

*Munitions and Supply Act—Blackout*

mons and the government buildings. The blackout of government buildings when night shifts are not on duty is a farce. There are no lights in those buildings anyway; there is nothing to black out. But we were sitting here; we were discussing this bill, and the debate was adjourned before 9 o'clock, while two hours remained for discussion.

I have some further objection to the report of the comments by the minister to the *Ottawa Journal*, which I quote from the noon issue of Saturday last. The reporter got in touch with the minister, and this dialogue is reported:

"Sorry to bother you," said the *Journal*, calling Mr. Howe by phone later, "but now that you are just an ordinary citizen, and out of a job at that, it doesn't matter so much." "How so?" asked Mr. Howe. "No bill, no munitions department, not until Monday at 3 p.m., anyway." "Ah," returned Mr. Howe slowly and sweetly, evidently enjoying it—

Mind you, sir, he was enjoying it.

—"We fooled you. Just rushed through an order in council, expecting that perhaps the bill might not pass to-night." The munitions department still is the munitions department through the minister's foresight and the grace of a hurried order in council. The bill may go to the ash-can, killed by a black-out; for the order in council gives the munitions department life for the duration.

I wonder if the minister really said those words; if he tried to fool the House of Commons by ordering a blackout to interrupt the debate on the bill. It may look strange at first, but the bill was there, waiting for the last moment; and before the last moment came we had this blackout. There are jokes, of course. I do not wish to be hard on the minister; if he tried to fool the correspondent of the *Journal*, so much the better. On the other hand if he tried to fool the House of Commons it is an altogether different matter. I remember that one fateful day, February 21, 1941, I expressed grave fears about growing fascism in this country, and if the minister used that language with regard to the House of Commons it is a very serious matter.

My first question directed to the minister is whether he spoke to the *Journal* as he is reported. My second question is this. The original bill creating the Department of Munitions and Supply was passed by parliament in 1939. There was an amendment in 1941, and since February 24 we have had on the order paper this bill to amend further the original bill and also to extend the life of this department. My second question to the minister is whether the debate on that bill has been concluded forever as a result of the blackout that was ordered on Friday evening. The amending bill of 1941 contained a section providing

(Mr. Pouliot.)

that some decisions made by the munitions department might be prolonged even after the bill creating the department expired, but there is no suggestion there that the life of the whole department could be extended by an order in council. I understand it is an emergency measure, but if the bill had been brought before the house a month earlier there would have been no need for the order in council.

This is not a question only for the hon. member for Témiscouata; he is not at all moved by rebuffs. It is a good thing to be hard-boiled at times; but the question involved is the survival of parliamentary institutions.

My third question is this: Who ordered the blackout of the parliamentary buildings? At what time was it done? At what time was the notice given to turn off the switch in this building?

Hon. C. D. HOWE (Minister of Munitions and Supply): Mr. Speaker, no one was more disturbed than I was when the blackout occurred at the time it did. In fact, I think no one in the house has more right to complain about blackouts, because I seem to be the victim of all of them. I have no idea who ordered the blackout. I received advice of it about ten minutes before it occurred, and that advice came from the Prime Minister's office. But I am certain the Prime Minister was not in any way involved in ordering it. Just from whom the order came I cannot say.

My conversation with the *Journal* reporter was a very simple one. He called and asked if the Department of Munitions and Supply had ceased to exist. I replied that it had not. He said, "How does that occur?" I said that an emergency order in council had been prepared and signed, to permit the department to continue throughout the life of the present session of parliament. Of course, the intention is to pass the amending bill as soon as possible. The government is reluctant to amend legislation by order in council; and for that reason the government, including myself, was anxious to have the bill passed within the allotted time. We were unable to do so, and for that reason the order in council was necessary.

In the conversation with the *Journal* reporter I said nothing derogatory of parliament. Certainly it was no fault of parliament that the sitting had to be adjourned. I read the article in question hastily, and I saw nothing in it which suggested that I had said anything derogatory of parliament.