

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 12, 1948

The house met at three o'clock.

HONG KONG

DREW LETTER—QUESTION AND ANSWER IN BRITISH HOUSE OF COMMONS

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in view of some of the doubts expressed and implications made, which are recorded in *Hansard*, as to statements of mine concerning communications between the Canadian government and the United Kingdom government respecting publication of the letter known as the Drew letter and the refusal of the United Kingdom government to allow the publication of certain telegrams exchanged between the United Kingdom and Canadian governments in 1941, I am sure hon. members will wish to have the following information on an exchange of question and answer which took place yesterday in the United Kingdom House of Commons. In justice to myself I feel this question and answer should also be recorded in *Hansard*.

The question appeared in the name of Mr. Quintin Hogg, Conservative M.P. for Oxford City. The text of the exchange is as follows:

Question: "Mr. Hogg to ask the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations what communications have passed between the Canadian and British governments relative to the publication of letters known as the Drew (Premier Drew of Ontario) letters concerning Canadian troops at Hong Kong and if he now agreed to their publication."

Answer: "There has been no correspondence between His Majesty's government in Canada and the United Kingdom about publication of letters from Colonel Drew to which the honourable member (Hogg) refers."

"The Canadian government inquired whether they might publish certain telegrams exchanged between the United Kingdom and the Canadian government in 1941 relating to the dispatch of Canadian forces to Hong Kong and to the situation in the Far East at that time."

"We replied agreeing to the publication of those telegrams which related to the dispatch of troops but we said that we felt unable to agree to the publication of telegrams relating to the international situation."

"Such telegrams are framed on the basis that they will not be published and the whole system of full and frank communication between His Majesty's governments would be prejudiced

if telegrams of this nature had to be prepared on the basis that this rule might not eventually be observed.

"The question was very carefully examined at the highest level and the United Kingdom regret that they cannot reconsider their decision."

TARIFFS AND TRADE

REFERENCE OF SUBJECT MATTER OF GENEVA TRADE AGREEMENT TO BANKING AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): It was announced last night, Mr. Speaker, that the first order to be called today would be the one which appears as No. 3 on the order paper with respect to the Geneva agreement. The purpose of calling that order today was to enable the subject matter of the trade agreement to be referred to the banking and commerce committee. The procedure in the house has always been to pass the second reading in the first instance, before assigning a bill by direction of the house to one committee or another. But hon. gentlemen opposite expressed the view earlier that it would be helpful if, before being asked to vote on the second reading, the subject matter could be referred to a committee, and the committee on banking and commerce was the committee agreed upon.

I just wish to point out, in order that this will not become a precedent, that it is quite exceptional to refer the subject matter of a resolution to a committee before the resolution itself has been voted upon. In order that the matter may be proceeded with in a regular way I would move, seconded by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. St. Laurent), the following motion, which serves the same end:

That the subject matter of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, including the protocol of provisional application thereof, together with the complementary agreement of October 30, 1947, between Canada and the United States of America, be referred to the standing committee on banking and commerce.

This is not a resolution and therefore no notice is required; if carried it will be an order of the house. But hon. members will see that it is to carry out the purpose that was intended, namely, to enable the house to have the subject matter of this agreement referred to the banking and commerce committee.