

Defence Production Act

would be a barefaced corruption of power itself. Let us not have that. Let the government show its strength by acting in the way a strong government can act. Let it either accept the amendment and ask its supporters to accept the amendment and then in the committee obtain the kind of measure that is consistent with their own assurances. Alternatively we could wait until next year when all can devote their thoughts to this subject. That, Mr. Speaker, would in itself be an expression by the government of its own respect for the supremacy of parliament and the rule of law upon which our civilization is founded.

(Translation):

Mr. Leon Balcer (Three Rivers): Mr. Speaker, I have great pleasure in rising to take part in this debate—

Mr. Gauthier (Portneuf): It shows.

Mr. Balcer:—even if it has been going on for some time, and even if it is due to go on for a few days or weeks—

Mr. Gauthier (Portneuf): It looks like it.

Mr. Balcer:—for I consider it my duty to support the leader of my party in this fight he is leading for the defence of our parliamentary system of government in Canada.

Mr. Lesage: You don't look any too happy about it.

Mr. Balcer: In my opinion, the leader of our party, together with other Progressive Conservative members who have spoken up to now, have genuinely discharged the duty which is theirs as an opposition in our parliamentary system. We, the members of the opposition, are here to criticize any and every exaggeration on the part of the government in power and I believe that the bill, in its present form, is a striking example of abuse of power and exaggeration, within our parliamentary system.

To my mind, the criticism offered by the Conservative opposition in this debate has been constructive criticism. As a clear example of this, we have the amendment moved by the hon. member for Royal (Mr. Brooks). A detailed study of this amendment cannot fail to reveal to anyone here how perfectly logical it is, since, by justifying the existence of the Department of Defence Production, it enables the latter to serve the country. Adoption of the amendment would allow the department to procure all those things necessary to our armed forces, while enabling it, moreover, to ensure that our defence effort does not interfere unduly with the general economy of this country, while curbing abuses on the part of industry, labour, or private individuals.

[Mr. Drew.]

And yet, in spite of all the logic of this amendment, the government obstinately refuses to agree to a time limit on certain powers which the house is being asked to grant to the Minister of Defence Production (Mr. Howe). Such stubbornness, Mr. Speaker, is really unaccountable. What has happened, so far, in this debate? We have seen one or two ministers speak in favour of this legislation but, as regards the rank and file of the Liberals, barring a few exceptions who were content to sit there and interject silly remarks, not a single one has had the courage to rise in defence of the Minister of Defence Production, and to show that this bill was absolutely necessary at this time.

Mr. Lesage: That is not so.

Mr. Balcer: Can the hon. Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Lesage) point to a single member from Quebec who, with the exception of the Prime Minister, has taken part in this debate, which has been going on now for the past few days?

Mr. Gauthier (Portneuf): I dare say there has been one.

Mr. Balcer: There is no doubt about that. However, it is at least strange to note that, among those who, for the past ten days, have been listening to the opposition and to a few ministers discussing a bill of great significance for the country, not a single one has mustered enough courage to rise in defence of the Minister of Defence Production. Yet, there has been ample opportunity. The only excuse that has been found up till now to justify the excessive powers requested in this bill was that those powers will never be used.

Well, if these powers are so unpopular that the government would not use them even during the Korean war, I wonder why today it goes to the trouble of asking us to make them permanent and of insisting that they be retained permanently in our statutes.

Mr. Speaker, some of the powers we are asked to grant the minister are quite justified, but there are others which are really too sweeping, undemocratic and unparliamentary. Such powers should be used only in an emergency, and the experience of the past shows that the loyal opposition, always conscious of its obligations, would be the first, in the event of an emergency, to grant the Minister of Defence Production all the powers he would need to provide our armed forces with all required weapons and equipment. But the only excuse given today when demanding that such drastic powers be permanently included in our statutes is that the minister never used those powers and never will use