

Combines Investigation Act

(Mr. Macdonnell)—that but for the resignation of Mr. McGregor we would have suppressed the report entirely.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): I want to correct the minister. I said that that was reported, and the government need not be surprised if all kinds of reports were made in view of the action that they took. I did not say it myself. I said it had been said.

Mr. Garson: My hon. friend quoted it with disapproval, but quoted it.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): That is correct.

Mr. Garson: Let us look at this suggestion. If we were going to suppress the report entirely why would I go to the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. MacInnis), as he quite rightly said that I did, and ask him to withdraw his question concerning the flour report—thereby admitting that such a report existed—until I was in a position to bring down the report and this amending legislation at the same time. True, my estimate as to the time in which it could be brought down was, shall I say, unduly optimistic; but why would I ask him that question at all if we were going to suppress the report? Moreover, sir, the fact that the flour report was in the offing was no secret. Mr. McGregor referred to it in his evidence before the prices committee in 1948 and there were references in the press to this report as far back as the spring of 1948. To suppress it would have been an utter impossibility.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Was not the reference to the investigation, not the report, in February or March of 1948?

Mr. Garson: No, it was a reference to the flour report itself in preparation. As I say, to suppress it would be impossible. But, sir, that was not the point. The point was that before the government published what could very well be regarded as a serious attack upon business confidence in the good faith of the government—and when I say “government” I do not mean just this government, I mean government generally—it was under an obligation in the public interest to know its own position and coincident with that publication announce that position so that no person would be pilloried and indicted in respect of co-operating with the government in wartime controls which owed their success in large measure to that very co-operation.

During this debate it has been asserted that the government is responsible to parliament and that it should in its action take proper cognizance of this point. No person will quarrel with that view—certainly we do

not. True, there was some delay. Delay in respect of what? Delay in respect of what turned out to be—I am talking about the statutory delay now in getting it printed in time—a manuscript which was changed five times by the commissioner himself before it became the report that we have before the house at the present time.

Mr. Coldwell: What was the last date on which it was changed?

Mr. Garson: February 23, 1949, which, if I may point out, was a matter of about a month and a half after the date on which my head should have rolled in the sand, because the report was not published.

Mr. Coldwell: And eight months before it was tabled?

Mr. Garson: Yes, that is right. I have explained the reason for the delay in the intervening period. We have published the report. We have made our statement concerning it at the time that it was always intended that it should be made, coincident with the publication of the report, and at the same time we have placed this amending legislation before parliament. It was on the second reading of this amendment that my hon. friend, the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew), moved his amendment to the motion for second reading which I suggest is, in its substance, a motion of want of confidence in this government. While it is important, sir, that the government should be responsible to parliament and should respect parliament, parliament should respect the functions of government. One of the most important of these functions is that the government, as long as it remains the government and continues to retain the confidence of the House of Commons, should have the right to make government policy.

Mr. Drew: But not change the law?

Mr. Garson: No. My hon. friend is quite right. When parliament, lacking confidence in the government, interferes with the government's making of government policy, then the only course that the government can follow is to resign.

The bill now before the house represents government policy. The leader of the opposition made what I regarded as an attempt to indicate that it did not represent government policy; but by interjection I think I made it quite clear that the bill now before the house represents the government policy and the whole of government policy in this matter of the Combines Investigation Act amendment now before us.