

Defence Production Act

Mr. Proudfoot: And I said it standing up.

Mr. Drew: That is my opinion, Mr. Speaker. But let any lawyer in this house get to his feet and say I have overstated the case. Let any member of this house rise in his place and say that I have overstated the case. I say the government can appoint a crown corporation. Of course they can do that; there is no argument about it. It is as clear as it can be put into words.

Then what is the purpose? The purpose is to carry out any of these manifold and undefined undertakings which are entrusted to the Minister of Defence Production. That is the authority. There is no parallel authority for this purpose either in the act of the United Kingdom or in the act of the United States. Every power in this act must be read in conjunction with that special power, because every power in this act sets forward things that could be brought within the scope of the operation of one of these crown companies. Not a single word has been said that even purports to explain why that power would be required.

Mr. Speaker, this debate has gone on for some time and it will go on for some time yet. But if any hon. member feels there should be a solution of this problem, may I say that solution may be found in two ways. We have before the house an amendment which does nothing—

An hon. Member: You said it.

Mr. Drew:—but carry out the proposal of the government itself. It would write into the law the continuance of the Department of Defence Production and refer to the committee which seems to be the most appropriate one for the purpose, namely the standing committee on banking and commerce, the duty of redrafting this act to carry out the declared intention of the government.

I hope it will not be said by any hon. member opposite that it is too late in the session to refer this bill to the committee. Of course I know that argument would not be put forward by the Minister of Finance, because he referred the estimates of his department to the committee on estimates only within the last few days.

Mr. Knowles: They came back this morning.

Mr. Drew: That is right. That shows with what celerity this problem could be dealt with. That is exactly the situation. It shows that there need be no difficulty about dealing with the matter in this way. Then the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence Production could explain exactly what they had in mind when they said four years ago that

there were certain powers that they thought should be discontinued. They could say exactly what those powers were and put them before the committee, and it would be for the committee to express its opinion. Then there could be incorporated in the act an appropriate time limit within which the powers could be reintroduced, just as they were reintroduced under other legislation put forward by the government.

If this government, Mr. Speaker, thought it was appropriate in time of war, and in what they described as an emergency period immediately after the war, to place a time limit of one year on powers and then come back for an extension, and to put a one-year time limit in 1951 on the emergency powers act, surely it is proper that there should be some time limit today.

After all, we must remember that the Prime Minister came to this house last year and said that although conditions were still serious and no one could be entirely satisfied with the international situation, nevertheless they regarded the time as appropriate to return to normal procedure. If it was proper for the Prime Minister to ask to return to normal procedure last year, why is it too much for us to ask now that they keep within normal procedure so far as the powers of the defence production department are concerned? The argument of the Prime Minister himself at the time of the termination of the emergency powers act was in itself an argument in support of the contention that we are placing before the house.

Surely there are two simple courses: Accept our amendment which carries into effect their own proposal, or come before the house and say it has been an extended debate, but at least to the extent that views have been sharpened on both sides of the house it has been a useful debate. With that information before us and with the growing confidence now inspired by the meeting at the summit at Geneva, which was not even thought of at the time the legislation was first brought into the house by way of resolution in March, we are going to make the suggestion that the bill stand over and it will then be given cool and careful consideration in the light of events as they are at the next session of parliament.

That, Mr. Speaker, would be the act of a strong government conscious of its own power to do the right thing. There can be corruption, Mr. Speaker, other than corruption in the handling of money and things of that kind. There can be corruption of power, and the insistence on naked power in denial of the assurance given by this government