

with respect to unemployment in Canada are from the bureau of statistics and they do not pretend to be a registration. They are, I believe, accurately described as an estimate based upon various indices of unemployment in different parts of Canada. So far as the unemployed on relief are concerned, we have had for the past two years a national registration and each month a summary of the registration is released to the press. I believe that for some months past a copy has gone to the leader of the opposition. Certainly the desire of the Department of Labour is that the figures of registration, which are the most accurate we have, should be made available at all times. There is, of course, in the publication of these figures, a time lag sometimes of two months. For instance, the figures for October cover the entire month of October up to the first of November and they might not be available until the middle of January, let us say. But these figures are the most accurate that we have and they are available to all members of this house.

Mr. STEVENS: That is not my question. I was not referring to any particular department. The Prime Minister is now in his seat, perhaps I might put the question again. It concerns the extent of the right of members of the House of Commons to secure access to accurate information. My question was: What rights have members in the matter of requesting information from departments where they know it to be, and what limitation is placed upon officers of the government in giving information to members?

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): I understand that the procedure in respect to information which is not available in public documents is that any hon. member may ask for it by way of resolution. I think that answers the main point of my hon. friend's question. Certainly as far as the government is concerned, in supplying information the wish would be to give to hon. members at any time the fullest information that it is possible to let them have. There are of course documents that are confidential, and they must be so treated. But with regard to general information I see no reason why any hon. member should not inquire of the minister of any department with respect to any data that he may wish to have. But there is always the method of proceeding by resolution with respect to information that is not available in public documents.

Mr. STEVENS: One question further. Am I to gather from the Prime Minister's reply [Mr. Rogers.]

that it is not possible for a member of the House of Commons to go to a department where he knows certain public information is to be found, and discuss the matter with the deputy or any other officer of the department who understands the matter and to whom he can explain what he desires to secure in the way of information?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend knows as well as I do that under the system of responsible government a minister must be responsible for everything that relates to his department. I should think that the proper procedure in respect to what my hon. friend has just mentioned would be for the member wishing to get certain information from a department to go to the minister of the department and inform him of what he desires. The minister would then give instructions to those in his department to accord the facilities, or not to do so. If an hon. member were not treated with the courtesy with which he should be treated, the minister would be responsible. But I do not think it has ever been the practice, nor do I think the practice would be a right one, to have officials in departments interviewed by hon. members without the knowledge of the minister responsible, or be obliged to give out information without the minister being consulted in reference thereto.

EUROPEAN SITUATION

REQUEST FOR PUBLISHING OF CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO CRISIS OF SEPTEMBER, 1938

On the orders of the day:

Hon. R. J. MANION (Leader of the Opposition): I should like to ask a question of the Prime Minister. In view of the fact that yesterday, both in his speech and in mine, and perhaps in the speeches of other hon. members, the international situation of last September was referred to a number of times, would it not be wise to have, either laid on the table or published in some form, the correspondence, so far as it is not of a confidential nature, between this government and the British government relating thereto? After all, no one knows much about the situation except the government, and I am wondering whether the correspondence could be published—say in a white book, or a blue book, or even a red book, but published in some form for the information of the house.

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): As my hon. friend knows, correspondence between governments, particularly where it relates to the possibility of war,