

DEFENCE PRODUCTION ACT

AMENDMENTS RESPECTING SALARY OF MINISTER
AND EXPIRY OF ACT

The house resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Howe, Port Arthur (for Mr. St. Laurent) for the second reading of Bill No. 256, to amend the Defence Production Act.

Mr. Clarence Gillis (Cape Breton South): Mr. Speaker, I have sat here for the past couple of days and listened with great attention and some profit to the debate on the motion for the second reading of this bill. The thing that struck me most forcibly was that there was no issue as far as most of the official opposition speakers were concerned, and in my judgment a controversy must have an issue. They were not prepared to say that we should not have legislation of this type; they were registering complaints rather than raising an issue or making concrete proposals to offset the legislation before the house.

I always like to listen to the last speaker for the official opposition because you get the impression that at least he means what he says. He was very earnest in his presentation and he did clearly point up the issue that he had in his mind. In my judgment that issue was that the house should determine the rights of private property as against the security of the state. This was the ground put forth by the hon. member and in my judgment that is the issue before the house.

The first question we will have to ask ourselves is whether it is necessary to have this type of legislation. With his long experience in this field I am sure that the Minister of Defence Production (Mr. Howe) would not come before this house to ask for this kind of bill unless he had a good reason for so doing. In my judgment all this talk about dictatorship and the loss of democracy is denied by the very discussion that has taken place on this subject. The minister has come before the house and given hon. members representing all the people of Canada an opportunity to discuss the advisability of granting to him the modified amount of authority over the economy of Canada which he is asking for in this bill. That is all it amounts to.

In my opinion this type of legislation is made necessary because big business begets big government. When you examine the economic processes outside of this house you find that during the past 20 years the practice has been to take a dozen or score of small companies that have been functioning as separate units and amalgamate them

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under a charter from the government. Nobody has objected from that source to that type of thing. By getting a charter which gives them practically unlimited powers in certain economic fields they can water their stock, squeeze out the small shareholders and in effect control the destinies of the communities in which they operate. That in turn forces the government which is responsible to the people to develop the same type of organization in order to be able to meet those who manage the economy of the country on the outside on common terms in the event of an emergency.

To suggest that we should not have this kind of law or that the minister should not be given this type of authority in an emergency is to argue against the very basis of law itself. We have laws against bank burglars, not because we want to enforce them but because we know there are people in our society who will commit that type of crime if they think they can get away with it. We impose the penalty of capital punishment in the case of murder, not because our lawmakers want to enforce that law and hang people but because it might act as a deterrent. It is a notification to all those who might violate the laws of society that there are penalties which will be imposed when such crimes are committed.

We establish procedure for the reading of the riot act under our Criminal Code, not to promote riots or because we want to enforce that law but as a penalty in the event of something like that happening. That is the principle which runs through all our law, and there is no difference in this case.

Is there a reason why this should be done? Is it, as has been suggested by the official opposition, that the minister is merely looking for power? Is there any reason why he should do this? What precedents exist arising out of his own experience that tell the minister that he has to have this kind of thing? We have precedents but I do not intend to go over them at this time.

I sat in this house from 1940 during the years of the war and I saw where this government had to place a controller in one of our national steel companies because they were not playing ball in the emergency. I saw them put a controller in the Montreal tramways in order that transportation in that particular city might not be scuttled and defence industries tied up as a result. Another example is that mentioned by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), the profits limitation act. While the house was not in session the minister was forced to repeal by order in