

NORAD—Canada-U.S. Agreement

opposition is because this government is still confused, as it was last fall and as it was last August, with respect to this most important intergovernmental agreement between the United States and Canada.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) said today that this matter did not have to be referred to parliament. I think that was a rather unusual observation to be made by a man who is regarded by his colleagues as a champion of the rights of parliament, and yet one who as Prime Minister takes few advantages of living up to the reputation asserted by the members of his own party.

This is one question which surely is properly within the rights of parliament. The Prime Minister surely will not contest the fact that acts and policies of the executive, particularly in matters of this importance, must be submitted for approval or disapproval to the parliament of this nation in accordance with the practice that is now well over 50 years old. The Prime Minister says no. I propose to show him that that is the case. As a matter of fact, we have the unusual situation of having been told on November 4 last by the Minister of National Defence, in answer to a question which I put to him, that parliament would be given the opportunity of discussing this very matter. Then, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Smith), speaking in the address in reply to the speech from the throne, informed the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) that notwithstanding what his colleague had said there would be no opportunity for discussing this matter in the way suggested by the Minister of National Defence. Then, the day after the Minister for National Defence was asked by the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge), whether or not an opportunity would be given pursuant to the assurance given by the Minister of National Defence on January 4, and the Minister of National Defence referred the hon. gentleman to the reply made the day previous by the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

But the Prime Minister, who by this time was aware of the dangerous implications of this course, and who always has his ears close to the political sensibilities of the nation, apparently did not agree with either the Minister of National Defence or the Secretary of State for External Affairs and, in the absence of a denial, repudiated these two ministers by accepting at once the proposal of the Leader of the Opposition that the customary way of presenting a specific resolution should be the basis for discussion of this matter in the house; but,

unfortunately, the Prime Minister, in acceding to the request, gave a most unusual reason. It was not because parliament had the right to discuss this matter; it was because the Prime Minister wanted to know how hon. gentlemen opposite were going to vote on the question. Rights of parliament; civil liberties, what do they mean? I want to know how hon. gentlemen opposite are going to vote, and that is the reason and the only reason why the Prime Minister has given us in the opposition the opportunity to exercise our duty of discussing this important matter.

Why was this matter not discussed by way of resolution in October? It was said by the Minister of National Defence that it was an interim arrangement. That was all that was before the house at that time; but other interim measures, all involving our relations with other countries, have been discussed in this house by way of specific resolutions. As the Leader of the Opposition said, when the Minister of National Defence announced in the month of August the decision of the government regarding the formation of this continental air defence command, there was no suggestion by him that this was an interim arrangement. There was no suggestion made by him in his press conference that this was an arrangement of a temporary character. He said that this was a decision of the government of Canada without any qualifications being given. The announcement was made by him as a member of the government without that government first of all having come to and asking parliament to pass on the policies of the executive.

There is no question, as the Leader of the Opposition said, that the issue before us today is not whether we agree or oppose this particular arrangement for continental collective defence. All hon. members accept this in principle. What we are seeking to elicit from the government—and tonight we have had some difficulty in doing that because of the reluctance of the Minister of National Defence to speak—is more information about this particular measure, and also to take this occasion to insist on the right of parliament to express approval or disapproval of this particular act of the executive arm of government.

The Prime Minister said it was not necessary. In almost the first remarks he made in his speech he said it was not necessary really to submit this matter to parliament. Of course it is not necessary. There is no legal requirement which compels this government to submit the question to parliament for approval or disapproval. Of course, there is no legal obligation on the government to