

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 23, 1959

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

CIVIL DEFENCE

STATEMENT ON REARRANGEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the house will recall that the government asked Lieutenant General Howard Graham to review the state of the civil defence program throughout Canada. General Graham's confidential report made some weeks ago has been reviewed, and the arrangements for responsibility for civil defence discussed in the light of it and of further studies given to the subject by both military and civilian advisers.

We have had to consider these civil defence arrangements as part of the whole plan to be prepared for nuclear war, both on the military side and in various fields where it is now necessary to be ready on the civilian side as well, taking into account the best advice we can get on the nature of the situation which would face us in the event of war. As a result of this review the government proposes to transfer certain of the responsibilities for civil defence functions in so far as the dominion is concerned, and to offer to assume directly certain responsibilities hitherto assumed by the provinces and the municipalities.

The principal change proposed is that the army should undertake primary and direct responsibility for a number of the technical civil defence functions heretofore carried on by civil defence organizations at provincial and municipal levels. These will include warning of attack, the location and monitoring of explosions and radioactive fall-out, the assessment of damaged areas, the decontamination and clearing of such areas, and the rescue of the injured in such areas.

These are difficult and frequently dangerous tasks, requiring trained and disciplined forces and much technical equipment. In the intense early phase of a nuclear war they are likely to be more important and urgent than other tasks on which the army in Canada would be engaged. Consequently we think they are suitable functions for the army to assume, with some aid in particular tasks from the other services. The army will need for this purpose not only its own

reserve force but also the assistance of various local auxiliaries, which it will be expected to arrange with provincial and local authorities and others able to help.

The major humanitarian tasks of providing medical and hospital services for the injured and sick, public health measures and emergency billeting and other accommodation for those who must leave their homes, and emergency feeding and other welfare services, should remain, we believe, the direct responsibility of provincial authorities in war as they are in peace, but with increased assistance both financial and technical from the dominion. This assistance would remain the responsibility of the Department of National Health and Welfare. The proper organization, in peacetime, of such emergency arrangements to be ready immediately on the outbreak of war in all localities where they are apt to be needed is a very formidable task, and should be undertaken with determination and vigour. I believe the provinces and local groups are best able to do it. They have the experience, the qualified staff and the local knowledge.

We shall be quite prepared to agree that the provincial and local facilities, both of equipment and personnel, whose costs we may share for civil defence purposes should also be made available to meet the humanitarian requirements of peacetime disasters as well.

Certain other emergency tasks falling within the civil defence field are also clearly best discharged by provincial or local authorities, notably the control of traffic and the preservation of law and order. We shall be prepared to offer increased support for special expenditures incurred in making preparation for such services in war, subject to parliamentary approval. In the two examples cited the Royal Canadian Mounted Police will administer such assistance, and provide as well whatever technical and general advice it can.

Provincial and local costs of approved civil defence projects will henceforth receive assistance to the extent of 75 per cent instead of 50 per cent as heretofore; and this division will apply to projects in the fields of interest of national health and welfare, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and to other provincial and local projects.

The emergency measures organization, attached to the privy council office, to which