

## THE SENATE

Wednesday, September 13, 1950

The Senate met at 11 a.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers and routine proceedings.

### BREN GUNS AND AMMUNITION

#### INQUIRY

On the inquiry:

1. Have any Bren guns and ammunition been reported missing or stolen from armouries throughout Canada during the past six months? If so—
2. How many such guns and how many rounds of ammunition have been so reported as missing or stolen?
3. What recoveries have so far been made of any Bren guns or ammunition missing or stolen?
4. Are night watchmen or guards maintained at all armouries and ammunition depots? If not, why not?

**Hon. Mr. Robertson:** I would ask that this inquiry stand, but in doing so I assure the honourable senator from New Westminster (Hon. Mr. Reid) that I have not neglected the matter in any way. I hope to have the information required—which has to come from all the armouries across Canada—by this afternoon or, at the latest, tomorrow.

The inquiry stands.

### ESSENTIAL MATERIALS (DEFENCE) BILL

#### SECOND READING

**Hon. S. S. McKeen** moved the second reading of Bill 5, an Act respecting materials and services essential for the purposes of defence and national security.

He said:

The object of this bill is to control materials and services essential for the purposes of defence and national security. It makes provision for the control of the production, supply, distribution, use, and prices of essential material and services if and when required. At the start of every war there is need of some legislation to give the government power to make quick decisions and take control over production, industry, and, in some cases, labour. The weakness of our democratic system in a time of war is that our processes of making decisions are rather slow. We found in the past that when a democracy is up against a dictatorship, the government or somebody in that democracy must have the authority to make quick decisions, because those decisions affect not only ourselves but all our allies.

At the start of the first world war the government of the day, to meet this need, passed the War Measures Act. That statute,

passed in 1914, is still on the statute books. It gives the government very complete power. Our present government used that act in the last war, and under the authority contained in it they made many regulations to give them the powers they required.

In 1945, following the second world war, parliament passed the Transitional Powers Act, which continued those powers into peacetime. The government thereby retained many of the powers they had, and the act vested them with authority to pass further orders in council.

In view of the possibility of a third war, the government, realizing what disruption is caused by official control of everything, and believing that their purposes would best be served by not disrupting industry any more than is absolutely necessary to provide for national defence and the threat of war, decided to introduce a bill which restricts their power by comparison with the War Measures Act, or even the Transitional Powers Act.

The present bill, as I have said, authorizes the government merely to control the production, supply, distribution and prices of essential material and services. The question was raised in the other place whether the government was taking complete control over production. The answer will be found in the definition of "essential materials", which are designated in the bill as follows:

(b) "essential materials" means such materials and substances as are designated from time to time by the Governor in Council under section three as being—

And this is the important part.  
—essential for defence purposes.

A material which is not essential for defence purposes does not rank under this bill as "essential".

The main purpose of this measure is, of course, to enable the government to carry out its commitments under the Atlantic pact, not only for our own supplies but for supplies to our allies. It also enables the government to make preparation for dealing with the Korean situation and for our national defence.

The field in which the powers conferred by this Act may be exercised, or exercised first, is that of iron and steel, in which shortages are even now evident. The first step to be taken when a shortage is apparent is that the industries themselves, will allocate to the more essential services such steel as is available. Already that is being done: some steel has been diverted from the construction of automobiles to purposes of military and naval defence. If a point is reached when this system is inadequate to our needs, the government under this bill will have power to step