

Emergency Powers Act

I think that was the desired purpose of the announcement, in view of the shortage of materials. With that happening just at a time when rent controls are coming off in some of our provinces and at a time when prices generally are going up, I suggest that we are heading into a situation that is an extremely serious one. I hope that the government will give constant attention to this matter and will reconsider the whole position before April 30.

Mr. Green: May I ask the Prime Minister whether this measure will enable the government to undertake a national registration?

Mr. St. Laurent: The measure would be drawn in terms that would permit the government to undertake a national registration; and if that were to be taken merely as a precautionary measure, perhaps the government would take the responsibility of attempting to do it under the terms of this legislation, if and when it is adopted. But the policy of the government will not be to do anything of major importance without coming to parliament and declaring that it is its view that it should be done, and allowing parliament to disagree with the government if it finds that its policy is not the proper one. It is not our intention to get legislation to enable us to do things that we will not take the responsibility of doing publicly in the constitutional manner.

Mr. Green: From the answer just given am I to take it that the government would not undertake a national registration without coming back to the house and asking for approval to take that particular step?

Mr. St. Laurent: The manner in which it would be put before the house might or might not be that of seeking approval. But it will not be the policy of the government to make any major change in its policies, as they have been announced up to the present time, without coming to parliament and declaring its change of policy and submitting that new policy to parliament. If, for instance, in connection with the census something were to be arranged that might be preparatory to an inventory of the resources of the country, that is something that we would not consider to be a departure from the announced policies. But if there were to be something new, something that the public would look upon as a major new venture in government policy, we would want to announce that to the house and to take our responsibility before the house.

Mr. Green: What the Prime Minister means then is this. There might be some type of registration taken in connection with the census without having that policy approved

[Mr. Knowles.]

by the house; but in so far as what is commonly understood as a national registration is concerned, such a step would not be taken without coming to the house?

Mr. St. Laurent: Unless parliament was not in session and it appeared to be something that required urgency; and even in that case my own disposition would be to call parliament, because I think it is preferable that all these matters that are of such great consequence to the nation should be dealt with in the regular constitutional way.

Mr. Green: What would the procedure be with regard to bringing in some system of national selective service?

Mr. St. Laurent: That would be announced to parliament, and the government would take the responsibility of the verdict of parliament on the propriety of its action.

Mr. Green: There would be some legislation required other than this measure we are now considering?

Mr. St. Laurent: I do not know whether it would really require some legislation, but there would be ample opportunity for it to be considered by parliament and for parliament to make known its views as to whether or not the government was doing the right thing.

Mr. Knowles: Just to get this clear, I take it then the way in which parliament would express its approval or disapproval of a course the government proposed to take would not be by voting specifically on that measure but would be simply our being informed by the government that a measure was to be taken, and then we would show either our confidence or lack of confidence in the usual way?

Mr. St. Laurent: In the bill as drafted any order made in the exercise of these powers would have to be brought before parliament immediately, and would cease to be effective if the houses of parliament resolved that it should not be effective. There will be opportunity for such a resolution to be made and considered.

Mr. Knowles: In other words, there will be an opportunity to show our disapproval in a positive way?

Mr. St. Laurent: Yes.

Mr. Knowles: But if we did not show that disapproval, we would not have the opportunity to show approval?

Mr. St. Laurent: No, we find today that for the consideration of the motion as to whether the Speaker should leave the chair to consider a resolution we used one day of debate; and there are at least six opportunities for