

*Indian Affairs*

Each official has his own responsibilities and, if he gets an idea, it is his duty to refer it to us, if he thinks it is of some value. As administrators, we have the responsibility of determining the value of an idea.

In addition, I believe that unless we can assure our officials that their suggestions shall remain confidential and also that there is no risk of a public debate following whatever proposals they dare make to the government we cannot expect a sound administration.

I recognize that the ministers' actions and the government's policy must be discussed in the house. However, the documents that paved the way to such policy should not be debated in the open.

Getting back to what I said earlier, I have nothing to hide about what is in that document. Eventually our policy on the administration of the bands and the reserves will become known. A while ago, I told the hon. member for Skeena that we intend to allow the Indian people to participate to a larger extent in the administration of their own affairs, since, in many cases, they are both well informed and determined to make their decisions by themselves, and we shall devise the necessary policies to concretize our aims.

[*English*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Skeena.

**Mr. Howard (Skeena):** Mr. Speaker, if you had risen earlier I should have presumed that it was to ask whether the minister had unanimous consent of the house to carry on with his remarks. I should have been happy to accede to any request by the minister to continue, since I do not think he should be saddled with any five minute time limit.

The minister has said on two or three occasions that it is not possible or advisable to produce all documents prepared in the Indian affairs branch. But he misses the point. We are not asking for all documents. We are asking for one specific document which has been drawn to the minister's attention but which he has not yet read. We are asking for a document, and this is an important point, that has been distributed to a number of native Indian people by persons working in the department. A number of Indian people have therefore looked on the document as a document with some official status. Indeed, the minister gave credence to that belief by saying he could not produce the document because it was confidential.

[*Mr. Chrétien.*]

When I asked the minister if he disowned the document, he retorted, "How can you disown something you know nothing about?". He did not disown it; neither did he adopt it. He said he would take from it what was good and reject what was bad. Of course, the minister will interpret what is good. If his interpretation coincides with the interpretation of our native Indian people, well and good; I will agree with him. Otherwise, I will not.

We have a document which the minister refuses to reject and refuses to adopt. This document has already been circulated amongst our Indian people. They consider it has some stamp of approval. In the short time the minister has occupied his portfolio he has learned no doubt the degree to which our native Indian people distrust the department which, in the years it has existed, has done practically nothing to dispel that distrust. Over the years it has acted in an autocratic, overbearing, paternalistic and stupid way when dealing with Indian affairs. If the minister maintains his attitude that the document in question is secret after a number of native Indian people have seen it and have concluded that it enjoys some official status, he will be doing himself a disservice, to say nothing of the disservice done to our native Indian people. Surely when this motion for the production of papers appeared on the order paper appropriate officials in the minister's department ought to have drawn the document to the minister's attention and told him what was in it. That did not happen and reflects on some officials. No doubt someone in the minister's department said, "We cannot disclose this document. It is marked 'confidential'." Perhaps the person who marked it confidential is the same person who told the minister the document could not be disclosed. The minister, apparently without question, accepted the opinion of some official in the department that a certain document was confidential. He did not bother to look at the document.

May I call it six o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The hour for consideration of private members business having expired, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the house took recess.