

that rule overrides the ordinary parliamentary rule of producing documents which are cited.

In regard to the general principle underlying a confidential document or documents which it is not considered to be in the public interest to produce to the house, I refer my hon. friend to Todd on "Parliamentary Government," at page 440, where he cites no less an authority than Disraeli, whose word my hon. friend should accept. The minister, in this, has complete jurisdiction; when he states to the house that it is not in the public interest to produce these documents, that ends the matter.

Mr. POULIOT: Speaking not to the point of order, but rising to a question of privilege, as a member of the house I am interested in having a copy of that public paper. That, in the first place, is what I have to say in rising to a question of privilege. In the second place, I want to know what is meant by the words, "public interest." I want a definition of these words, which are used so often by ministers as an excuse for not tabling or producing certain papers. It is quite easy for a minister to say that something is not in the public interest; but what is the norm; what is the rule; what is the definition of public interest, and who decides that question? Is there a minister who can decide against the will of a certain number of members that it is not in the public interest to table certain papers? I submit that it is most important for us to know exactly where we stand on this, so that we may know what is meant by the government whenever such an answer is given.

In the third place, I hear at times amendments to motions to the effect that the government will accept a certain motion with certain reservations. The minister makes a reservation. What does that mean? I remember distinctly a typical case, relating to the station at Rivière du Loup, where the question was about the tabling of certain papers, and I wondered if the correspondence was to be made personal after it had been received. As I have mentioned before in the house many times, letters marked confidential or personal are sometimes sent to a minister, merely to bring them to the attention of that minister, but the subject matter is not personal. If hon. members will take the trouble to go back to the records of 1931, they will see what was said at that time by the then Prime Minister Mr. Bennett, and also by the present Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King), as well as by Mr. Lapointe, with regard to the impossibility of changing the nature of a communication after it had been received.

In this case, what is asked for by the hon. member for Charlevoix-Saguenay is the discussion that took place, not between officials of the department alone, but between Ottawa and the provinces, and if there is one thing which we are interested in and with regard to which we ought to be fully informed, it is the relations of the provinces with Ottawa, especially on the eve of the Sirois report. The Sirois report was not down then, and it is of the utmost interest not only to the member for Témiscouata but to every one of us to know exactly what was discussed on that occasion and what were the views put forward by the representatives of the provinces and of Ottawa, and the more so by reason of the resumé which the sponsor of the resolution read to the house a minute ago. These are matters of vital importance for all of us, and for that reason I have risen to a question of privilege.

Mr. SPEAKER: In this matter, which has already been before the house, the hon. the minister, as reported at page 3696 of *Hansard*, stated:

To complete the record, I wish to state that in my judgment it is not in the public interest to produce these.

The leader of the opposition (Mr. Graydon) made the argument that because the Minister of Finance had referred to some excerpts from the report, therefore he was bound to produce the report; but in this instance the Minister of Finance was not founding an argument or proving an assertion; he was simply stating from that report the reason why the report should not be produced. Therefore, in my judgment, the Minister of Finance is not bound to table the report by reason of the fact that he made references to an excerpt from it.

There is confusion as to the question of public interest, to which the hon. member for Témiscouata has referred. The Minister of Pensions and National Health (Mr. Mackenzie) referred to Todd. Todd says, at page 440 of volume 1, "Parliamentary Government in England", that:

Consideration of public policy and a due regard to the interests of the state occasionally demand that information sought for by members of parliament should be withheld at the discretion and upon the general responsibility of ministers.

It is a mistake to believe that as long as a paper deals with a public question, parliament has the right to see it. Memoranda, letters or drafts submitted to a minister by his officer in the preparation of a government measure or ministerial statements, though they deal with public matters, are not in the category of official documents which ministers are bound to lay before the house.