

Indian Affairs

to talk about it now, unless he wants to congratulate me for what I did.

Mr. Peters: I think this does really concern us; it is the paternalistic aspect of this document which is involved. In this particular case, one of the agents decided there were 603 Indians on the reserve and that they would be entitled to six representatives. After the election had been held, it was found the Indians numbered only 575. The Chief came to me about it. I found out afterward that he had gone to a number of other people as well. He is a very good politician. I have known Chief Pine for a long time and he is a smart cookie in many ways. He came to me with a legitimate problem. The Indian Affairs branch said there had to be another election because it had been found there were fewer Indians than expected. The minister would not say he was willing that the band should have an extra councillor. I checked with Chief Pine and he told me there might be ten meetings held. Councillors get \$25 a meeting, so the amount at issue would be about \$250. What happened, was this. The Indians met the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), the Prime Minister turned to the minister responsible for Indian affairs, and said: "Settle it". The minister did the same thing as the spokesman for his department, the same thing as the law officers in the branch. He said: I cannot.

Mr. Chrétien: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I said, yes. And the six councillors elected are now in office.

Mr. Peters: That is not as I understand it. The minister said, no, because this question had been referred to the legal branch of the department for an opinion. The lawyers said it was not in order to override the provisions of the act. The matter was referred to the Department of Justice and that department gave a similar opinion. In these circumstances, an order in council was passed giving authority to do something which is not allowed by the act itself. This was done merely to make legal an interpretation of the act which, really, turned upon a technicality. After all, there is always room for a little give and take where figures fall very near a dividing line.

● (5:40 p.m.)

The point I am making concerns the act, not what the minister has said. This document expresses really the thinking of the officials in his department. I do not blame the minister for telling the house the document

[Mr. Chrétien.]

cannot be made public. He is really telling us that he does not know what is in it, whether it should be made public or not. As a matter of fact, I disagree with the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard); I think it is fairly representative of the thinking of the departmental officials. He said it was a bad document but I do not think it is. I say it fairly represents the paternalistic attitude of many of the Indian affairs officials.

I have heard the minister address numbers of meetings in my area and I know that his approach is conciliatory; that he is interested in giving his own views, not those expressed to him by his officials. He has done much to bring about a dialogue between himself and his colleague and Indian bands in particular areas. In my opinion, this document does represent the views of the planning directorate of the Indian affairs branch. I think it should be circulated and torn to pieces. It is paternalistic and departmentalistic.

I know that the Indian agent, who was in my area for a while, never bothered to talk to the Indians for months and months. I know for a fact that he did not attend one reservation for a period of five months. I do not think he counted the Indians or even looked at the roll.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Did he cash his pay cheque?

Mr. Peters: He certainly did. I asked people who worked with him how long he had been there, and they told me three years but that they didn't know what he did. He knew how many Indians had voted, so I suppose he did count them.

If the minister reads the document, then he may find it is not detrimental to him and probably represents his opinion. However, in his remarks today he has spoken against the motion and is refusing to disclose the document.

Quite frankly, I was ashamed to have to listen to an official of the department give me some silly argument about why he was not able to satisfy the little problem that Chief Pine had. After all, we are spending here only \$250. We can give some other Indian in the band an education, but really \$250 is neither here nor there. Obviously, this man has some contribution to make but we are tied with red tape. According to this document, the red tape will be extended.

The minister might be wise to disavow this document, but we have no objection to its