

Trans-Canada Highway

The provinces have been dealing with the matter of the trans-Canada highway since the thirties. Large amounts of money have been spent in Nova Scotia, and I think we have a right to know whether the federal government will reimburse that province or whether they consider the relief payments made at that time as part of the financial arrangement. I am prepared to let this resolution go through, because I should like to see the bill; but I want to know what the province has said to this government in connection with the trans-Canada highway, and I shall have a lot to say on the second reading if we have not that information.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Up until now I understood that the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra wanted to have tabled the correspondence up to date between the dominion and the provinces that have given consent to the tabling. Another request was made by the hon. member for Cumberland, who insisted that we endeavour to get the consent of Nova Scotia to the tabling of the correspondence with that province. I do not know in what position the correspondence with Nova Scotia is at the present time, and I do not know whether it will be tabled.

Replying to the hon. member who has just taken his seat, I have always understood that correspondence between governments was tabled only after the parties concerned had agreed to the tabling. I shall call the attention of the minister to the remarks of the hon. gentleman. I would not want to say that if the province does not agree we will table the correspondence. The hon. member has referred to the difficulties of the people of that province with their government, but I do not know that I can add anything to what I have said.

Mr. Gillis: My understanding is that in the case of certain interdepartmental correspondence it is considered to be a courtesy to withhold it. I understand also that the only rule as to secrecy of correspondence applies to that between foreign governments and this government. This is not an interdepartmental matter; this is a matter dealing with public funds to be expended on a national project. A minister of the province may wish to keep his negotiations secret, but I submit that he has no right to do so. There is no law that gives him that right. He is dealing with public funds, and there is no law or rule that this government would be breaking if they tabled that correspondence. The information is necessary if we are to make an intelligent decision.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Will the hon. member agree that if we ask the province once again

[Mr. Gillis.]

for permission to table the correspondence, that is about as far as this government can go?

Mr. Gillis: Tell them you are going to table it anyway, even though you do not get permission.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Gillis: It is public property.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): I should like to consult the leader of the opposition to see if he would agree that we should table correspondence with a premier of a province without his permission. For my part, I think that would be going too far.

Mr. Drew: I cannot recall a single occasion on which I was asked to consent to the tabling of correspondence where that consent was not given.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Perhaps there was not much correspondence.

Mr. Drew: There was extensive correspondence, and a great deal of it found its way into this house. This is a matter of more than casual interest. The point made by the hon. member is an important one. As between national governments, obviously there is a type of correspondence that must be regarded as secret, but as between governments within a federal system there can be no secrecy, because it would all relate to the combined business of government about which the legislative bodies have a right to be informed.

We are dealing here with an attempt to reach a joint agreement in regard to the development of a trans-Canada highway. The discussion which has taken place serves to emphasize the need of getting the dominion and provincial governments together instead of attempting to do this by correspondence, with part of the correspondence being under some limitation as to publication.

Mr. Black (Cumberland): I thank the hon. member for Cape Breton South and the leader of the opposition for supporting the view I expressed with regard to this correspondence. I agree with the hon. member for Cape Breton South when he says that we cannot deal intelligently with this matter unless we have the correspondence. Unless the government of Nova Scotia is able to justify its stand, I do not think I would be warranted in giving my approval to the legislation now before the committee with regard to a trans-Canada highway. Without that information I cannot intelligently come to a conclusion as to what is desirable or practicable in the interests of Nova Scotia. I again ask the