

*Grain Handling at Quebec*

and the rights of the House of Commons so much transcend that that I trust the minister will not arrive at a hasty conclusion with respect to it.

I wonder if he realizes just what is involved. I had occasion to traverse this matter with a great deal of care some years ago when I was leader of the opposition, as I still am. I had difficulty in dealing with a matter in which certain correspondence was marked "private." The minister properly took the view that it had to be introduced and was on the file. Then the further question arose as to whether or not we had a right to have laid on the table of the house a letter to which he referred. The Speaker had to rule in accordance with the rules of the house, that when a minister refers to a public document in the course of his observations he must table that document, because he cannot deal with it when other members of the house are not permitted to see it. He cannot place his construction upon a document which I might not know about, and which I cannot see.

Mr. POWER: That was the Simcoe post office?

Mr. BENNETT: Yes. The Minister of Pensions and National Health is quite right. It was in connection with the Post Office Department. I do not recall the exact letter, but it was under that department—whether it was the Simcoe office or not, I cannot say. However I believe the hon. member was interested in the matter at that time, and probably will have a very good memory with respect to it.

The reason for the rule is obvious. Let us look at it for a moment. A member of the government, having access to public papers, sees fit to refer to those papers, and to place upon the contents of the document the construction which suits him, when presenting his case to the house.

Mr. DUNNING: That is not the case in this instance.

Mr. BENNETT: Yes, it is the case in this instance. The hon. member for Kootenay East (Mr. Stevens) asked for some information which he did not get. He thereupon asked for definite information with respect to a letter. The minister admits that he has the letter but he says, "This is a personal letter written by a member of the board to somebody who is a member of Dreyfus and Company".

Mr. HOWE: May I correct my right hon. friend?

Mr. BENNETT: Certainly.

[Mr. Howe.]

Mr. HOWE: I may say that I have never seen the letter. I have never seen it and I do not know whether it is in existence; it is certainly not in any file of the department.

Mr. BENNETT: That makes the minister's case so extraordinary as to cause me to wonder how he can possibly stand in his place and make the statements he has.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): It is quite true.

Mr. BENNETT: Yes, it is quite true—what I say. Anyone would wonder how a minister of the crown could stand in his place and make that observation, how any minister could stand up and say, "I don't know what is in the letter; I do not know whether it exists; I have never seen it". That is monstrous. Surely the minister does not mean that. Think what that means. He is a responsible minister of the crown and this is a responsible government, not a dictatorship. The minister says, "I don't know what is in the letter but I have been talking about it. I don't know whether it exists or not, but I have been talking about it. I have never seen it, but I have been talking about it." Can anyone imagine a responsible minister doing that? I say, the minister must have an entirely erroneous impression of what the duties of a minister of the crown are. Does he realize what his responsibilities are? There are those sitting beside him who can tell him.

Mr. LAPOINTE (Quebec East): To what item is my right hon. friend speaking?

Mr. BENNETT: I am speaking to a question of high privilege—a privilege of the house.

Mr. LAPOINTE (Quebec East): Privilege?

Mr. BENNETT: Yes, privilege of the House of Commons. If I am to find myself unable to deal with public matters because I cannot get access to papers to which a minister may refer, then the House of Commons becomes nothing more or less than a rubber stamp.

Mr. LAPOINTE (Quebec East): The rules provide the way to order the production of papers.

Mr. BENNETT: The rules do more than that. The rules provide that when a minister of the crown refers to a public document he must table it.

Mr. LAPOINTE (Quebec East): It was the hon. member for East Kootenay who did.