

The CHAIRMAN: Before I hear more opinion, may I say, with humility, that I heard these arguments with the pros and cons throughout the last meeting. The section Mr. Nielsen has just read, which was introduced by the Prime Minister, is of course taken word for word from section 297 of Beauchesne, which is the standard procedure at the beginning of every session. It is section 2 of paragraph 297. Section 3 says the following, and I quote:

A committee cannot require an officer of a public department to produce any papers which, according to the rule and practice of the house, it is not usual for the house itself to order to be laid before it. If consideration of public policy can be urged against a motion for papers it is either withdrawn or otherwise dealt with according to the judgment of the house.

In addition to this, we agreed in the very first steering committee, which was a fruitful one—and members of the committee can verify or contradict that statement—that we had no intention, because it would not be in the best interest of the trustees or unions coming under the trustees, to produce through this committee any document the production of which would be prejudicial to the everyday operation of the unions, particularly in relation to their clients.

Mr. BELL: In their opinion.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, and Mr. Bell made this point at the last meeting, as you will see if you look through your report.

In that steering committee we also adopted a policy that would eliminate much of this type of discussion. I would ask the members to let this sink into their minds for a moment and not to get too technical. Where, in the opinion of trustees, the production of documents would jeopardize the union and the role of the trustees—and the word “trustees” is an important one—the question should be referred immediately to the steering committee and then the steering committee, with the advice of the trustees, could browse through these documents and find out whether or not in fact their production would be detrimental. This is exactly what we have done with the majority and minority report of the election committee.

The steering committee has come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these documents that could be prejudicial to the unions and, regardless of whether or not the trustees indicate favour or disfavour, the steering committee has come to the conclusion that documents should be made public.

We are getting away from the subject and on to the question of documents, and the pros and cons can go on forever. I would like to take each and every document as it comes up. I do not see how I, bound by conscience, can make a blanket ruling that all documents must be vetoed just because the trustee says so, or anyone else. I think every document that is controversial should be referred to the steering committee for their objective guidance.

Mr. BELL: I think you have stated it reasonably well, Mr. Chairman, but I do say that I think we have the right when a document comes into question to ask the opinion of the trustees, who would have just as much knowledge as we would of the effect of the production.