

Defence Production Act

this house without its being suggested that it becomes a personal attack upon the Minister of Defence Production. There have been occasions of course when the minister did not take kindly to some remarks that have been made, but in the very nature of debate in this and other similar bodies where free discussion takes place there are bound to be fairly vigorous exchanges. Those exchanges not only are appropriate but will be continued where they are justified.

This does raise the point of how some people have acted in regard to this act. There have been comments editorially in newspapers, which have however changed their opinions in most cases in more recent days, to the effect that this is an attack on the Minister of Defence Production simply because we do not say to the House of Commons, "No matter what the act says you must support it because, if you do not do so, you are raising some doubt about your reliance upon this omniscient minister."

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): May I ask the hon. gentleman if these remarks are addressed to the bill? I do not need his comments upon myself; I do not welcome them and I do not value them.

Mr. Drew: I am pointing out that in the discussion of this subject which is taking place fortunately there is a free press outside this house as well as here. There has been a mistaken idea expressed that the points we have raised in regard to the bill have constituted an attack upon the Minister of Defence Production simply because we have challenged the wisdom of the legislation itself. I point out that it would be a sorry day for this House of Commons and for parliament as a whole if we ever came to the time where we failed to examine legislation strictly upon the basis of the legislation itself and became confused as to the nature of the debate because some particular minister might for the time being be associated with the administration of that legislation.

The Minister of Defence Production has the responsibility of administering this act. We as members of parliament have the responsibility and the very high duty as the highest court of law in Canada to make sure that we do not put on the statute books laws which could be abused or which in themselves, regardless of who may administer them, could in any way affect the constitutional position or the rights of the people of Canada.

This measure has been discussed as emergency legislation. We do not know of the so-called compromise proposal, which is something not heard in this house. If the

proposal were anything that had been stated in the house there would be nothing new that came from the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Low). I say that with the highest regard for the speech which the hon. member made. It was a logical, clear and forceful speech. What he did however was to amplify and strengthen the argument which was made first in March, that the Department of Defence Production be made a permanent part of government for the acquisition of defence supplies and equipment. In March it was stated that the powers conferred upon the minister who from time to time may be responsible for the act should be powers subject to review and confined from time to time to powers which are necessary in the light of changing events. That was the precise effect of the motion by way of amendment that is under discussion in relation to the primary motion now before this house.

I repeat what I said before this article appeared, that if there have been any discussions or any negotiations they are unknown to me and I am rather inclined to think they are equally unknown to the Minister of Defence Production. No proposal has been made to me. I repeat that there is no need for the continuance of this debate. All that is necessary is that the government adopt the perfectly logical and sensible course of doing exactly what it said in 1951 it should do, and that it review the whole subject and eliminate those powers which it said at that time were excessive.

Today we have had a most interesting comment by the Prime Minister in relation to another subject. I shall not refer to that subject because all hon. members are aware of what it is and I might contravene the rules if I did. In relation to that subject the Prime Minister said that this government is prepared to deal with other governments on the assumption that we are in a period of steady and hopeful international trade and that therefore it is quite proper for the government to make cash advances which will benefit communist as well as other governments because of the confidence of the government in the situation that confronts us. But the position of the government is not the same with regard to defence production. It is prepared to trust the Polish communist government but it is not prepared to trust the people of Canada. That is exactly what this means.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Drew: It means that it is prepared to go ahead and make these deals with communist governments on the assumption that everything will be steady. Yet more than a year before the termination of the act it