

*Indian Affairs*

He said: Mr. Speaker, in order that there may be some continuity for those who will be reading this debate and because it is sometimes necessary with such motions to point out that they have been transferred from another point in time I think I ought to put on the record just what is involved. The motion I sought to move yesterday asked for the production of a particular document entitled "Local Government on Indian Reserves", prepared by the policy and planning directorate of the Indian affairs branch under date of August 4, 1967. Yesterday when giving the reasons that the document could not be produced the minister said that it was a document marked "Confidential for discussion purposes". He said further:

● (5:00 p.m.)

This document was intended for field officials and I do not think that we could table it in the house since it is a departmental document prepared for internal administrative purposes.

I pointed out yesterday and do so again today that if it was a document prepared, as the minister said, for internal administrative purposes there is a tremendous amount of confusion and misunderstanding within the department itself because the document in question was given fairly wide distribution to people who were not officials of the Indian Affairs Branch and who were not employed by the branch in any capacity. In other words, departmental officials gave at least semi-public distribution to this document. That is how it came into my possession.

However, since the document deals with a fundamental and basic aspect of authority which the native Indian people should have over their own affairs I felt it would be desirable to attempt to have it tabled in parliament so that it would be a public document in the full sense of the word and would be available to all the native Indian people in Canada and not just a few of them. I have discussed this matter with a number of the native people who indicated they would like to have the document made available to them because it reflects the government's attitude as to local government control and the determination by the native people of their own affairs which is something that is pretty fundamental to them.

Without trying to offend the minister or without trying to sound as if I am offending him I submit that this is another example of the basic philosophy within his department and the government. Government tends to be

[Mr. Howard (Skeena).]

secretive. It tends to be aloof from the general public in respect of the publication of documents for discussion. It tends to be a closed circuit corporation. It wishes to do things within a vacuum or behind closed doors. It does not want basically to bring people into the discussion and the development of programs and ideas which relate to them. I submit that this is simply an extension of that concept of secrecy. So far as I am concerned the concept of government should be the reverse. It should be open, friendly and generous in its discussions with people. It should do its best to obtain the confidence of the people in every possible way and only maintain secrecy in a unique situation and not as the traditional way of doing things. It is with this attitude that I disagree.

In respect of secrecy and the refusal on the part of the government to take the national Indian people into its confidence, I submit that the fact that the document itself is embarrassing to the government is the real reason it does not want to make it public. By its construction, by its phraseology, the document indicates a government attitude which is disdainful of the right of the native Indian people to control their own affairs. All this is taking place at the same time that so-called convention conferences are being held. On the one hand the government tells the native people that it wants to talk to them about certain things and obtain their views, while on the other hand it prepares documents of the type I hold in my hand and refuses to make them public and give to the Indian people the thinking within the internal structure of government about things as fundamental as local government control.

Without reflecting upon a vote of this house, I point out that a few days ago we asked in the house for the production of another document relating to the fish and game laws as they apply to the native Indian people. That was refused. Subsequently there was a vote on the matter in the house and the majority, including the minister, voted against making that report public so that the native Indian people could see what was included in it about something as basic as fishing and hunting rights. When the committee was set up to deal with the fish and game laws the gentleman who is the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia and who was then the minister in charge of Indian affairs on behalf of the Liberal government told us that when that report was prepared it would