

Emergency Powers Act

ing an extension of the act, would give the right to pass such orders in council, that is to say secret and confidential orders, and I do not like the idea of it.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): Will the hon. member permit a question? I should like to ask him this. My recollection of what happened is perhaps not perfect. He referred to the returns as false returns. I wonder whether he would alter that. I think they were allowed to use arbitrary valuations.

Mr. Coldwell: I will change the word from "false" to "incorrect". I think that is the correct statement.

Mr. Knowles: They were still secret orders in council.

Mr. Coldwell: Never mind the secret orders in council. The fact was that the balance sheets that the banks and insurance companies were authorized to publish valued certain securities at incorrect and inflated figures, and if my use of "false" appears to be too strong, then I will ask the hon. gentleman to accept my statement that the balance sheets or the valuations were incorrect. I think I am justified in saying that.

Mr. Ferguson: May I interject for a moment? I have a fair knowledge of what the hon. member is speaking about. I think the hon. member would be on surer ground if he said they were correct values on that date. The values were there, but they were not the market values of the securities, because the market values of those days were not the true values of the securities.

Mr. Coldwell: I have always understood that the market value a person could get for his security was the value of it on a given date, and I must leave it at that.

Mr. Ferguson: What the hon. member is discussing is a very serious thing, and I can prove what took place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member must not make a speech.

Mr. Coldwell: I do not think we need to argue the point. My point was that these were secret orders in council, and indeed it may have been contended that they were in the public interest; but they were more substantially in the interests of the institutions that were protected from runs on them at that particular time. They had an element of hope for the future in them, if that will satisfy my hon. friend.

Mr. Ferguson: That is fine.

Mr. Coldwell: What I was also going to say was this. Parliament can always be called to deal with any matter that the [Mr. Coldwell.]

statutes at the present time do not give the government the right to deal with in respect to powers that are granted under the war emergency measure; and because the powers we granted in 1951 have not been used as we hoped they would be used we feel that parliament is not justified in extending them now.

I was interested in the historical argument this afternoon between the Minister of Justice and the Leader of the Opposition. My impression of the reign of Charles I was that the main problem was not how money was spent but how money was raised. The right to levy taxes formed the principal point of contention between Charles I and his parliaments. However, that is by the way; but I always like to have history more or less correct when it is referred to, and I think that is really the historical position. I merely want to say, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to vote against the second reading of this measure if and when a vote is called.

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I intend to take—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the Prime Minister speaks now will he close the debate?

Mr. Knowles: No; he did not move the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It will be the Minister of Justice.

Mr. St. Laurent: I would not ask to intervene at this moment, but it so happens that there are other requirements that will prevent me from being in the house this evening, and it may very well be that this debate will conclude before the end of the day.

I wish to take only a very few minutes. I find it fortunate that the debate today is quite objective, and that opinions are being expressed as to the desirability or otherwise of there being this continuation of the Emergency Powers Act. I suppose if we were on the other side of the house, and had been on the other side of the house in 1945 and since, we would have been repeatedly, in 1945 and since, predicting dire consequences for parliamentary institutions and for the Canadian constitution by the existence of such emergency powers. But I do not think anyone would contend seriously that our parliamentary institutions today are any weaker than they were before 1945, or that our constitution is not on as firm a base or not as fully respected now as it was in 1945.

It is, I think, a legitimate part of our parliamentary institutions that there should be criticism of anything out of the ordinary that is proposed or recommended by the government, and it is wise that there should be