

Defence Production Act

I want to caution my hon. friends that you are doing a very dangerous thing in leaving on the statute books of this country, as you propose to do, permanent legislation which may enable subsequent governments to do all the things I have suggested. You have no guarantee that the next government of Canada will be a Liberal government, no guarantee that it will be a Conservative government or any other kind of government. After all the charges I have heard levelled as to what a C.C.F. government might do, I am surprised that any members of the two or three opposition parties should be prepared to leave any legislation on the statute books which a C.C.F. government allegedly could use to subvert the democratic powers of this parliament.

May I say at once that the record of governments representative of parties like that which I represent in this house, the Norwegian government, the Swedish government, the Danish government, the British government, and to come closer to home the Saskatchewan government, are the governments that have given the widest democratic freedoms to their people of any governments that have been elected anywhere in the world.

But I say if all this is true, and particularly I say to my Conservative friends, then why all the difficulty in coming to a conclusion in this debate? I want to say very definitely that I feel if the Minister of Defence Production would rise in his place this afternoon and say that when this bill goes to committee he will be prepared to consider placing a limit on the time this act will remain in force before it will be reviewed by parliament, I do not think this debate would continue very much longer. I have listened to dissertations on Magna Carta; I have listened to dissertations on the Bill of Rights. The only things that were left out were the peasants' revolt and the black death. But it left me rather cold when I remembered the record of the party of the hon. gentlemen who were bringing these matters to the attention of the house.

Therefore I say, Mr. Speaker, that we of the C.C.F. are prepared to vote for the second reading of this bill because we consider that, in the interests of the country, the government and the Minister of Defence Production should have the power to say to these powerful industries that are assembling the basic supplies necessary for defence, "This is where we want these basic supplies to go". We are prepared to support it on this ground. We are prepared to say to the government that they should have the power to direct strategic material and industry into the channels that are necessary for the defence of this country.

We know that at the present time it is essential that our country shall be strong. It is essential that we shall do everything to strengthen our country, not so much in the light of possible aggression but because of the negotiations that are about to proceed across the world. We know quite well that if we are going to deal with those who may be our potential enemies we have to deal from a position of strength. We are not prepared to do anything that will weaken our side when it negotiates from a position of strength.

We say, therefore, to these powerful industries that these supplies which are essential to national defence should go, if necessary, to the defence production field. I know my hon. friends to my right feel that this should be left to private enterprise. Well, private enterprise has not always served this country except when it was compelled to serve this country in the early days of the last war.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Coldwell: Now, just a moment; I was here in 1939 and I heard the Minister of Defence Production rise in his place and tell this House of Commons that it had been very difficult indeed to obtain plans, specifications and supplies which would enable this country to embark on the production of aeroplanes for the defence of this country and of our allies. I sat in my place and heard the present Minister of Defence Production, the then minister of munitions and supply, make that statement to the house. I am not prepared to deny to that minister today the right he did not have at the beginning of the war, to say to industry: These supplies are essential to the defence and welfare of this country. That is the reason I am going to vote for the second reading of this bill.

As the minister said the other day, take nickel for example. I know there are powerful interests in this country who can sell nickel on the world market at a much higher price than the government of Canada is prepared to pay for that nickel for our defence production. And I think our country should have the right, after giving those people a reasonable return for the services they are rendering to their country, to say that the first obligation of those concerns is to provide Canada and our allies with the supplies we need for our welfare and that of our allies as well.

I think the time has come, having had this prolonged debate, when we should reach a conclusion. I say to the official opposition that I do not blame them. They have been carrying on this prolonged filibuster, if you wish to call it that, for some time. If they