

*National Finance Committee*

the government and the provincial representatives to the effect that the minutes of these meetings should be kept secret. I quote these words of the minister as they are reported at page 3694 of *Hansard*:

The minutes of the meetings of the national finance committee which took place in Ottawa on December 9, 1936, and the following days, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Finance, were understood to be for the guidance and information of the members of the committee only, and not to be made public.

Further on he said:

But I must take the position, in view of the arrangement with the provinces, thoroughly understood and agreed upon, that the minutes themselves are not producible.

I must say that if there was such an arrangement it cannot bind the House of Commons. My contention is that the people of this country, through the members of the house, have the right to know what is going on in these committees where sometimes very important decisions are made. Furthermore I must say I am informed from reliable sources that there never was such an arrangement between the provinces and the government.

The other reason given by the minister is found in his last remarks, when he said, as reported at page 3696:

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

That is, these documents. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we have too often been misled by the use of this expression "in the public interest", because the question is not whether it is or is not in the public interest to produce a document but whether its production would cause injury to the public interest. That is entirely different. I do not think the minister would be ready to state that the production of these documents would cause injury to the public interest.

Further, my contention is that the public would be much interested in knowing what has taken place at these meetings. We find in the "Canadian Annual Review" for 1935-1936, at page 86, some information about these meetings, and I quote a few lines to show that the public would be very much interested in knowing what went on there:

The first meeting of the national finance committee took place in Ottawa on December 9, 1936, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Finance. The meeting was attended by more than fifty government ministers and officials.

It says further:

At the close of the first session an official communique said that the committee "continued its discussion of the services that could be

[Mr. Dorion.]

rendered by the Bank of Canada to provincial governments, and of the possibilities of a greater degree of coordination in governmental borrowing in Canada."

And further:

Taxation was also brought up with several of the provinces urging that certain sources of revenue exclusive to the dominion should be turned over in a measure to the provinces.

And finally:

In particular it was emphasized that the developments of the last 70 years, especially the increasing activities of governments in the field of social welfare, make it necessary to review the allocation by the British North America Act of sources of revenue and governmental responsibilities to dominion and provincial governments. Further discussions on this question were to take place.

Representatives of the province of Ontario raised the question of overlapping services of government in the field of agriculture, health, labour, etc., and suggested the appointment of a committee of officials to consider this question with a view to reducing the cost of government.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I believe I am asking something very reasonable, just and fair in asking that this motion be carried.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. SPEAKER: This motion is not debatable. I allowed the hon. member to speak in introducing his motion, thinking he was going to speak to a point of order as to why he insisted on the production of the documents.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Then I should like to speak to the point of order if a point of order has been raised.

Mr. SPEAKER: Standing order 51 states:

Notices of motion for the production of papers which the member asking for the same intends to move without discussion, shall be marked by him with an asterisk and shall be placed by the Clerk on the order paper above "Notices of Motions" under the heading "Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers". All such notices when called shall be forthwith disposed of; but if on any such motion a debate be desired, it will be transferred by the Clerk to the order of "Notices of Motions."

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Is this not marked with an asterisk?

Mr. SPEAKER: Yes, and therefore it is not debatable. The question has already been before the house, and the minister then took the position that he could not in the public interest produce these documents.

It is true that when a document—

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): If Your Honour will pardon me, is Your Honour about to give a ruling on the point of order because, if so, I should like to speak to it.