

Defence Production Act

of State for External Affairs has not said so; the Minister of National Defence has not said so.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): I think most people read the papers.

Mr. Drew: The Secretary of State for External Affairs said the very opposite.

Mr. Harkness: The Secretary of State for External Affairs has certainly done his best—

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): To say that the Secretary of State for External Affairs has said it is not as dangerous now as it was in 1951 is ridiculous.

Mr. Drew: That may be so, but say it to the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

Mr. Harkness: The Secretary of State for External Affairs has done his best to give the impression to this house and to the people of Canada that things are considerably better now than they were a year ago, two years ago, three years ago, four years ago.

Since the minister has raised this point, I should like to examine what the situation was in 1951 and examine briefly what it is now. What were the circumstances in 1951? The Korean war was going on. There was extreme apprehension of a third world war breaking out at that time. In view of the extreme apprehension of a third world war breaking out, not because of Korea but because we were afraid a third world war was coming, a whole new defence build-up in Canada was announced and proceeded with. That was the situation then. We started the big expansion in defence at that time. The world situation was looked upon as extremely uneasy, extremely dangerous. We got started on a whole lot of civil defence activities at that time, and so forth.

What is the situation today? There is no fighting war going on at the present time. The world leaders are all making statements that they are hopeful the tension of the world is easing, including our own Secretary of State for External Affairs. In other words, the picture is better from every point of view except for one thing. That one thing is that the Russians now have better and faster bombers, they have a larger atomic stockpile, and they have the hydrogen bomb. Apart from that the whole situation is better than it was in 1951.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): It is wonderful.

Mr. Dickey: Is that not enough?

Mr. Harkness: In other words the emergency is not nearly as acute as it was in 1951.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): It begins right after they drop the first hydrogen bomb.

[Mr. Harkness.]

Mr. Harkness: The minister is trying to bring up another red herring, another bogeyman. As a matter of fact if a hydrogen bomb is dropped on this country it will not make one iota of difference whether the minister has these powers now and for the next year or two or whether he has not. It will not matter one iota. If a hydrogen bomb is dropped on this country the giving to the minister of these extraordinary powers in the next month or so, the next year or so, or whatever the length of time may be is not going to make any difference. That is a complete bogeyman.

The greatest period of activity by the Department of Defence Production presumably is over. We have had the defence build-up. I am not arguing, and no one is arguing, that the department is not going to still have a great deal to do, but its greatest period of expansion, its purchasing and so forth in such large quantities, is presumably over unless a full-scale war comes on. Whilst all this was going on, whilst all this large amount of purchasing was taking place, the minister got along quite well with the present act. The fact that there was a time limit in it had no effect. Why is he now opposed to a time limit? I ask that question again; why does he say that this section 41 must be repealed and there must be no time limit in this act? Nobody has answered that question, and as a matter of fact I think the reason nobody has answered it is that there is no reasonable answer. There should be a time limit.

Taking it from another point of view, as far as I know there are no shortages which require or are likely to require on short notice the institution of a priorities system. As far as I know there is no shortage at the present time of any essential material. As a matter of fact people are trying desperately to sell them. As far as some commodities are concerned, we are in a surplus position and are having difficulty finding markets.

I think it is quite evident that there is no industry which requires coercion on the part of the government to have it fulfil government orders. Practically all our industries are only too glad to get government orders. They are bidding vigorously against one another and taking all measures possible to get government orders, rather than requiring to have coercion applied to them to take such government orders. So from the point of view of the necessity for priorities in the case of essential goods, and the necessity of coercion to force industry to manufacture certain articles which are wanted, there is no need for these powers at the present time.