

Inquiries of the Ministry

[English]

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of any particular letter, but I am aware of what I would call general complaints in this area from consumer groups and parent-teacher groups—that type of representation.

* * *

NATIONAL SECURITY**USE OF EMERGENCY POWERS UNDER WAR MEASURES ACT**

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, yesterday afternoon during the question period a question was asked by the Leader of the Opposition concerning whether or not consideration was being given by the government to asking for emergency powers. I now ask the Prime Minister whether the government has given consideration under the War Measures Act to bringing in emergency powers.

In particular, has the government secured from the law officers of the Crown, inasmuch as the Prime Minister described what is happening as a result of the kidnappings as “this emergency”, any opinion on whether or not the present situation falls generally within the wording of the Act to which I have referred which empowers the Governor in Council to do and to authorize various things because of the existence of “real or apprehended insurrection”? Would the Prime Minister take Parliament into his confidence with reference to this matter?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my answer would be in the same terms as the answer I gave yesterday to the Leader of the Opposition. In effect, it was that we have considered such matters, that we have considered every possible way in which the government of Canada, in conjunction with the government of Quebec, could meet this very difficult situation. Therefore I would not be truthful if I said that we had not considered such measures. However, the fact that we have not taken them indicates that we have not considered them in a way that would cause us to act upon them, at least at this time.

As to the more precise question whether I have sought advice on this matter, the answer is that we have discussed the matter because in considering the various possibilities we have to know what are the conditions. I would suggest to the hon. gentleman that he would agree he has raised not only a legal question but, perhaps even more importantly, a question of fact which can best be understood and discussed by people who are aware of politics in this country as well as those who are aware of the law.

I might add that I would gladly seek out, perhaps in a private way later, the opinion of the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert on this question. Quite frankly, I would be interested in knowing what he thinks about the situation, and he can either tell the House or tell me privately.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I appreciate the attitude taken by the Prime Minister, but I would ask him what he meant yesterday when he referred to “this emergency”. Did he mean that there was a national emergency? If so, is it not a fact that the only provision that permits action to be taken in this regard is under the War Measures Act?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, there are many words which could be used, but when two lives are hanging in the balance I do not think it is exaggerated to talk of an emergency. As to the steps which would be necessary to meet this particular emergency, whether national, provincial or regional, I can only repeat the answer I gave yesterday. But I quite seriously repeat that I am very interested in knowing the opinion of the House and particularly of the leaders of the opposition parties and the former Prime Minister who has a distinguished record in the matter of civil liberties. If he is now suggesting that this might be a national emergency which might call for the application of the War Measures Act, I will certainly take that into consideration.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I would say, of course, that the Prime Minister has misinterpreted what I said.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: I asked him what he meant yesterday when he made a statement that could only be understood as meaning that the government was considering the abdication of civil liberties as it has abdicated its responsibility for the protection of diplomats by placing the whole matter in the power of the Premier and government of the province of Quebec.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

CANCELLATION BY PRIME MINISTER OF VISIT TO SOVIET UNION

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the right hon. Prime Minister. I am sure the House is anxious to know, in view of the words the Prime Minister used yesterday—“this emergency”—whether there are any new developments surrounding the Prime Minister’s intended trip to the Soviet Union which was to begin this weekend?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would confirm to the House, with reluctance, that I have cancelled my visit to the Soviet Union which was to begin on Sunday. I gave notice of such possibility of cancellation to the Soviet authorities on Tuesday. I must say that now I have received a very understanding reply from Premier Kosygin. I expressed to him my hope that the visit could be reinstated at a future date which would be convenient to him.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the right hon. Prime Minister this question. If this