Staff Associations, and make provision for joint consultation between employees and management on the general lines of the Whitley system.
- (d) Safeguards should be provided for the establishment prospects of the present non-established industrials; for the virtual right of temporary staff after seven years' service to a gratuity; and for other conditions of service such as the Code of Industrial Travelling rules; transfer rules; paid sick leave; and leave for Trade Union and certain other purposes.
- (e) Before any new pension scheme is introduced by the Corporation, it should be discussed with Staff representatives.
- (f) Access to Ministers on matters of general importance, at present enjoyed by staff organisations, should be preserved.
- (g) An early statement should be made on security of tenure under the Corporation.

21. The staff of the atomic energy undertakings should be seconded at the vesting date by the Civil Service to the Corporation for an initial period. During the transitional period, which might have to extend to two years, the staff would maintain their Civil Service status unimpaired. Before the end of this interim period we should expect the Corporation to offer individuals employment on Corporation terms, and individuals would have to decide whether to accept those terms or not.

22. After the Government's decision to set up a Corporation has been taken, it will be necessary to draft the necessary legislation and prepare the way for making the Corporation a separate administrative entity. These tasks should be undertaken by those who will bear responsibility for the Corporation's successful working. We therefore recommend that when the Government announce their decision to set up a Corporation they should also announce their intention to transfer responsibility at once to the designated Minister.

(Appendix II concerns draft statutory instruments.)

The Pope's Christmas Eve Broadcast

It was stated in this review recently (*T.S.C.*, January 9) that eight 'cuts' were discernable in that part of *The Tablet's* account of the Pope's Christmas Eve Allocation which dealt with 'The Technological Spirit.' We have now, through the courtesy of a correspondent, been able to compare this account with the English translation "made available at the Vatican" and printed in America by *The Tablet*, an 18-page weekly newspaper published in Brooklyn, N.Y. From this text, presumably complete, it appears that six, not eight cuts as stated by us were made in the account published in England, a total of 348 lines of the Brooklyn newspaper, plus 19 lines of conclusion. The significance of all this will assume different proportions according to whether the reader believes that the expansion of industry, irrespective of the real benefits, if any, it brings to man, is the end for which he exists in society or, with us, does not.