

Max: CONTROL OF ARMS TRAFFIC.

The hazards of Canada being drawn into the entanglements of any war that does not concern the Dominion may be as real as they are apparent, and the Federal Government's present anxiety that the country shall be provided with such legislative safeguards against the dangers as are feasible and usable indicates commendable Ministerial foresight and a due regard for the people's interests and their common welfare. Because that welfare and those interests are so largely involved, the legislation which has been introduced into Parliament by the Minister of National Revenue to give the Government a fuller control over traffic in arms, ammunition and, in fact, all implements of war, and likewise over the manufacture of materials that may be used in warfare, should receive, as no doubt it will receive, the most careful consideration. At the same time, it needs to be subjected to the closest possible scrutiny before Parliament sanctions the exercise of such wide discriminatory powers as are now asked for on behalf of the Cabinet.

Mr. Ilsley's bill proposes that the Customs Act shall be amended in a way which will enable the Government to regulate at all times exportation and importation of arms and all munitions of war from and to Canadian territory by a rigidly administered licensing system. If the measure is passed, at no time will any person or firm be permitted, without licence, to convey munitions of war directly or indirectly to any destination whatsoever. They may not transport without Government permission war material by coastwise carriage or by inland navigation. The same requirement of a permit will be applied to the importation of munitions of war intended either for military, naval or air use in the Dominion. The Government may compel the licensing or registration of all persons engaged in the manufacture of munitions of war. Moreover, it is proposed that the Cabinet shall have the added authority to demand the compilation and publication of information and statistics regarding the export, import and manufacture of war materials at all times.

It is a far-reaching measure of supervision and control that the Government is asking Parliament's permission to wield by orders-in-council. It means that many interests are likely to have much less than complete liberty of action. In the circumstances, the House of Commons may be wary of readily approving blanket powers which, unless they are very judiciously exercised, might by cutting off the country from important foreign markets operate to the impediment of a legitimate course of commerce and to a material extent disrupt the internal economic life of the Dominion. This possibility becomes more apparent in the light of the fact that government control as contemplated is to be firmly applied not only to arms, ammunition and implements of war and their manufacture in the Dominion, but evidently may be extended to raw materials which, though essential to the manufacture of war munitions, are not by any means used exclusively for that purpose. For example, under the Customs Act as it is proposed to amend it, there is a probability that the Canadian Government would have authority to impose an embargo on shipments from Canadian territory of nickel and other metals because they are capable of being converted into armaments and munitions or made useful in their production.

The Government's measure has the semblance of a hurriedly devised sequence to the law adopted last week at Ottawa to bar recruiting in the Dominion for service in the civil war in Spain. In each instance, there is reflected an acute jealousy on the part of the federal authorities to strictly maintain Canada's neutrality towards any and all wars in which the Dominion may not be

directly or even remotely affected. It is, of course, not an unreasonable jealousy, and at this time it is not, unfortunately, wholly unseasonable. But it is made abundantly evident in the details of the Hon. Mr. Ilsley's bill that the Government desires that Canadian neutrality shall command an exacting service. It is rational to expect the Government to be at the same time equally solicitous for the nation's rights of trading abroad, even though other countries less pacific than Canada may have decided that they must fight each other. It is manifestly important, therefore, that no species of fair trade and commerce shall be rendered easily liable to penalty, least of all to a suspension of the rights of trading and thereby be unduly prejudiced by the operation of the powers of government control which are now being sought at Ottawa through some thoroughgoing amendments to the Customs Act. In other words, it will be essential, if and when the new powers are accorded, that the Government shall not—even when war is being waged abroad—exercise those powers with that jealousy for neutrality which always looks through the end of a magnifying glass that makes little things look big. In judging how far it is safe to venture along the lines laid down in the bill that the Hon. Mr. Ilsley has introduced under Government sponsorship, the House of Commons will

realize, of course, that in any event such legislation will do nothing to obstruct war and can do very little to prevent outside contributions to the war strength of foreign belligerents.