

its existence when you are questioned as to it is anything but creditable to the hon. gentleman who makes that proposition. Hon. gentlemen opposite refused to produce this particular document apparently on the ground that they did not grant the request, that they did not act upon the application. Well that is an extraordinary position for a responsible ministry to take before parliament under our constitution. It is that ministers can receive documents as ministers, consider them and refuse an application in which the country is vitally interested, and that is to be the end of the question. We need not discuss whether the particular terms of this application were favourable or unfavourable. The ministers simply decide for themselves that they are unsatisfactory and refuse it. How do hon. gentlemen opposite know but that parliament would take a different view of it? Are we to be shut off on such a question as this by the opinion of the ministers? Is this a star chamber government? Are they to settle questions of such vital moment to the country as this, and are we to have no opportunity of considering the proposition? This might be a proposition that the government, fairly and honestly considering it, may have thought unwise to accept, but parliament in its wisdom might have thought that ministers were wrong. Surely this parliament had the right to know what that proposition was. Though it might have been the worst possible proposition, we were just as much entitled to know its terms as entitled to see what that proposition was as if it were the very best. If this thing can be done the right hon. gentleman and his ministers can decide the whole affairs of this country and only let parliament know what it suits them to let it know. I repeat, Sir, that under no circumstances whatever can the withholding of that paper be justified. It is obvious to every person that the right hon. gentleman was ready to use that paper when it suited the party purposes of the government and that he was ready to conceal it so long as it suited the purposes of the government to have it concealed. Hon. gentlemen on his side of the House could know what were the terms of the proposition that we were debarred from knowing. Does the right hon. gentleman think that is consistent conduct? Surely, if the paper were confidential, it was confidential for all purposes. How could any person with propriety be allowed to know anything of the contents of a confidential paper concealed from this House? We first of all were entitled to a knowledge of it. Will the right hon. gentleman say that nobody knew of it? He says that he submitted it to his cabinet? Was it not communicated to anybody else? Did anybody else know of it? Does the right hon. gentleman mean to say that he took none of his supporters into his confidence, none of the gentle-

men from the Northwest Territories or any other gentleman, that this was an absolute secret to everybody until he got Mr. Hays's permission to read it to this House? I doubt that the right hon. gentleman will say so.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. What is that?

Mr. BARKER. I doubt very much that the right hon. gentleman will say that no person on his side of the House, other than his colleagues, was aware of the contents of that paper until it was read in this House? Now, that is all I have to say. I move this resolution with the distinct intimation to hon. gentlemen opposite that it includes every document of every character whatever which relates to this subject matter.

Rt. Hon. Sir WILFRID LAURIER (Prime Minister). I have no objection whatever to the passage of the resolution, nor would I have objection to make to the speech which the hon. gentleman (Mr. Barker) delivered, were it not for certain expressions, which if they are to be taken seriously, were meant to be offensive. I do not think that I should go that far with the hon. gentleman, for perhaps he did not measure as he might have done, the language made use of by him. Parliament is entitled to all the information in the possession of the government with respect to public matters, but my hon. friend who is a business man will I think agree, that there is a way and a way of doing business. Not only with regard to public business, but even in private intercourse between man and man, it is the privilege of one man to approach another confidentially, to put his proposition either verbally or in writing, and if in writing it is his privilege to ask that it be treated as confidential. I do not think that proposition will be gainsaid by anybody. If it be a part of the amenities of civilized life; in fact, if it be a condition without which civilized intercourse cannot exist, that there should be respect for the confidence of another, then the hon. gentleman will have to revise somewhat the language which he used. The hon. gentleman, in speaking of the document as he called it can, as I am prepared to call it, which was marked 'confidential' by the persons who sent it to me as head of the government, said: Had the government the right to receive such a document, to entertain it, and to keep it for themselves? I say no. If the government had received, and if they had entertained such a paper, even though it be marked confidential, they could not have kept it for themselves. I assert that most distinctly. But, when that government receives a paper which is marked 'confidential,' and when they do not entertain the proposition therein contained, then I think the government would be quite justified in doing even what the hon. gentleman (Mr. Barker) suggested,