

Military Establishments—Fires and Thefts

with which we seem to be dealing so frequently in this house. There is a minister appointed, and according to him he has the authority to do anything, therefore it is not necessary to bother about the public Inquiries Act or any other act that was designed by this parliament to authorize the kind of inquiry which should be under way at this time. In fact, one might almost hear the minister say, in the words of Gilbert and Sullivan:

The law is the true embodiment,
Of everything that's excellent.
It has no kind of fault or flaw,
And I, my lords, embody the law.

The minister is appointed. He is in charge of the establishment, and therefore he embodies the whole law, and his wish expressed in a letter to Mr. Currie is adequate to conduct an inquiry, which certainly would be one of the most important inquiries conducted in this country if it were carried forward with the measure of authority which such an inquiry should possess.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am going to present a motion, and in doing so I wish to refer to certain arguments which indicate an attitude toward inquiries provided by the public Inquiries Act which seems to be strangely inconsistent, not only with the attitude of this government on other occasions but also with the history of inquiries of this nature both here and in Great Britain, from whose records we gain so much when we seek precedents of value in dealing with matters of this kind. When it was suggested on another occasion that an inquiry under the public Inquiries Act should be conducted, the Minister of Defence Production (Mr. Howe) belittled the suggestion that an inquiry of this kind could serve any useful purpose. He stated on an earlier occasion that a group of experts had been brought in from Chicago.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I gather that the hon. member is referring to another debate during this session. If it took place during this session, I request that he do not do so.

Mr. Drew: I had no intention of quoting, but in any event I can put forward my argument without any further reference to what was said on another occasion. The attitude has been adopted on a number of occasions that the calling in of experts is not what is helpful in producing reforms. At the time that matter was under discussion I did not have the opportunity of replying because I had introduced a motion. If I had I would have pointed out that on a number of occasions the failure of people brought in without full authority has been demonstrated, and that is exactly what should be in the minds of hon. members in this house if the arguments which have been put forward against

the appointment of a body to inquire under the public Inquiries Act are to be regarded as valid. Those arguments themselves demonstrate the unsatisfactory nature of inquiries conducted without the appropriate authority to obtain evidence, to obtain the production of documents, and that is exactly what has been suggested in this house and elsewhere. It has been suggested that, no matter how high the standing may be of any individual or group of individuals asked to inquire into certain matters of importance to the public, that inquiry can produce no satisfactory result if such individual or individuals do not find themselves cloaked with adequate powers under the public Inquiries Act.

Any suggestion that it is a derogation of the authority and responsibility of members of the house to suggest the appointment of an appropriate body to conduct a public inquiry under the public Inquiries Act is surely answered by the fact that this government has on so many occasions seen fit to appoint bodies to conduct inquiries into matters which ultimately could only be dealt with by this house and by parliament, and have, in fact, claimed a substantial measure of credit for adopting that course.

May I, Mr. Speaker, anticipate the possibility that we would once again hear any suggestion that it would be a derogation of the responsibility of the members of this house and of parliament to express their opinion that an appropriate body should be appointed under the public Inquiries Act. May I point out the occasions on which the appointment of such a body has been of vital importance not only here but at Westminster, from which we draw so many of our valuable precedents.

I think it may be worth while pointing out that our whole present system of public accounting and the presentation of accounts and reports to parliament is the result of the recommendations of a royal commission appointed in 1831 by the parliament at Westminster to inquire into their general methods of accounting, the preparation of accounts and, generally, the business methods of the government in relation to those subjects. Not only were the reforms effected at Westminster which produced their modern system of accounting but since we became, to use words that have been so often employed, "the transcript of Westminster", we adopted the same methods that were the result of recommendations of a royal commission in 1831.

Then when we are told that our treasury system is so perfect that it could gain nothing from such an inquiry, may I remind hon. members that another commission appointed two years earlier by the House of Commons

[Mr. Drew.]