

Supply—Defence Production

this national importance must inevitably have its welfare, its revenues and its income affected by the policies of the government of which the minister is a member. On the one hand the very fact that the disposal of it involves considerations of the national interest indicates its size and its ramifications; on the other we have a minister of the government whose duties, as he has accepted them, also in their ramifications extend into almost every facet of our economy.

But it is to me a strange confession of impotence, which this government has never been willing to make before, that in order to influence or determine the disposition of a vast industry so essential to the national welfare as this one, the Minister of Trade and Commerce has to accept the executorship of the estate. Does the minister seriously mean to say that this government as such, with him there, Minister of Trade and Commerce, Minister of Defence Production, controller of steel and all his other powers, could not determine the disposition of this company without his being an executor of the estate? Of course it could, and the argument he uses there is but the most absurd of rationalizations in an attempt to justify what is an impossible position.

I realize that in these remarks I have been discussing a matter of principle. It is a matter of principle, this question of the conflict of interest between the private capacities of ministers and their public duties, and it does affect the very structure and foundation of our government. These principles, principles we talk about in the House of Commons, may not be important to the minister personally. They may be regarded by him as a nuisance. He may have the view, and it does achieve results, that it is what you do that counts, not how you do it, and that therefore these matters are but of secondary importance and when they get in his way they are to be brushed aside.

But these principles, although they may not be important to the minister personally, are important to the system under which the government of this country and the government of every democratic country works. They are fundamental to the system. They are an integral part of the system and the system cannot be preserved, cannot work and will not continue into the future as a vital, effective system unless these principles are observed and maintained. These principles are not only fundamental and vital to the system but they are also fundamental and vital to the people who are the beneficiaries of this system of government founded upon the principles that I have been discussing.

[Mr. Fulton.]

Finally, sir, I say again that it is the minister's duty, however inconvenient he finds these principles and their observance, to resolve the conflict of interest by ending that conflict in whichever way he wants, but in my view he has to make the decision and to end it. I only trust that he himself will do so and that if he does not see fit to do so the Prime Minister will insist that it be done, and that he will, by ending the conflict, show respect for our system and the principles upon which it is founded.

Mr. Nicholson: Mr. Chairman, I wish to support the argument advanced by the hon. member for Kamloops. A year ago my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, presented to the house bill 379, an act to amend the Senate and House of Commons Act. While the bill did not pass it did result in the Leader of the Opposition, the Minister of Finance and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre all making very interesting contributions to the discussion. The bill was very simple. Its main provision was in these words:

No person who is a director of a company incorporated under the Companies Act or under any other public general act of Canada, or incorporated by a local or private act of Canada, shall be eligible to be a member of the Queen's privy council for Canada and a minister of the crown.

The member for Winnipeg North Centre did not make any reference to a member of the cabinet being an executor but I think the spirit of the discussion which took place at that time should have been observed by all members of the cabinet. I think that we all appreciate the position in which the minister found himself when an old and trusted friend made this sort of request, but those who seek public office have to be prepared to make sacrifices. One of my best friends passed away while the pipe line debate was on. The invitation to be present at the funeral was one that I found very difficult to turn down, but I had been elected by 50,000 people to represent their interests in parliament and much as I sympathized with the relatives of my very close friend I felt obliged to say that I could not go west to attend the funeral.

I am sure that the late Sir James Dunn would have understood the position of his very good friend if the minister in charge of this department had said: In the event that I am no longer a minister of the crown when you pass away I shall, of course, be prepared to discharge my obligations as an executor but should I be a minister of the crown then in the interests of the estate, in