

conclusion that it would not only be difficult but would be extremely inefficient, and it seemed to me that if it were possible, the system followed during the war should be continued, of a separate government agency to handle defence purchasing.

No one can tell me that the purchasing of supplies, food, screenings, textiles and the thousand and one things that go into the supplying of the armed forces, has to be done in the Department of National Defence. It is essentially a commercial business operation. That organization existed under munitions and supply.

Mr. DIEFENBAKER: What about the building of projects?

Mr. ABBOTT: As regards the building of projects, as the Minister of National Defence pointed out, if the contract was to be left to an outside contractor during the period of the war, that contract was let through the contracts branch of the Department of Munitions and Supply. We had no contracts branch in the Department of National Defence. If it was to be done by the defence department then its own engineers would do the work. It was felt that some central agency of government other than the Department of National Defence could do defence purchasing. When the Canadian Commercial Corporation was created a large portion of the personnel of the purchasing branch of munitions and supply was transferred to that department.

So far as I am concerned, I am not now debating the merits or demerits of forming the corporation. That was debated in this house before. But the defence department, faced with the necessity of creating another purchasing branch, of reconstituting a purchasing branch, looked about for an agency of government which could do that purchasing for it. The Canadian Commercial Corporation, under the direction of the Minister of Trade and Commerce, had a ready-made agency to do the work, and in my view that was the place to turn to. If the Canadian Commercial Corporation is wound up at the end of another two years, when its charter powers lapse, it may be that a purchasing branch will have to be created under the Minister of Trade and Commerce or some other minister to handle purchasing. But in the meantime we have an efficient existing agency which can do this defence purchasing, and it seemed to me that it was very much the course of common sense to allow it to do the work. That was the purpose of this bill.

Mr. GREEN: May I ask the minister a question?

[Mr. Abbott.]

Mr. ABBOTT: Yes.

Mr. GREEN: Does the Canadian Commercial Corporation do any purchasing other than defence purchasing?

Mr. ABBOTT: I am afraid I cannot answer that. May I add that as Minister of National Defence I did not care what agency did the purchasing so long as it was done efficiently. I looked around my colleagues and this agency was in existence under the direction of the Minister of Trade and Commerce, and there was no other available agency. The alternative was to allow that agency, which was there in existence and efficient, to do the purchasing, or to create a completely duplicating agency in the national defence department. To me that was rubbish, sheer rubbish.

Mr. C. C. I. MERRITT (Vancouver-Burrard): The minister has put his finger on what is wrong with this bill. He said he looked around and did not care who did it so long as it was done efficiently.

Mr. ABBOTT: Right.

Mr. MERRITT: I think the government has treated this whole matter in that light. They did not care who did it as long as, in their opinion, it was done efficiently. In this debate already we have had discussed the temporary character of the Canadian Commercial Corporation and the effect of this practice upon the continuation of our civil service as we know it, and we have had the suitability of this corporation to conduct building as well as purchasing operations thoroughly discussed. I am not going to detain the house except to make one quite short point.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott) has just said that he had to look around for some department of government to take over the duties in this connection performed during the war by the Department of Munitions and Supply. One of the chief troubles here is that he had not found another department of government, but rather a crown company, the Canadian Commercial Corporation, to do what was done heretofore by the department, and to do building which heretofore had been done by the Department of Public Works, and more recently by Wartime Housing Limited, and other agencies of the kind.

I find that most striking results flow from the use of this corporation. I hold in my hand the debates of the last session of parliament, particularly those of August 5, 1946, where the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. MacKinnon) was being asked questions with respect to section 11 of this act. At