

Defence Production Act

we are creating in parliament at the present time. I have told you that I have tried to adopt a non-committal attitude. I have found it interesting to watch my own party and the government on this question.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): You must have been horrified.

Mr. Blair: It was not horrible, it was interesting. It was horrifying to see some of the actions and hear some of the speeches in justification of the measure. If the minister wants any horrid examples I can give them to him. As I say, it was interesting to listen to the debate. I have been out of the house. I lost contact with the affairs of the house. Certainly I would normally support my own party. I fancy I can hear somebody say that I would vote Conservative anyway. Let us acknowledge that; but in my position one has to be fair and I have tried to adopt that attitude in order to get an explanation. I wondered what was behind this measure. Surely it is not a question of not trusting parliament with a time limit in the act.

I ask the minister whether there is anything else. I would hate to say that I suspect ulterior motives, but I feel there is something more behind this measure that has not been brought out in the house, as to why the minister not only wants these powers but wants them for an unspecified time. No time limit has been set. I am afraid of precedents of that kind in the House of Commons. That is what is bothering me. There is a dangerous precedent involved, one that has been pointed out to me not only by people across Canada but by the press of Canada. We must recognize that the press fulfil a duty in moulding public opinion and are very often conscious of public opinion before we are.

Therefore I shall support the amendment. I support it for the reason that I am very much afraid something dangerous is happening to parliament, and again I say I cannot understand why. I come back to this point. If you can trust parliament—and we have heard that so much from the other side of the house—why not trust parliament with regard to a time limit in this act? Bad and all as some of the features of the act may be, if you prate about trusting parliament then there should be a time limit in the bill.

Mr. R. W. Mitchell (London): Mr. Speaker, we have just heard a speech delivered to the house with such conviction that it could only have been born of a sincere and earnest belief in the cause which we espouse. Earlier in the debate I attempted in my imperfect and perhaps inadequate way to suggest that the government and the minister in particular had missed the point of the argument we have

been presenting. Others on this side of the house have presented the same point of view and the same argument in a much clearer way than I can.

This same difference in point of view, the same argument, in the interim has been presented to the Canadian people from coast to coast. While I do not propose to quote from any of the press of Canada, I can only say that a summary of the press reports in most particulars would be a fairly accurate summary of the arguments we have been presenting. The minister and the government, I submit, have refused to see the point. I can only say that there are none so blind as those who will not see.

What is that point? It has been expressed by myself and by others from this side of the house. As I indicated before, it has been presented in many different ways, but it is all the one point. Though it goes farther than I would be prepared to go, I submit that this is a fair summary of those arguments. No one objects to wide powers for the Minister of Defence Production, or even to an extension for a considerable period. The objection is to an indefinite delegation of the power of parliament.

As I previously indicated, that goes further than I am prepared to go. I would submit that the word "considerable" should be changed to the word "definite". What I have said before would then read; no one objects to wide powers for the Minister of Defence Production or even to their extension for a definite period. The objection is to an indefinite delegation of the power of parliament.

Since the last time I took part in the debate on this bill I have listened with complete attention and have carefully read the two speeches and the hundreds of interjections made by the minister. I have seen nothing and I have heard nothing which has caused me to change the conviction which I expressed some two weeks ago. If we accept a free press as being qualified to express public opinion and act as a mirror, then I suggest to the government it is time they looked over their shoulder. They have taken a peek, and it was a pretty small and ineffective peek that went over the left shoulder. I suggest to the minister it is high time they looked around. I suggest it is high time they realized what is going on, and what the reaction is to this bill.

As evidence of that I should like to refer to Dawson's book, "The Government of Canada", and quote a short paragraph.

The initiation of cabinet policies is undoubtedly related in a democracy to trends in public opinion,

[Mr. Blair.]