

Motions for Papers

Mr. Ian Grant Wahn (St. Paul's): Mr. Speaker, the first suggestion is certainly acceptable to me, namely that we proceed to private bills; but can we bind the house by agreement now as to what is to happen next Thursday? I would want to see how we proceed today before I would consent to a change in the order of business for next Thursday, because I have the next two bills on the list after the one relating to the universities association, which one I agree should be taken first. This is the only suggestion I thought was being put forward by the hon. member for Skeena.

Mr. McIlraith: I want to clarify another point with respect to that part of the suggestion which related to next Thursday. I heard nothing about it until just after we had moved into the private members' hour when the hon. member raised it. I would certainly feel it would not be proper for us here, without notice, to attempt to bind the house with respect to its proceedings next Thursday, especially without an opportunity of mentioning it to the other house leaders and the other members directly involved. Subject to that reservation I have no objection to any adjustment hon. members want to make with regard to today's private members' hour.

Mr. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I think it is not possible to proceed except by taking the normal course of business as set out for today.

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS**PROVINCIAL SUBMISSIONS AT CONFERENCE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena) moved:

That an humble address be presented to His Excellency praying that he will cause to be laid before this house a copy of all submissions, presentations, briefs and other documents and a copy of any speeches delivered at, or to the recent dominion-provincial conference on Indian affairs by each provincial government or any person representing a provincial government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, so far as I know federal-provincial conferences in the past have invariably been held in camera. Primarily the reason was that such conferences related to the division of spoils, as it might be termed, taxation and fiscal matters and tax rental agreements. In considering such matters I expect it was felt conferences like that should be held in private, just the same as discussions relating to the preparation of a budget are held in private and in secret, except when the Minister of Finance wants to hire ghost writers to give him a hand.

[Mr. Howard.]

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of federal-provincial conferences and an alteration in the subject matters with which they have dealt, so that now a dominion-provincial conference is a sort of supragovernmental body comprising representatives of the federal cabinet and the various provincial cabinets, and these conferences now discuss more than budgetary and fiscal matters. But still they are held in camera. Still the proceedings of such conferences are closed. People are unable to find out what is the position of respective governments on any subject matter which comes before these conferences.

The motion before the house deals with certain submissions, documents, speeches and presentations at a particular dominion-provincial conference, namely the one held last fall on Indian affairs. You will notice it states "at, or to the recent dominion-provincial conference on Indian affairs" and it will be immediately recognized this motion was placed on the order paper last fall just after that federal-provincial conference, so that the word "recent" should not be related to point of time now but rather to a conference held last fall when the motion was originally prepared.

That conference on Indian affairs differed markedly from other conferences in that it was one which dealt with the rights, freedoms and prerogatives of people and did not deal with cold things such as statistics, changes in tax levels, and whether or not a certain amount would accrue to provincial governments out of revenues received by the federal government. Because it was such a vastly different type of conference it is our opinion that the proceedings before it should have been made public.

It was a very bad error, among many other bad errors on the part of this government, to have held that conference behind closed doors in the first place. We think it was insulting to the native Indian people to have excluded them from the conference even as observers and to have denied them the opportunity to hear what the position of the federal and of the provincial governments was with respect to their welfare. It is because the rights and freedoms of our native people are involved that we think we should now try to correct the insulting error made by the federal government in holding this conference behind closed doors, and we think this might best be done by disclosing to the general public of Canada, to this parliament, and particularly to the native Indian people across this nation, documents showing the various positions