

**Source: ".electrical energy too cheap to meter"
L Strauss 16/9/54**

The quote "too cheap to meter" came from Lewis L Strauss a financier and Chairman of the USAEC from 1953 to 1958:

"Our children will enjoy in their homes electrical energy too cheap to meter," he declared "It is not too much to expect that our children will know of great periodic regional famines in the world only as matters of history, will travel effortlessly over the seas and under them and through the air with a minimum of danger and with great speeds, and will experience a lifespan far longer than ours, as disease yields and man comes to understand what causes him to age." Chairman of the USAEC Lewis L Strauss, Speech to the National Association of Science Writers, New York City, September 16 1954.

It is not clear exactly what he meant with this statement - one school of thought now being that it pertained to fusion not fission power, moreover the term does not imply that whatever its source, the electricity would be supplied for free. The conditions under which electricity would be too cheap to meter could apply at any time the electricity supplier determined that it would be economic to charge fixed fees rather than pay for meters and their reading. (This has been done with domestic water supplies in some countries.) Further, costs associated with plant construction, fuelling, operation and electricity distribution that apply to any form of generation would still have to be met out of this revenue.[1]

In his time as USAEC Chairman, Lewis Strauss presided over the establishment of prototype commercial nuclear power plants (EBWR and Shippingport) and expansion of the nuclear weapons capability of the US.[2] It was in the latter respect that he was instrumental in having Robert Oppenheimer stripped of his security clearance for his purported reluctance to work on the H-bomb.[3] Then in 1959 Strauss was denied confirmation by the Senate to be Secretary of Commerce, a decision that was influenced partly by the Oppenheimer affair.[4]

The ill will so generated apparently led to Strauss being an object of criticism in some circles - including his pronouncements. It is not hard to imagine, therefore, that the term "too cheap to meter" is now used as a criticism of nuclear fission power itself with its source and original meaning being forgotten.

Refs:

1. "Too Cheap to Meter?" Morgan Brown, Canadian Nuclear Society Home Page.
2. "Chronology of the Bomb", ANF Information Paper No. 8.
3. "Dark Sun", R.Rhodes, (Touchstone, 1995).
4. US Senate website; Wikipedia "Lewis Lichtenstein Strauss".