

*Defence Production Act*

procedure, and that the department has done efficient work. The minister was charged with the responsibility of securing the necessary defence supplies, not only for the Department of National Defence but other supplies considered necessary for the successful prosecution of the war, or the carrying out of a full defence program.

As I said, I have come to such conclusion from reading the remarks of the Prime Minister in 1951, when he was speaking to the resolution. Let me quote briefly from his remarks as they appear at page 613 of *Hansard* for February 23, 1951:

The greatly increased defence program not only calls for greater purchases, but, what is more important—

And this was in 1951.

—requires some direction of the production program in such fields as production, aircraft, ship-building, vehicles, armament and ammunition. The present high level of demand for practically all major commodities has already made it necessary for the government to take a certain measure of direction and control or allocation of such an essential material as steel, for instance.

Those are not very strong words, but from them one can gather that there was good cause for setting up the Department of Defence Production and giving it some powers of control and direction. Those words were spoken at a time when it was believed that such action was necessary, and at a time when it was necessary that there be some direction of the production program. It was a reasonable conclusion that there should be a separate department to look after the procurement of supplies which were then so urgently needed. There was no question about fixing the minister's salary. He was to be paid the same as other ministers, but then follow these words, and they are significant:

The present high level of demand for practically all major commodities has already made it necessary for the government to take a certain measure of direction and control or allocation of such an essential material as steel, for instance.

That was in 1951; and hon. members will recall, some better than I do, that that was quite a different situation from what we have today. Even then the Prime Minister did not use very strong words. Even when we passed the act we put a time limit on it. I do not think hon. members can say that today conditions are similar to what they were in 1951. Today many industries are running on part time. There is a surplus of goods and commodities. Thousands of men have been put out of work because industry has not been able to give them employment. As a result, industry is anxious to get orders.

If that is not so we have not been told by the minister or by any member of the government today that the facts are different from

what we read in newspapers and what we hear around us. Even the aircraft industry, which is one of the essential industries in our defence program, is not operating at full capacity; nor are the shipyards to which the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Michener) referred. I am not going to say anything more about it. As I see it, conditions are not the same at all. I cannot help but feel that industry would be very glad to do business with the government, glad to get orders for defence contracts, and there is certainly no evidence to the contrary.

Compare that with conditions in 1951, when this country was engaged in a hot war, when the people had ample money with which to buy goods, when the civilian population acquired a lot of goods. I can understand that the government might have difficulty in obtaining the supplies they wanted under those conditions. I can understand why the minister required those powers at that time. But when we come to consider putting this type of legislation in a permanent form so it becomes the basic law of our land, and when we consider and boast about freedom and democracy, it seems to me we are inconsistent, and we shall be looked upon by other countries as being inconsistent. We brag about how much freedom we have, and then we pass such a law as this and make it permanent on the statute books.

The Prime Minister indicated at the time that since the present Minister of Trade and Commerce had been carrying on throughout the war and had great experience in handling defence supplies, he had been asked to draw up or frame the act, and he was the one who would be responsible for it. While at that time he did not say the minister would be in charge of the department, I gather it was understood that would be so. Therefore the act was drafted by the minister or at least it was under his guiding hand, as he wished it to be, since he was the minister who was going to administer the act. No doubt he was pretty sure of that.

From his point of view I do not blame him much for wanting to get all the punch into it that he could. With his experience in business he felt that he could get things done as and when he wanted them done. Because of his experience he would know where to draw the line. I have no hesitation in saying that he put every bit of power into the act that he could possibly get into it. He knew that he had to organize and control the products and materials in a period when civilians were clamouring for many of the same materials. Because the economy was strong and purchasing power was high it was