

Defence Production Act

I admit to being a person capable of getting into an argument with all the heat that anybody else can. I admit to taking sides very strongly and fighting hard. But I ask hon. members on both sides of the house if it is not true now that we are talking at length and staying here over a subsidiary issue. We are agreed on the main issue. The only issue we are not agreed on is as to whether the act should technically be made permanent, always capable of being repealed, or whether technically it should be put on a temporary basis, always capable of being extended.

My hon. friend from Kamloops (Mr. Fulton) suggested the other day, with help from some of the rest of us, that this House of Commons consists of a group of grown men and young women. Surely we are capable of resolving this difference. I recognize how difficult it is in the heat of debate to have a difference of this nature resolved, but I think it is possible, and I want to make a suggestion. Others before me have tried. My hon. friend from Peace River (Mr. Low) tried the other day and I do not know what success he has had. But I shall make my suggestion.

In the light of the fact, as the hon. member for Leeds said, that we have no quarrel with the Defence Production Act, and in the light of the fact that we are agreed on the need for the department and the need for the government to have certain powers over industry, particularly with respect to defence needs, but that we are divided on only the subsidiary question, I suggest that the Prime Minister invite to his office as soon as he can—and I suggest he do it today—certain people. I shall name some of them, and I have no objection if he invites others. I suggest he invite the Leader of the Opposition; the leader of this group, the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart; the leader of the Social Credit group, the hon. member for Peace River; and the Minister of Defence Production himself. The house leader, the Minister of Finance, might also well be invited, and I have no objection to the Prime Minister inviting others.

It does seem to me, and all of us who have had some experience with meetings of this kind, that collective bargaining, bargaining in good faith, can achieve results. It seems to me that if this group of men could get together some sort of settlement could be arrived at. I do not ask the government to give up its insistence on the endorsement of the principle of the bill, namely that the Department of Defence Production be continued.

Mr. Lennard: We do not quarrel with that.

[Mr. Knowles.]

Mr. Knowles: As my friend the hon. member for Wentworth (Mr. Lennard) says, they do not quarrel with that.

Mr. Lennard: The quarrel is with the powers.

Mr. Knowles: I do not ask my friends in the Conservative party to give up their contention that certain modifications should be made but surely we could get agreement on the second reading of the bill and agreement on some course of action to be followed after second reading. I am not going to spoil things by trying to suggest any particular course of action. But surely this group of men could get together on some sort of action to be taken after second reading which would be satisfactory to all concerned. I make this plea, Mr. Speaker, not only in the interests of this legislation. I may say that I think it is important and necessary legislation; it is legislation that I want to vote for and that we in this group as well as most hon. members in this house want to vote for. I make this plea not only for that purpose but because of the interest that all of us have in so many other items yet to come before parliament at this session. We are not objecting to the length of the session. There is not any one of us who is doing that. If some amongst us are obliged to go away for a few days and to come back, that is in the nature of things. However, I think we should all agree that there should be a sense of proportion or a sense of balance. There are all kinds of extremely important issues which have yet to come before this house. From our experience here we know that if we get everything else done but the estimates, and that if it is hot in July or hot in August in Ottawa, the rest of the estimates will go through this house fairly fast; they will not be given the kind of consideration we know they should be given.

I could take longer in developing the various arguments, but I have tried to refrain from arguing. I suggest that our position is that the primary consideration is the principle of extending the department and extending the control of the government over defence industry and defence purchasing. We therefore feel that the important issue is the vote on second reading itself. As to the other question, as I said on March 14, we should be glad to see consideration given to a time limit being written in. Indeed that is our preference, although we are not unduly concerned if that is not done. But surely the government could consider that aspect if it had a good-faith understanding by the