

Defence Production Act

Then the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Sinclair), in one of his pithy statements, is recorded as having said, "Yes".

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): You said "Yes" as well, I think.

Mr. Mitchell (London): I shall go on. I said further:

The Minister of Defence Production can refer to it in any way he prefers. I have heard that same language used before.

Referring to blank cheques, what could be more of a blank cheque than this present legislation? And so far as I can see it is not even dated. What could be more of a blank cheque than what we are now asked to present to the minister.

I have not been sitting on any bench communing with nature, but I have thought during the last two or three days that perhaps it would have been helpful if some of the ministers had been communing with somebody on a bench at Kingsmere. I am sure such communion would have been not only interesting but profitable. We are told that the late owner of that estate was the founder of modern Liberalism. I think he would resent that, because while in many ways he was a Liberal, sometimes I find that the similarity between so-called traditional Liberalism and that which is being practised by hon. gentlemen opposite is not very marked.

What about the so-called blank cheque to which the minister refers? Let me remind him that it was a blank cheque with a time limit, a blank cheque which would expire in less than a year, a blank cheque to the governor in council—not to a minister—and a blank cheque which authorized expenditures of money for a definite purpose recited in the preamble and to meet a national emergency.

What would the late Right Hon. Mackenzie King have thought of a blank cheque giving unabridged powers to one man over every business enterprise and natural resource in Canada? Bearing these points in mind, bearing in mind the time limit, bearing in mind the fact that there was a national emergency, bearing in mind that the governor in council was the body which was to act, not the Minister of Defence Production, I would ask hon. members to go back with me to the session of 1931. There we shall do a little communing on our own. I find at page 4282, volume IV of *Hansard* for that session, the

[Mr. Mitchell (London).]

Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King, speaking at the resolution stage on July 29, 1931, said:

My right hon. friend—

He was referring to Mr. Bennett.

—has spoken of the cabinet as a board of directors and he says that in this resolution he is asking the house to give to that board of directors absolute powers in dealing with the problem of unemployment relief. May I say to him that it is not the cabinet, of which he is Prime Minister, that is the board of directors of the nation; it is this House of Commons. Hon. members sitting on both sides of the house are the board of directors who have been sent from the different constituencies in Canada to represent the people of the country, to discuss questions of importance with respect to the economic and other affairs of Canada, and to make laws to aid in the solution of those problems. The cabinet is a committee of the House of Commons; any power it has is derived from the members who sit in this house. It is an executive committee. But the committee of the nation constituting the board of directors is, I submit, this House of Commons. That leads me to direct again a very strong criticism against my right hon. friend. The criticism is this: that with regard to this all-important question he has ignored altogether the board of directors of the nation and has taken it into the hands of a small committee, which derives its authority from this board of directors, to deal with the question in an absolute way.

I cannot help thinking what Mr. King would have said of legislation in this form which delegates powers, not to the governor in council but to one minister. Again in *Hansard* for July 29, 1931, I find this, at page 4285, where Mr. Mackenzie King said:

We are not going to object to the moneys that may be needed for unemployment and farm relief so long as parliament, the board of directors representing the people of this country, has its control and its say with respect to the expenditure. But we will object as strongly as we possibly can to increasing the powers of the governor in council in the matter of giving them unlimited authority with respect to public funds.

There again, Mr. Speaker, is a condemnation of the delegation of powers to the governor in council. But how much further would Mr. King have gone if he had been asked to delegate powers to the Minister of Defence Production? Once again, on the same date, at page 4287 of *Hansard*—and here we get back to the blank cheque to which the Minister of Defence Production has been pleased to refer—I find this:

My right hon. friend has predicted a criticism, which he must know is inevitable, when he asks for powers such as those sought in this resolution. He himself has said that they may be described, euphoniously, I think, as giving a blank cheque to the administration.

Mr. Bennett: I said that they "had been" described.

Mr. Mackenzie King: Yes, that they had been described. Let us drop the word "euphoniously" altogether and view in a clear and direct manner the simple fact that the government is asking this parliament to give it a blank cheque to deal with unemployment relief in such a manner as it may think wise.