

*Censorship of Members' Mail*

clusion that there are very strong reasons why, on the subject of censorship, too much should not be said in public. I am therefore going to suggest to my hon. friend the leader of the opposition, the leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation group and the leader of the Social Credit group that they meet with me at some convenient time when I would be pleased to place before them different aspects of this question which have come to my attention.

Censorship, it will be recognized, is a phase of war activity, and if it is to serve the purpose for which it is intended, matters connected with it must necessarily be kept very largely secret. However, I wish at once to say to hon. members with respect to the censoring of letters of members of parliament that we in Canada thus far have not begun to go as far as they have in Great Britain. I think it can be shown that the censorship of letters of members of parliament in Canada is at the present time on quite a restricted basis.

I wish to say further that such censorship as there is being or has been exercised with regard to members' letters has related only to matters that are of immediate concern to Canada's war effort or to the war effort of the United States or Great Britain or to that of some of the allied countries. There has been no attempt on the part of the censors, as far as I could ascertain, to seek for any information other than that which had an immediate relationship to some war activity.

With respect to references in letters to political matters I have been informed that the censors have had very explicit instructions. Not only have they been instructed to pay no attention to matters other than matters affecting the war, but I am informed that in fact they have carefully refrained from passing on any information in any letter that related to political matters. Nothing of the kind has come to the government from any source. It has been ignored entirely.

I believe a question was asked by my hon. friend the member for Parkdale (Mr. Bruce) which brought an answer from the Postmaster-General (Mr. Mulock) which seemed to imply that excerpts generally might be taken from letters and sent to heads of departments concerned. But if the entire question and the entire answer are read together, it will be seen that the only excerpts that could be taken from any letter to be sent to the head of any department were excerpts which related to some matter pertaining to the war. I am assured that such was the intention of the reply, that such in fact has been the case, and

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

that nothing has been taken from any communications and sent to the heads of any departments of the government from censored letters other than what has related to war activities in one form or another.

The question came up in the course of discussion a day or two ago whether a certain locality was included in a defence area. Well, that question helps to illustrate the point which I am making of the necessity of the government being very indefinite about what is said on this subject of censorship. If a defence area were specifically mentioned—as for example, Halifax, a defence area—and it were to be stated that the boundaries of that were at a certain radius, immediately persons interested in sending communications in a manner which would avoid the censor would simply go outside of the area so defined and mail their communications there. That is one of the instances which help to illustrate why it is not possible to give the house full and exact particulars in regard on details of censorship.

My hon. friend also asked that the regulations regarding censorship should, if possible, be tabled. Well, that, I must say, is not possible. If they were tabled they would reveal information which relates to the United States and Britain as well as to Canada, and would certainly give sources of information or knowledge to the enemy which he should not possess.

These are some of the points which have come out of a careful study of the question. But I would add that I do not know of any aspect of the censorship matter which should not be communicated to the leaders of the parties if it will help to give confidence to hon. members as to the method in which the censorship is exercised, and I shall seek to arrange for that when we have our interview.

Hon. R. B. HANSON (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am obliged to the Prime Minister for the statement which he has made, and which, of course, is intended to be reassuring. I would like him and the house to feel that I appreciate that censorship is an essential part of war activity. I have never controverted that principle. I do not see how it would be possible to carry on the war without it. I will reserve any other remarks on this matter until the conference is held; perhaps I shall then have a better appreciation of the whole position. But it is naturally an irritating thing to find that a letter—a political communication, if you will, and rather harmless—had been opened by the censor although it did not come from a defence area. That is all that I have to say on this point at the moment.