

## Is the AEC Obsolete?

JOHN W. FINNEY

THE PROPOSITION that the Atomic Energy Commission has outlived its usefulness and should be replaced by a single administrator has overwhelming, if unspoken, support these days among a number of extremely influential officials—in the White House, the State Department, the Defense Department, the commission's own overgrown but not overly loyal staff, and even among the five commissioners themselves. Probably the only exception to this prevailing sentiment is to be found in the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy of Congress, whose members understandably are not ready to preside over the dismemberment of a prestigious and bountiful fiefdom or see their divide-and-rule control over the AEC undermined. In fact, it is Congressional opposition that explains the unwillingness of the Executive branch thus far to take the public initiative in urging abolition of the commission. But the need for reorganization cannot be ignored much longer.

To a certain extent, the reform is being dictated by the commission's inherent inefficiency in managing a \$2.5-billion-a-year business. But more importantly, the commission is a victim of its own success, for it has literally worked itself out of a job. With commendable diligence and foresight, it has developed weapons in such numbers and such sophistication that even the military's appetite is becoming sated. On the peace-

ful side, atomic power, after an investment of almost \$2 billion, has been brought to the point where it is nearly competitive with conventional electricity. Thanks largely to the commission's largesse to universities and laboratories, the United States is now clearly in the lead in practically every area of atomic research. As a result, the commission has become an organization with few new challenges to be met and few important policies to decide.

Circumstances have changed markedly since those days eighteen years ago when, after a long civilian-vs.-military struggle over control of the atom, it was decided to create the five-man commission. Back then, far more than now, thinking about atomic energy was dominated by a concern over the vast and still somewhat mysterious military power that had been unleashed. Understandably in retrospect, once the decision was made in favor of civilian control there was apprehension about placing this power over weapons in the hands of a single administrator. The commission organization, therefore, was deliberately chosen in the original McMahon Act to ensure diffused responsibility and a variety of views over control of atomic weapons.

### Times Have Changed

At the outset, weapons were the commission's main business. It was responsible for developing and producing weapons and it maintained

custody over the warheads. The commission is still nominally responsible for developing and producing weapons, but in all other respects its weapons responsibilities have diminished. It no longer has much say over how many weapons are produced or what happens to them after that. Indeed, it has become something very much like an industrial contractor to the Defense Department, which establishes the requirements for weapons and then expects the commission to build them and, according to the budgetary arrangements that prevail, pay for them. The nuclear arsenal is overflowing with tens of thousands of weapons, and an embarrassing surplus of fissionable materials has been accumulated for fabricating new weapons. And now for the first time since the Second World War, weapon production is being cut back, as indicated by the Johnson administration's recent steps to reduce the future production of enriched uranium and plutonium. The manufacture of more warheads may not cease completely, but it is apparent that it will not continue much longer to be the predominant activity and preoccupation of the commission. And there are many who feel that the development and production of atomic weapons, which now consumes about two-thirds of the AEC budget, could well be turned over to the Defense Department entirely.

The use of atomic energy for nonmilitary purposes is also losing its unique status and is being assimilated into the mainstream of government and industry. In the process, the commission is losing its once jealously guarded privileged status within the government. Foreign-policy decisions are shifting over to the State Department or up to the White House. Scientific and technical policies involving the atom are being determined by the White House Office of Science and Technology. And finally, after years of nourishment and subsidies, industry appears ready to take over the commercial application of atomic energy for generating electricity. Utilities are finally striking out on their own to build atomic-power plants, and in the process the commission is losing its role as the promoter and developer of atomic energy.

Within a decade or so, atomic-power reactors, including the "breeders" that will produce more fuel than they consume, will probably have progressed to the point where their further development can and should be carried on by private industry in competition with conventional power plants. Because of the radioactivity danger, there may be a continuing need for Federal supervision of atomic power plants. But as the safety of reactions is established, it should be possible to turn over even the regulatory responsibilities to other Federal, state, and local agencies.

**T**HIS significant dissolution of the unique status of atomic energy was given official recognition last December by Commissioner John G. Palfrey, in a speech appropriately entitled "The End of the Sacred Atomic Preserve." To an increasing extent, Palfrey observed, "the atomic energy enterprise has spread throughout the government and has had to be conducted by the AEC in conjunction with other agencies, including DOD, State, NASA, Commerce, Interior and the Committees of Congress. Most significantly, the atomic enterprise is co-ordinated at the White House level, by the President himself, by his staff members concerned with national security affairs, and by his assistants on matters of science and technology and, as usual, or more than usual, by the Bureau of the Budget." It is not that the commission has been "downgraded," he said, "but that the atom has been upgraded. The atom has been assimilated into the affairs of the nation."

As Commissioner Palfrey noted, this trend toward considering major atomic decisions at a higher level inevitably raises the question of the continued need for the commission. There is "less point," he observed, "in retaining the five statutory wise men deciding policy questions within the Commission, when these decisions were to constitute merely one component of the larger picture to be considered at a higher level."

The extent to which the commission's policymaking role has been diminished, even on matters presumably falling within its primary jurisdiction, is illustrated by several

recent decisions. The abortive and expensive program to develop a nuclear-powered airplane was canceled by a Presidential message based upon the recommendation of the Secretary of Defense without a definitive recommendation by the commission. The program for resumption of atmospheric nuclear testing in 1962, including such details as the content and scheduling of the test series, was drafted by a committee composed of the chairman of the AEC, the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, and representatives of the White House staff and the State Department. So isolated were the rest of the commissioners from the deliberations that when one commissioner accidentally poked his head into the room where the committee was meeting, he was promptly shooed away as an intruder. And when the limited test-ban treaty was being negotiated in Moscow last year, no commission representative was present, nor was the commission consulted on the terms of the treaty.

One can argue, as some commissioners do, that the pendulum has swung too far; that the commission, if not holding the primary responsibility, at least should be consulted on policy matters involving atomic energy. On the test-ban treaty, for example, some consultation with the commission might have avoided the potentially embarrassing failure to make any provision for the peaceful uses of atomic explosives. But there can be no argument with the basic fact that the commission has lost its policymaking role because the policy issues involving atomic energy now transcend the interest or competence of the commission.

### **No Way to Run a Railroad**

More and more, therefore, the AEC's role has become that of operating a large research and manufacturing complex with total assets of about \$8.5 billion—larger than General Motors. In the operating role, the commission inevitably has proved deficient, given the difficulties of attempting to manage such a large enterprise efficiently with a five-man committee. In effect, the vast atomic-energy program is being managed by majority rule within a commission that is so disorganized that it lacks bylaws or any rules of procedure to

ensure adequate notice of agenda, full information to all commissioners, a verbatim transcript of meetings, or even a recorded vote. The discord extends even to the relationships between the commission and its staff. At times some of the commissioners have felt that the staff was trying to dominate, to the point where a few years ago the commission staged a silent coup against the staff and decided that it would determine its own agenda. For its part, the staff feels frustrated at trying to serve five masters and being forced to bring even the most trivial questions up to the commission for a decision.

The inherent inefficiency of the commission was described by Loren K. Olson, who served for four years with the commission, first as a general counsel and then as a commissioner. In a letter in 1962 to Representative Chet Holifield (D., California), then chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Olson wrote: "For years commission operations have been run, for practical purposes, not by the general manager but by the Chairman and a majority of the commission. A great deal of time is consequently required to reach operating decisions, and the ultimate products are frequently compromises. As is so often the case, policy derived from compromise tends to be inconsistent, or even sterile."

For the sake of asserting effective control, the chairman tends to establish an alliance with a couple of the commissioners. A few years ago the three scientist members teamed up against the two lawyer members. The staff inevitably tends to give its loyalty to those commissioners in majority control and ignore those in the minority. "Under such circumstances," as Commissioner Olson pointed out in his letter, "the temptation is great to circulate rumors, information and innuendo in order to curry favor with one or the other."

**I**N EFFECT, the commission itself is in the unenviable position of trying to serve two masters—the White House and the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. And its relationship to the Congressional master is unclear—a fact that helps explain much of the controversy that sur-

rounded Lewis L. Strauss when he was chairman of AEC.

The original concept was that the commissioners would deal with broad policy matters, leaving the general manager to serve as chief executive officer responsible for day-by-day operations. Right from the outset, when the AEC became preoccupied with passing on individual security cases, the commissioners found it extremely difficult to draw the line between policy and administrative matters. Furthermore, five Presidential appointees with presumably equal responsibility for management of the atomic program found it impossible to avoid involvement in specific operational decisions.

The difficulty was compounded by the unusual amount of control the Congressional committee exercises over the atomic-energy program. Through a specific provision in the Atomic Energy Act, the commission must keep the Congressional committee "fully and currently informed" about all its activities—a requirement imposed on no other Executive agency. The idea was that the committee was to serve as the Congressional "watchdog" over a field that was so secret it could not be discussed openly with Congress. But the injunction has been interpreted broadly by the joint committee to include all areas of atomic energy—and so rigidly that the commission feels compelled to inform the legislators even before a decision is reached.

One can argue the theoretical question of whether this arrangement violates the Constitutional principle of separation of powers. But there can be no argument whatsoever about the practical effect of placing the commission in such an awkward, uncertain position in its dealings with the rest of the Executive branch. Other government agencies, which have frequently found their proposals nipped in the bud by the Congressional committee, are reluctant to involve the AEC in their discussions for fear the commissioners will feel forced to tip off the Congressional committee. The commission, in turn, has found itself driven into almost a subservient position in its relationship with the Congressional committee. The result is organizational and administrative

confusion. In effect, the Congressional committee has become the policy-setting board of directors—the role the commission was supposed to play—and the commission has become the operating manager. The poor general manager, who was supposed to be the operating manager, finds himself reduced to the status of an errand boy trying to carry out the wishes of five bosses.

#### 'Please Fire Us!'

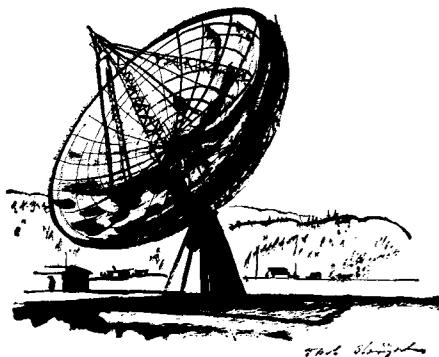
Back in the spring of 1962, the AEC took an action that was surely unprecedented for any government agency: the commissioners voted unanimously that their jobs should be abolished. In a letter to the Budget Bureau, the commission pointed out that when the original Atomic Energy Act was passed, it was generally recognized that a commission type of organization would result in "diffused responsibility" and "slow down the decision process." At that time, however, they said, it was felt that such "sacrifices" in administration were preferable to concentration of authority in the new atomic field in one individual. Since then, they noted, "circumstances have markedly changed," and they had come to the conclusion that the five-man commission should be replaced by a single administrator.

With the subsequent resignation of two commissioners, the commission reopened the question and appointed three consultants—Arthur W. Murphy, a New York lawyer; Richard E. Neustadt, a Columbia University political scientist; and James B. Fisk, president of Bell Telephone Laboratories—to study the reorganization question. The three consultants unanimously recommended a single administrator, and in December, 1962, the commission once again voted in favor of the

change, this time by a 4-1 vote. The lone dissenter was James T. Ramey, former staff director of the Congressional committee.

At one point in 1962 the Kennedy administration was ready to push for reorganization of the commission. But it got cold feet when the proposal ran into opposition from some influential Democrats on the Congressional committee. The Democrats still had a candidate or two they wanted to put on the commission before it was abolished, and they were concerned about whom the administration might pick as the single administrator. Probably a more basic consideration, however, was the likelihood that such a reorganization would produce a fundamental realignment of power between the committee and the commission. Indeed, this was one of the main reasons the reorganization was being pushed by the White House and the Budget Bureau, which had often found their plans being frustrated by the commission making end runs to the committee. Indirectly, much of the power and influence of the committee depends on the present setup of the AEC. With five men running the program, the committee often has been able to assert its influence or gain inside information on administration plans by making allies with particular commissioners.

In political terms, the Congressional committee obviously holds the key to reopening of the administration proposal for reorganizing the commission. But the same force of events that is pushing forward the reorganization is also changing the political climate. With the cutback in the procurement of uranium ore and the production of fissionable materials and with the coming of age of atomic power, much of the political "pork" is disappearing from the atomic-energy program. Also gone are the policy issues on which Congressional committee members can make publicity and political records. Perhaps that explains why some of the legislators are losing interest in the atomic-energy program, for few of them show up any more for committee hearings. And if the committee members are losing interest, reorganization of the commission is probably not far behind.



# What the Boys In the Bach Room Will Have

FREDERIC V. GRUNFELD

THE Swingle Singers, as everyone knows by now, are a skat-singing French vocal group on Philips Records that has vaulted to fame by treating J. S. Bach as though he were live talent instead of a museum exhibit. The trick is that the Swingles sing their Bach straight from the page—fugues, preludes, two-part inventions, etc.—while gently jazzing up the rhythm with free-swinging accompaniments on bass and drums. This is not to be confused with earlier attempts to modernize Bach by forcing him into blues harmonies and boogie-woogie patterns, à la Hazel Scott or Alec Templeton. This time the procedure is just the reverse: it is the jazz drummer who has learned to adjust his beat to Bach's way of doing things.

The results are refreshing enough to overcome all but the most musicological scruples. A light undercoating of percussion, deftly wire-brushed onto the rhythm, can generate a lot of kinetic energy in these pieces, and the mellifluous skat syllables are often better suited to Bach's elastic melodies than the consonant-choked texts for which they were originally written. Thus the music that Bach buffs associate with the words "*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*" gains a kind of aural unguency in the Swingles' version: "Doot doo-doo-doot doo-doot doo-doot doo-doot doo-doot doo-doot doo-doot doo-doot. . ."

This may not endear them to the purists, but in their own happy way the Swingles are not much further removed from "true" Bach than Leopold Stokowski (organ fugues converted into *Tannhäuser*-type bachanales), Glenn Gould (harpsichord variations on an Aston Martin piano), or your local oratorio society (two hundred voices singing choruses designed for twenty). Bach's music has always been

a happy hunting ground for arrangers, transcribers, and editors: it is susceptible of as many different kinds of exegesis as the Bible. "You cannot perform Bach without interpretation," as Arnold Schönberg says, because his manuscripts omit so many important details. The shorthand notation of the so-called "figured basses," for instance, leaves it very much up in the air as to what instruments are supposed to play which notes at whose tempo, and says little or nothing about when to trill, where to use arpeggios, or how to fill in the missing notes. Bach and his colleagues were accustomed to deciding such matters in the course of a performance, just as jazzmen do. Even the keyboard pieces that were written out note for note pose any number of unanswered questions for the modern interpreter. "What the Bach organ was like, we barely know!" writes Schönberg, venting his perplexity in exclamation marks. "How it was played we do not know at all!"

LACKING a definitive set of blueprints, each succeeding generation has had to reconstruct Bach in its own image. The last two hundred years have witnessed a dozen Bach "revivals," each marking a fresh tide of enthusiasm and rediscovery. In school we learned that it was Felix Mendelssohn who started it all by exhuming the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829, but that was merely the beginning of Bach's popularity with concert-hall audiences. The earliest and most gifted of "the children of Bach" was not Mendelssohn but Mozart, who applied the lessons learned from his predecessor in the fugal writing of his own *Requiem*.

Mozart had known of Bach only by hearsay until he got to know some of his fugues at the Viennese ama-

teur concerts of the Dutch Baron van Swieten, where "nothing was played but Handel and Bach." The immediate result was that Mozart started his own collection of Bach preludes and fugues and undertook the highly instructive task of transcribing them for string quartet. On a visit to the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig a few years later, he had his only opportunity to hear one of Bach's choral works. "The choir surprised Mozart by performing the motet for double choir, *Singet dem Herrn*," relates a journalist who was present. "As soon as the choir had sung a few bars, Mozart sat up, startled; after a few more he called out: 'What is this?' And now his whole soul seemed to be in his ears. 'Now here is something one can learn from!' he shouted when the song ended." He asked to see more of Bach's music, and "it was a pleasure to see how eagerly Mozart sat down with the sheets of music all around him, held in both hands, on his knees, on the nearest chairs. Forgetting everything else, he did not get up again until he had looked through everything of Bach's that was there. He asked for copies. . . ."

All the early Bachians were dependent on handwritten copies for their very sketchy knowledge of his work: even *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was circulated only in manuscript before 1800. Yet when the young Beethoven appears on the scene, it is as a Bach player that his name first gets cited in musical despatches. An article in a 1783 music magazine notes that the twelve-year-old Beethoven "plays the clavier very skillfully and with power, sight-reads very well, and to put everything in a nutshell, he plays most of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by Sebastian Bach, which Herr Neefe has placed in his hands. Anyone who knows this collection of preludes and fugues in all the keys (which could almost be called the *non plus ultra*) will understand what this means."

When he came to Vienna in the 1790's Beethoven found his way to van Swieten's salon; according to friends he used to play half a dozen Bach fugues "by way of final prayer" to top off the Baron's chamber-music evenings. Like Mozart he arranged a Bach fugue for string