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## Atomic Power

The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 made possible private ownership of atomic power reactors and provided for the declassification of information of industrial interest. Although some progress has been made in developing commercial atomic power—the 60,000-kilowatt station at Shippingport, Pennsylvania, is nearing completion and several other stations are proposed or under construction—the pace has been slower than may have been desirable. Progress would doubtless have been more rapid if the Government had come to a clear-cut decision about the method of attaining rapid development. But no such decision has been made, and industry has been understandably reluctant to move into the field of atomic power while uncertainty about costs and risks prevails.

Several recent events suggest that the Government is moving toward a decision to push the atomic power program more vigorously and to take a larger responsibility for the production of commercial reactors. Last year the Panel on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy (the McKinney Committee), which had been appointed by the Joint Atomic Energy Committee, recommended a partnership between Government and industry for the development of atomic power, but added that, if industry failed to take the initiative, the Atomic Energy Commission should support a program for the development of atomic power, including the construction of full-scale "demonstration" plants of several types.

The bill introduced by Senator Albert Gore in the last session of Congress would have authorized the AEC to spend \$400 million over a 5-year period in contracts for the development of reactors to show their practical value for the generation of electricity. It would in effect have authorized the AEC to carry out the alternative recommendation of the McKinney Committee. Despite opposition by four out of five members of the AEC and by the Administration, the bill was passed in the Senate by a close vote; it was, however, killed in the House by a narrow margin.

It seems probable that the attitude of the Administration toward the "partnership" program has changed recently. On 11 December 1956 Lewis L. Strauss, chairman of the AEC, who had formerly opposed a program of rapid development, shifted his position and urged a major expansion in commercial atomic power plants. And, in his budget message on 16 January 1957, President Eisenhower said: "If acceptable proposals for non-Federal construction of promising reactor types do not materialize within a reasonable time, a request will be made to the Congress for funds for direct construction by the Federal Government."

Whether or not this presidential statement implies that the Administration will not oppose Senator Gore's bill, which has been reintroduced in the Senate, is still uncertain. But it seems not unlikely that this bill or an Administration bill directed to similar ends may be enacted in this session of Congress. We hope so. For it seems to us none too soon for the United States to be in a position to supply practical power reactors to nations short of conventional sources of power and none too soon for us to develop commercial reactors as a hedge against the inevitable increases in our own demands for power in the near future.—G. DUS.