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Swords into Plowshares

The ratification of the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency by the U.S. Senate on 18 June brought to nine the number of nations that have formally approved the document. This action makes it virtually certain that a large enough number of nations will follow suit to ensure the establishment of the agency and its organization at the general conference in Vienna next October.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is an outgrowth of President Eisenhower's bold "atoms-for-peace" proposal to the United Nations on 8 December 1953. After months of preliminary negotiations, 12 states unanimously agreed on a statute for the agency on 18 April 1956; this was approved by 81 states on 26 October 1956 and signed by 80 states during the following three months when the instrument was open for signatures. What still remained to be accomplished—and this was a large order—was to have the statute ratified. Until quite recently, there was some doubt about approval by the Senate during the present session of Congress. Hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate members of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy did much to make clear the usefulness of the agency and to give assurance that proper safeguards against diversion of materials for use in weapons were provided for. Another stumbling block was the fear on the part of some senators that the agency might sometime commit the United States to a course of action without Senate approval. Had this reservation taken the form of a modification of the treaty, lengthy renegotiation would have been required and the agency might have been stalled for months or years or indeed stifled at birth.

The Foreign Relations Committee, however, worked out a compromise in the form of an understanding with the Administration that any amendment to the statute should be submitted to the Senate and that the United States would withdraw from the agency if an amendment unacceptable to the Senate were adopted. Inasmuch as the statute itself already gives members this privilege ("... whenever a member is unwilling to accept an amendment to this Statute, it may withdraw from the Agency by notice in writing . . ."), the action of the Senate seems to serve merely to underline the privilege, allay anxiety, and put the Executive on notice about Senate prerogatives.

The principal aims of the agency are to increase the contribution of atomic energy to "peace, health, and prosperity throughout the world"; to promote research on the development and application of atomic energy; to facilitate the exchange of information and of scientific and technical experts; and to set up standards for the protection of health in the field of atomic energy, both in the agency's own operations and in those that it facilitates.

Of the numerous safeguards to prevent diversion of materials for military use, one is the right of the agency to send inspectors into states that receive its aid. Thus, the agency will give participating nations experience not only in cooperating in the field of atomic energy, but also in tolerating the kind of inspection and control that must precede any reduction in the threat posed by atoms-for-war. G. DUS.