

Defence Production Act

and has exercised more authority than any other man in the history of Canada. That is regarded by some people as a good thing, and by others as not so good. It depends on the point of view. No one detracts from the job which the minister has done in organizing Canadian industry on a war footing. I do not wish to detract from that myself. However, I am not one of those who feel that because we have had one good custom we must follow it indefinitely. If we are to believe the poets, we have to make changes "lest one good custom should corrupt the world". There is as much truth as poetry in that. It is not desirable that any one person in his own hands should exercise and wield so much power for so long a time. Therefore, we find today that the minister who is regarded by some as the patron saint of Canadian industry—and certainly he has been the best customer of Canadian industry—is regarded by others as an arbiter, an autocrat and a czar of Canadian industry.

If these powers are continued it will be possible for the minister to continue to play that role in the years to come. To my mind, Mr. Speaker, that is not a desirable thing. We have submitted to five years of what might be called absolute authority over Canadian industry. Businessmen had very little choice in their actions during that period. In fact, if they came within the essential realm they had no choice and they were perforce dealing with the government of Canada as their principal customer.

That was followed by a period of not quite so intense control, which has continued to the present time. Even today the businessman of this country has to be very careful of his relationships with the government because of the authorities which exist in this act, and authorities of that kind which have existed in the past. It is not possible for a man to be independent in these circumstances, or as independent as he would wish to be, and that extends not only to what is normally regarded as munitions and supply and defence industry but into all the collateral industries that are connected in any way with defence production. There are a great many others. It goes through the whole breadth of the manufacturing industries of the country. If for no other reason than that, it would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that the justification which this house should have for the continuation of that state of affairs has not been forthcoming.

It is not easy for those who resent or resist these influences and would like to see them curtailed to say anything, and it is the duty of their representatives in the house to speak for them in that respect. The man in business who is so directly connected with the

[Mr. Michener.]

government has no freedom to express himself, and it is not limited to defence. The minister's authority has extended throughout the realm of trade and commerce, which involves imports. At one time it was necessary to have export licences which involved exports which were under control. It involves a great deal of the commerce of the country. The fact that the same person is the Minister of Trade and Commerce and the Minister of Defence Production does not help the situation at all at this time. In addition to that, the same minister has the responsibility for the western farmers almost completely in his hands. There is hardly a farmer in western Canada who does not have all his products taken by this government and sold for him and the returns paid to him, and all under the direction of this same minister. Therefore, I say, much as one will give credit to the Minister of Trade and Commerce, the Minister of Defence Production and the minister of munitions and supply and the head of many other agencies, corporations and instruments of government, much as one will credit him with the accomplishments that have taken place, it becomes necessary to consider the cumulative effect of these authorities on the country and on the state of mind of the businessmen of the country.

I am rather astonished that those who call themselves Liberals and claim a liberal view of our economy and of our personal relations with government have submitted and are willing to submit to so much centralization of authority, even though it may have been exercised so well. The practice is not justification for the principle which is being followed by this kind of legislation.

Will you call it one o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Applewhaite): May I point out at this moment that if the hon. gentleman wishes me to call it one o'clock it will then be my duty to tell him that his time has expired.

At one o'clock the house took recess.

The house resumed at 2.30 p.m.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1955-56

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 1956, was presented by Hon. W. E. Harris (Minister of Finance), read by Mr. Speaker to the house, and referred to the committee of supply.