

Defence Production Act

There has been a measure of agreement in the house with regard to some of the matters that have been mentioned in the course of the debate. There has been general agreement that the department should be made permanent. There has been some general agreement that the world situation is uncertain. There has not been agreement that there is at the present time an emergency. The world situation has been described by the minister as being worse now than it was in 1951. We cannot recall that other ministers have indicated that in recent times. The Prime Minister, who I judge is going to participate in the debate at the appropriate moment, when speaking to the federal-provincial conference on April 26 dealt with the subject of world affairs and painted the picture as he saw it.

I shall not quote at length from his statement, but I think it is important to get his viewpoint because it has its bearing on this subject of defence production. The Prime Minister on that occasion—and I am quoting from page 6 of the *Hansard* of that federal-provincial conference meeting—said this:

In 1950 we met in the shadow of the Korean crisis and the ministers most directly concerned spoke to us of the urgent tasks confronting us in the defence field. Since then the situation has changed. On the surface it seems to have changed for the better. The fighting has stopped. Fundamentally, however, the situation has not improved, but we have grown more used to it. The world remains divided and suspicious; it appears likely to be that way for many years.

He goes on further to speak about the gravity of the risk that threatens Canada should a major war break out, and he says this. I quote again from page 6:

If a major war commences we must expect at its very beginning—that is, in the first few hours—heavy attacks on North America with large nuclear weapons. These attacks would likely take place on Canadian targets as well as on those in the United States.

That is a somewhat alarming view of world affairs, which should be presented to us here in the house if that is the situation, but I see no hint there of an emergency as defined by the Oxford dictionary. As I say, there has been some measure of agreement. What are the differences here in the House of Commons? We have been saying on this side that the powers are excessive except for an emergency, and we have said that the powers should not be permanent. It is interesting to see what has happened so far.

Attempts to reach a compromise on this matter were made during the course of the debate at the resolution stage in March. At

that time the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, as indicated on page 1996 of *Hansard*, said:

I hope that between now and then—

That is, when the bill would get second reading.

—the government might consider whether some changes in the act itself might be made. I suggest, as one change, that instead of wiping out the expiry date altogether another expiry date might be written into the act. The department as set up originally in 1951 was to expire July 31, 1956, and perhaps the government would consider putting in an expiry date of, let us say, July 31, 1958 or 1959.

Then, as other people participated in the debate, there was agreement to that suggestion on the part of the hon. member for Peace River. Then the minister himself intervened to say, as shown on page 2001 of *Hansard* of March 14, 1955:

If it were not for the human element in the department I would be quite willing to set another date and debate the matter again.

As reported on the same page, the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra made a suggestion in these words:

Why would it not be possible to word the bill in such a way that the department is made permanent but these powers are made temporary, and subject to review within a certain length of time?

With that suggestion the hon. member for Peace River agreed. As reported on page 2002 the Minister of Defence Production said this:

If the house wishes to adopt this resolution before the bill is brought in, the government will consider the request of my hon. friend.

He is referring to the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra.

I do not know whether or not the government will accept the hon. member's suggestion, but at least it will be given consideration.

Then the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre indicated—

An hon. Member: No tedious repetition.

Mr. Churchill: If there is tedious repetition here, Mr. Speaker, it is because the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has been repeating himself.

Mr. Knowles: You fellows have been repeating what I said.

Mr. Churchill: He said:

I hope in the consideration which the Minister of Trade and Commerce has promised to give he will consider the possibility of wording that section in the opposite way, letting it stand that the department goes on but including a provision in section 41 which would say that sections so and so of this act—and these could be the sections dealing with the wide powers—will expire on such and such a date. This action would give the