

Defence Production Act

Mr. Lennard: Two or three weeks from now.

An hon. Member: Speak to the amendment.

Mr. White (Hastings-Frontenac): The hon. member will have plenty of time to speak. I have not heard him speak for a long time, and we will all be waiting with interest to hear what he has to say. I was saying that the amendment moved by the hon. member for Royal is so reasonable that it is hard to understand why the minister or the government will not accept it. The position we take on this side of the house is simply that we have no objection to the department being made permanent, but we do feel there should be in the act a time limit over those powers.

It seems rather absurd to say, as suggested by the Prime Minister that a private member could introduce a bill to review this act and the government would facilitate the discussion of that bill. Surely parliament should have the right at a future date to examine this bill, to debate it, to criticize it and to decide what powers are necessary to be extended for a further period. Let the government proceed in a really democratic way and give the elected representatives a proper opportunity in the future to fulfil the duties which they were elected to fulfil and which they were sent here to fulfil. That procedure has been followed in the past, so why should it not be followed at the present time?

If it should turn out that this bill is forced through by the government, it would then be placed on the statute books of Canada and there would be no limit to these drastic and sweeping powers. I wonder if this is the type of democracy or the parliamentary procedure for which many thousands of young Canadians gave their lives in two world wars. Is this the type of freedom that young Canadians want, or will they have to accept a parliamentary procedure that would by-pass parliament? If there is to be no opportunity to review this bill in the future, then I say the supremacy of parliament is being delegated to the Minister of Defence Production.

Hon. members have referred to different editorials and press comments across the country, and it has been pointed out that many Canadian people are becoming rather uneasy and somewhat worried over taking away the right of parliament to have a periodic review and renewal of these powers. It appears that it is rather pleasant for some hon. members who sit opposite to ridicule the argument of the members of the opposition when they refer to and speak in support of the supremacy of parliament, the rights of parliament and the rule of law.

I say that when parliament is asked to grant powers as sweeping as these, and for an indefinite period, the minister and all hon. members of the house should scrupulously abide by the rules of parliament. It is my intention to vote for the amendment.

Mr. W. G. Blair (Lanark): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have taken part in this debate, and I do so tonight not with the idea of participating in a filibuster but as an elected representative who desires to give voice to his opinion and conviction regarding this legislation. I am surprised at the small number of government members who have participated in this debate. As I was not actively engaged in the debate and was more or less sitting on the sidelines, I was able to pass an opinion on the legislation and on the actions of hon. members on both sides of the house.

I was rather glad yesterday when two of the youngest members of this house rose to take part in the debate, and I wondered why they did so. I felt that they wanted to justify their position supporting the government, and I wondered also if there were not some twitterings of conscience in the speeches they made. But it became quite clear that either some pressure had been placed on them in their ridings or that they had been influenced by the press when they made their speeches in justification of the position they were taking. It brought to my mind a story of a woman charged with smoking in bed and starting a fire in a hotel room. When she was brought up before the magistrate she complained that the bed was on fire before she got into it.

I recall quite well the speech made by the hon. member for Spadina. I do not always agree with the speeches of the hon. member for Spadina, but I always felt that when he spoke he stated his position clearly and concisely. But there was one thing in his speech to which I should like to refer. I looked it up because I felt it would be interesting. It will be found on page 5005 of *Hansard* of June 20. He made this statement:

In so far as the people of Canada are concerned, they could not care less about this present issue, because there is no real issue.

I want to point out to the hon. member for Spadina that he is badly mistaken. I was in touch with my constituents over the last two Saturdays, and one of the last of the people with whom I talked on Monday morning said to me as I left, "This is a bad act; try to influence the government so it will not pass". I have met with that sentiment several times during the last few Saturdays in my own riding and I might say it comes from all parties and all political complexes.