

Canadian Commercial Corporation

ways it has been able to serve the individual Canadian importer and exporter; because speaking for myself, and I think generally for members of the Progressive Conservative party, we do not want to take lightly the continuation and extension of commercial corporations.

The minister made the point that the corporation rather than a government department was needed in respect of various transactions which are to be carried out. That may well be; nevertheless we feel—and this has often been expressed in the house—that when things get into a government department that is a fine way of having them done without scrutiny, and a way of exercising almost without limit, powers which cannot be exercised if they have to be submitted to the scrutiny of this house. Indeed we shall have certain questions to ask on that very point—whether one of the incidental by-products, if I may put it in that way—I will not say one of the aims—may not be to enable the minister to wield a power which I do not think he entirely dislikes, and to do it in a way in which he could not do it directly as Minister of Trade and Commerce.

I noticed one thing in the report that interested me. Evidently the writer has a great respect for the minister, for this is what he says:

During the year the corporation, acting at the request and in the name of the Minister of Trade and Commerce . . .

And so on.

Mr. Howe: That was a different minister.

Mr. Macdonnell (Muskoka-Ontario): Well, I am not so sure. This is the report for 1948. The minister will know better than I do how long he has been in this department. He will agree that it is very difficult to keep track of just what he is and what he is not. At any rate it is the officer we are talking about; and if the minister is right in saying he was not minister of trade and commerce at this time—though I think he is wrong—I should think he would exercise just as much control as any other minister, and therefore I think the point still stands. There is an old saying that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. The minister, I am sure, enjoys power just as much when he exercises it through a crown corporation as he does when he exercises it direct. We like to see the minister exercise power directly rather than indirectly, because we feel we are better able to understand what he is doing and we can keep track of him better. There is then more chance for us to catch up with him some day, whereas when he is back of these commercial corporations no one knows what is happening.

I do not intend to prolong this debate, but I suggest to the minister that it will expedite this matter if, after the luncheon recess, he can bring us up to date on the operations of the corporation. As always, we have an open mind, but there are a good many questions we want to have answered before this measure is passed.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): At the outset, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that in general I support the principle of the bill that is on the statute book as well as the principle of the amending bill to be based on this resolution.

I noted with interest the reference that the hon. member for Muskoka-Ontario (Mr. Macdonnell) made to a remark of Winston Churchill, to the effect that people would like the government to get out of the way and let them carry on their own business. That remark applies in a good many cases, particularly in relation to small businesses. I would also point out, however, to the member for Muskoka-Ontario that there are a good many things that are the people's business that the people will never get an opportunity to do except through their government.

My reason for rising to say a few words about this resolution is to call attention, calmly but firmly, to certain abuses that have occurred in connection with the activities of the Canadian Commercial Corporation. This does not detract from my support of the principle. I feel that full publicity should be given to something that was done about a year ago in connection with the affairs of this corporation. One of the purposes in calling attention to this abuse is to provide a basis for preventing a recurrence of it.

In my hand I hold copies of the five orders in council referred to in paragraph 9 of the most recent auditor general's report. I find that those orders in council refer to transactions of the Canadian Commercial Corporation. The transactions to which I refer—and I submit, Mr. Speaker, that it is in order to deal with them at this point—are transactions mentioned in the orders in council of March, 1948, which authorized payments in advance for certain supplies for the Department of National Defence which were to be purchased by the Canadian Commercial Corporation. These supplies were not to be delivered until after the end of the fiscal year. As some hon. members are aware, the Auditor General has called attention to this as a serious irregularity. He points out:

A constitutional reason for the lapsing and writing off of unused balances in appropriations at the year end is to ensure that the executive be ever in a state of dependency on parliament for funds.