

Supply—Defence Production

They would want to see the agreement, and I cannot see any reason in the world why we should be in that position here. The minister may say: There is nothing in it that would be of interest to you. All right, let us determine that for ourselves. Probably he is quite right, but if we saw the agreement we would know the circumstances. I do put it to the Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Trade and Commerce as a matter which is of importance.

Mr. Abbott: My hon. friend who has had a great deal of experience with corporate finance knows that it is not usual to have the detailed agreements submitted to a meeting of the shareholders. The resolution—

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): To the directors.

Mr. Abbott: The resolution of the shareholders, which if it is an agreement which has to be ratified by the shareholders, and most agreements may be authorized by the directors—if it is an agreement that has to be ratified by the shareholders the resolution of the shareholders is couched in general terms. In this particular authorizing item here, the essentials of the agreement are set out in the item. This is a form of authorizing agreement which is consecrated by long practice. It is a matter of whether we ought to bring in a statute with agreement annexed, and all the rest of it. In my opinion it is not necessary, nor is it desirable. To joke for a moment, I think that if we did that every lawyer in the house would want to cross some of the t's or dot some of the i's in the agreement. The details of the agreement are essentially legal details. Does my hon. friend think they should be provided to the house, which is analogous to the shareholders of a company? The government, now the crown, owns this property in its own name. It proposes to transfer it to a crown company. It sets out the price that is to be paid and the way in which the price is to be paid. Surely, it is not the function of this house to consider and pass upon every legal covenant that may be included in the agreement, every legal phrase that is needed to be inserted. To me that is making a joke of the work of this house. I do not know how we would ever get through with it if we went into that sort of thing. Why spend a lot of time on a number of things here? I suggest that is not the function of the house. There are just two principles to pass upon. The details of this agreement are the responsibility of the executive. I think the house should pass, and it is entitled to pass, upon the essentials, and that is being done here.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): I am not going to split hairs with the minister. As to the analogy of the shareholders, the people of Canada are in my opinion the shareholders, and in my judgment we are in the position of the board of directors. The cabinet is like the executive officers of the company. I am not going to press it, because the minister takes a different view.

Mr. Abbott: I agree the analogy is not complete.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): To come to the practical effect of it, I do not think the bogey the minister raised is a real one. For example, I am not now expressing any view, nor will I, when we come to the details of the foot-and-mouth disease, because I do not know anything about foot-and-mouth disease. My remarks will be of a purely general nature. But being practical again, it seems to me that, if an agreement of the kind we are talking about comes before this house, of course 260 members will not review it, but perhaps half a dozen will, and perhaps one or two may be on this side of the house. As far as I am concerned, the minister has not answered me. I still think we should have this agreement; I still think it should be produced to us before it is ratified. Having said that, I want to ask the Minister of Trade and Commerce one or two questions on detail. I have looked at the list of directors. Am I correct in thinking that they are mostly outside businessmen? They are not members of the department?

Mr. Howe: No.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): I take it that they are directors in the ordinary sense. What I mean is, none of them have any special powers such as the governor of the Bank of Canada has.

Mr. Howe: Just directors under the Companies Act.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): The minister did remark in passing that no interest had been paid by Polymer on the advances from time to time.

Mr. Howe: No. There has been some repayment of capital but all advances have been non-interest bearing. No interest has been paid.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): Is that a general policy with crown corporations? Here is a case of a very successful operation, where interest could have been paid, presumably. I am just wondering why it is a matter of policy.