

SUPPLY—ST. PETER'S INDIAN RESERVE.

Mr. FIELDING moved that the House go into Committee of Supply.

Mr. G. H. BRADBURY (Selkirk). Mr. Speaker, it will be remembered last year I called the attention of the House to the manner in which the surrender of the St. Peter's Indian reserve had been secured. At that time I pointed out that the Indians at St. Peter's alleged that they had been practically cheated out of their reserve. I pointed out that the methods employed by the government agent had been anything but creditable to the government. The hon. Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (Mr. Oliver) replying to my remarks, said, at page 7071 of last year's 'Hansard':

I am sure the House will not expect me—at this stage of the session, would not wish me—to make a detailed criticism of the four hours' speech made by my hon. friend from Selkirk (Mr. Bradbury) at the close of the last sitting of the House. My hon. friend is entitled to the credit, if credit it be, of having made the longest speech of the session. May I add my humble appreciation by saying that I believe never, since this chamber was erected, has there been delivered in its walls such a persistent and sustained tirade of unfounded assertion, of unwarranted insinuation; a tirade that, in its gratuitous inexactitude, is an offence against the privilege of parliament and an insult to its intelligence.

This is the language with which the hon. the Superintendent General opened within a three and one half hour's speech which was intended no doubt to destroy the force and effect of one of the most serious indictments ever delivered against the Indian Department of this country. After such a tirade of carefully prepared criticism of my humble efforts to discharge a duty which I felt imperative on me as a representative of the part of the country where this outrage occurred, I think I had a right to expect, and the House had a right to expect, that the hon. gentleman who started out with such a flourish of trumpets would have at least made good his reckless assertions; it was surely his bounden duty to demonstrate to this House the correctness of his bold and I think reckless statements in justification of the use of language verging on what would be considered unparliamentary, and which was certainly undignified and hardly worthy of a minister of the Crown.

You can read the minister's speech from end to end without finding one fair or intelligent argument to justify his opening criticism of my speech. Neither can you find one fair or one intelligent argument in rebuttal of the serious charges preferred against his department by the Indians, his wards. It is true the hon. gentleman has denied in a general way the correctness of those statements, but he failed to adduce

one tittle of evidence to sustain his denial. He seems to expect this House and the country to accept his bald statement as against the sworn statements of dozens of the wards of this country, men who are living on the ground, who know the circumstances, I am sure I will be pardoned when I say, that I prefer to take the sworn statements of the men who suffered, and the men who knew what they were talking about, when they made these declarations, which formed the serious charge against the administration of the Department of Indian Affairs. The hon. Superintendent General, has demonstrated very clearly to me, that he was entirely ignorant of the real facts with regard to this scandalous transaction, and sooner than admit that ignorance he was advancing arguments to save the face of his department, arguments no doubt furnished to him by officials some of whom at least were very much concerned and interested in his success in convincing parliament and the country that there was nothing wrong in this surrender and nothing to investigate. But after an heroic effort sustained for three and a half hours by the hon. minister, and after his reckless statements he left unanswered entirely this serious inditement. Therefore we see clearly the unfair and uncandid methods employed by the minister to counteract the damaging effect of the serious charges made by his wards, the Indians of St. Peter's. That speech also shows how unfair the minister was in his opening attack on me at the commencement of his long and somewhat laboured speech.

In order that the House may understand the position to which I was referring last year which called forth this criticism from the hon. minister, and that the House and the country may understand that the minister failed entirely to meet these serious charges, and left this indictment standing as strong against the Indian Department as on the night on which I delivered my remarks, I wish to recall to the House a few of the charges to which I referred and which the hon. minister failed entirely to meet or to explain. For instance, I stated that the notices calling a meeting to consider the surrender of the homes of nearly 1,300 souls was posted in four or five places on the reserve and were not seen until Sunday about noon, the meeting being called for Monday at 11 o'clock, giving less than twenty-four hours' notice for this all-important meeting at which this band of Indians were supposed to decide whether they would surrender the reserve on which their grandfathers before them had lived. How does the hon. gentleman meet and dispose of this serious indictment? This charge was not made on hearsay evidence, it was made on the strength of sworn declarations from dozens of Indians, wards of the people of this country.