

Mr. BENNETT: No; I say Mr. Gordon tells me that it was limited entirely to the work that arose after the date of the return of the writs. Instructions were issued that such provision should be made with respect to all expenditures. In other words, if the government was defeated, the new incoming administration should not be bound to pay any commitments for expenditures after the date of the return of the writs.

Mr. ROGERS: I do not wish to labour the point, but the agreement actually contained a clause requiring that the work should begin on October 10.

Mr. BENNETT: No—

Mr. ROGERS: That it must begin at least before October 10.

Mr. BENNETT: Yes.

Mr. BEAUBIEN: Copies of that letter were sent to Hon. R. J. Manion and Hon. Mr. Lawson. Once a letter is sent to four or five people, surely, taking my right hon. friend's own view, the letter ceases to be private and confidential, and this was a copy. The copy has been circulated all over the country.

Mr. BENNETT: The copies were each marked "personal and confidential."

Mr. BEAUBIEN: But when a man writes a personal and confidential letter, has he the right to send a copy to everybody?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: The point is that the letter which was addressed to Mr. Gordon making a request was not marked personal, confidential or private. It was a public letter signed by Mr. Webb and appeared on the files as such. It would have been improper that it should not be there. That letter contained a reference to an enclosure, which the original letter said was of importance as giving the reasons why the request made in the original letter should be carried out. That letter was attached to the formal public letter, and I submit the minister or anyone in his department would have been violating every sound rule if he had detached from a letter, which was a public letter, any part of the communication which was referred to in it as an enclosure, and which was intended to explain the letter itself.

May I say something in regard to what my right hon. friend has just said with respect to publicity to be given letters marked "private and confidential." He himself made a statement on the subject on May 30 of this year.

Mr. BENNETT: He certainly did.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: And I should like to read it. Speaking on May 30, the right hon. gentleman is reported at page 3337 of Hansard in these words:

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.

This letter touched public business. It was wholly and solely concerned with public business.

Mr. BENNETT: No, it was not.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Then it was concerned with political organization, I suppose; that is the only other thing. But the one was inseparable from the other.

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.

That was the position taken by my right hon. friend, namely that he may talk about anything, such as visiting the city, or social engagements—

Mr. BENNETT: Or political organization.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: He said:

—but the minute he touches upon public business he has no privacy. He cannot protect himself by putting "personal" on the letter, 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.

That was the statement of my right hon. friend.

Mr. BENNETT: Yes, because it was on the file. And this was not on the file.

Mr. ROGERS: The leader of the opposition has suggested that this letter was not on the file. That is an extraordinary suggestion.

Mr. BENNETT: That is the minister's suggestion, I say.

Mr. ROGERS: It is an extraordinary suggestion.