

In this season the situation differed somewhat in that the grain to be carried was United States grain, over the transportation of which the board of grain commissioners does not exercise jurisdiction. Therefore the question arose as to how this discrimination could be removed. Some discussion took place between a representative of Louis Dreyfus and Company and a member of the harbours board suggesting compensating for the carrier differential by a reduction in elevator rates. It was of course thoroughly understood by both parties that if any reduction of rates was made it would apply to any user of the Quebec elevator. In the course of that discussion I understand that a letter was written by a member of the harbours board to a representative of Louis Dreyfus and Company, asking whether the statement contained in the letter was a correct understanding of a previous conversation. After this letter was written the differential in lake rates was removed, by negotiation with the shipping lines, so that any necessity for a special tariff or a special commutation of elevator tariffs was removed. As I told the house in committee, a special commutation was made, and is to be found at page 2979 of the Canada Gazette. That commutation represents the only difference in the charges on grain through government elevators as between Montreal and Quebec.

The effect of that commutation is that in the period from May 18, 1938, to August 30, 1938, there will be no storage accrued against grain moving in full cargoes from the Quebec elevator. The tariff was published in the Canada Gazette, based on the commutation which, as I say, was passed by order in council. I will now file that tariff and will make the further remark that all grain handled at Quebec or to be handled at Quebec up to August 30 of this year will move on the rates set out in this tariff.

Hon. H. H. STEVENS (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, I must respectfully request however that the letter to which the minister has now referred as having passed between a member of the harbours board and the Dreyfus Company be tabled. It was that request I made the other day; the minister now having himself referred to it makes it doubly important that this be done. I now request again that the letter be tabled for the information of hon. members.

Mr. HOWE: I may say the letter referred to was marked private and confidential, and was sent by a member of the harbours board—it was not sent officially by the harbours board—to a representative of the Dreyfus

Company, and was addressed to him personally. The letter had no effect, as the negotiations to which it referred were not consummated. When we consider that the national harbours board is engaged in a competitive business I think we can all agree it is not in the public interest to table letters passing between a member of the harbours board and any firm or individual referring to negotiations which are not consummated. Therefore I must decline to table the letter referred to by the hon. member for Kootenay East.

Mr. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, and again on the orders of the day: in the first place, marking as private and confidential a document dealing with the conduct of public business is not sufficient excuse for not producing it in the house. In the second place, the document having been referred to in the observations of the minister himself, the rules of the house provide that it is competent for a member to request that it be tabled. In the third place, the question of the confidential character of a communication certainly cannot be extended to a document passing between the national harbours board and a firm doing business and, according to the minister's own statement, having under way negotiations for a variation in the fees or tolls fixed by a statutory body, namely the board of grain commissioners. I must again submit that the letter ought to be—indeed under the circumstances should be—tabled.

Mr. HOWE: I would simply say that a question was asked by the hon. member about this particular letter, and was answered by myself. The only reference I made to the letter was in reply to a question which bore directly on the letter.

Right Hon. R. B. BENNETT (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the issue is far larger than a controversy between the Minister of Transport (Mr. Howe) and an hon. member of the house. It is a matter of extraordinary importance. I do not think any words I could use would be language too strong to employ in dealing with the matter.

A member of a public tribunal created by this parliament has seen fit to write a letter to a member of a firm which does business with this country. There cannot be anything personal about that, if it touches public business. He can write about visiting the city, or he can write about social engagements, but the minute he touches upon public business he has no privacy. He cannot protect himself by putting "personal" on the letter,