

Defence Production Act

Prime Minister, in whose name the bill appears, has not spoken or should speak? In other words, at this moment I do not raise the point and I do not intend to proceed further.

Mr. Fleming: I know you are not inviting discussion on the point, Mr. Speaker, but in fairness I think there should be added to your closing observations this fact. The point you have just mentioned is not the only ground that has been put forward in this debate as to why the Prime Minister should take part. It was one point, but surely there are many important questions—

Mr. Howe (Pori Arthur): Mr. Speaker, this is the fifth speech by the same hon. member.

Mr. Speaker: There is, I suppose, some relationship to the point of order. However, I find it difficult to believe that what the hon. member is about to say has a direct bearing on the point of order I have raised. I would not want him to have to repeat the reasons which he advanced in his earlier speech. I am not ruling on that ground. I am not giving a ruling. I am merely asking the co-operation of hon. members not to repeat, as the rule says, arguments used by others in the same debate or to repeat one's own arguments in the same debate. The hon. member may continue.

Mr. Dinsdale: I certainly did not intend to become the centre of a procedural discussion, Mr. Speaker, and I most decidedly do not intend to comment on the point of order. I have been in the house long enough to realize that new things are developing each day in parliamentary discussion and procedure, and before one dares to inject himself into a discussion of this kind he must have considerable experience behind him. I must say, however, that I have learned something new this evening as a result of the discussion that has taken place, because from past experience in the house it has come as a surprise to me that repetition is one of the unpardonable sins. It seems to me that in the past repetition has proceeded apace in most discussions we have had.

Now, proceeding with my contribution to the debate, Mr. Speaker, this bill has been described as a very simple, innocuous bill. I fail to see certain aspects of it in that light. Perhaps if it were viewed in isolation and as a separate item one could so describe it. Certainly, as you examine the bill presented to us, it seems to be very simple and harmless. But on the other hand, if you look at this matter of perpetuating exceptional powers delegated to the minister in the Defence Production Act, I feel that we are

justified in concluding this is just another symptom of a trend that has been under way for far too long, not only in this parliament but in other democratic parliaments.

From time to time in our debates in this house concerning trends in parliament the book "The Passing of Parliament" by G. W. Keeton has been mentioned. It deals more directly with the United Kingdom parliament than with this house, but I feel that if this Canadian House of Commons allows these exceptional powers to be included in this act in perpetuity it is definitely part of this fundamental erosion of the rights of members under our parliamentary system. At page 7 of this book Keeton says that parliament is tending to become merely a censor of executive acts.

The argument has been put up in defence of this measure that there is no need to circumscribe or limit these exceptional powers because the estimates of the minister will be coming before the house each year and hon. members will have an opportunity to level the necessary criticisms to keep the application of these exceptional powers within reasonable limits. Going back to Keeton's statement, that procedure is merely putting parliament in the role of a censor, not an active creative force in the legislative process. We would merely be censoring what had already taken place under these exceptional powers if they happened to be used by the minister. Certainly they are provided for in this act.

Keeton also goes on to say that there are many trends under way in our parliamentary system. He indicates that even in democratic parliaments such as our own and that of the United Kingdom, the democratic processes are on the road to Moscow; that is a phrase he uses.

He gives three points in support of that viewpoint. First of all, the road to Moscow is marked by the one-party state; and who will deny that we have come perilously close to that unhappy situation in this country? Only recently the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson), who should have a broad knowledge of this situation, decried the unhappy circumstances in which we have an opposition divided in its own councils and therefore rendered almost powerless to take an effective part in the parliamentary deliberations of this house. The one-party state has been a part of the trend.

Then Keeton points out that the road to autocracy is open when we have an all-powerful executive which can almost usurp and arrogate to itself unlimited powers because of the relatively weakened position of the opposition. Third, he indicates that the

[Mr. Speaker.]