

Defence Production Act

the tabling of orders in council we are discussing. In my view it has not. Second, whether the provisions of the Emergency Powers Act, which we have just passed, have any application; and I have said in my opinion they have. Beyond that I am afraid I cannot accommodate my hon. friend, because we have not as yet directed our minds at all to that further procedure under these statutes.

Mr. Howe: If I may say just a word, this discussion is so unrealistic that it is rather disgusting to a man who has to be on the firing line. Let me give my hon. friends an illustration of the problem. Some time ago we had to suspend a subsidy on wheat. The action could not be announced before the effective date; otherwise there would have been stockpiling and trouble. When we decontrolled wheat there had to be a compensating increase in the price of flour, and as soon as the decontrol order was announced it was necessary to telephone every baker that the increase in the price of flour should not be more than so much. That was done over the telephone in a great hurry. Prices were increased to that level and the matter was forgotten until Mr. McGregor brought down his report, in which the increased price was made one of the principal charges against the milling industry—that they had combined to fix that price.

That is the situation. What could we do? Could we let everything run wild for a few days until we got an order in council and tabled it in the house? If my hon. friends are serious about wanting price control—and the people trying to tie us up are those who want price control—we cannot be hobbled by any such regulation, written in advance, as my hon. friend is suggesting. Price control is a very high-powered affair; it must be operated with great speed and without too many rules and regulations to follow if it is to be effective. Therefore if my hon. friends seriously want us to undertake price control, do not tie us up as to how we should operate vis-à-vis the combines act.

Mr. Fulton: I think what the minister has said and what was said by the Minister of Justice indicate that the government must have—and if it has not it should have—given some consideration to how it is going to do this thing. The Minister of Trade and Commerce has just now said that great difficulties arose under similar circumstances when this thing had to be done in the past. I should imagine that at the least the government would be—in fact, I am quite certain they are—most anxious to avoid similar difficulties in the future.

Mr. Howe: Quite so.

Mr. Fulton: Therefore it surely follows that if they wish to avoid those difficulties, and wish to be in a position to act quickly, as the minister has said it is necessary to act on occasions such as these, it is necessary to know in advance under what powers they are going to act, and along what lines they are going to act when they do decide to go ahead.

The Minister of Justice has said that the government has not yet directed its mind to the question of how it is going to be done. I do not want to tie the ministers down to every statement made on this subject on every occasion, but I would point out that when the matter was brought up on Tuesday the Minister of Justice was able to hand to the Minister of Trade and Commerce a statement concerning it, which the Minister of Trade and Commerce read to the house. It is hardly consonant with the facts, and with the importance of this subject, to ask us to accept without further explanation the statement that the government has not directed its mind to the question of how these things are to be done when the time arises.

Mr. Howe: The government can direct its mind all it likes, but if the time comes when we get seriously into price control, and it has to take a chance on violating the combines act or take a worse chance on letting some prices run wild, I assure you that if I am responsible or asked for advice as to what should be done I will do what will mean the most to the Canadian people, and take my chance on being ridiculed in this house, as I was on one other occasion. If you want me to commit myself, that is the stand I take today.

Mr. Fulton: I do not think the minister appreciates what we want to do.

Mr. Howe: You want rules and regulations laid down under which we will act if we undertake price controls.

Mr. Fulton: I do not suppose the Minister of Trade and Commerce likes to be put in a position where he has transgressed or broken some law. He has told the people that it may be necessary to suspend the operation of the Combines Investigation Act, and I think that—

Mr. Howe: If we do suspend the act, the regulation is brought down and tabled saying that we are going to do it. How we operate it after that, we cannot tell you. It will have to depend on circumstances.

Mr. Fulton: The questions that are being asked are directed to the point of how we are going to find out that has been done. If it is an order or regulation of one type which is tabled automatically, then we know.