

pass reflections on other colleagues in the House. At the same time, it is difficult for the Chair, on the point of order, to let hon. members who have participated in the debate to participate again. I agree that the parliamentary secretary might question the last remark of the hon. member for Skeena; nevertheless, the Chair feels that at this time the best thing to do might be for us to leave it at that. I do not believe the reflection affected personally the hon. member or the House. Unless the parliamentary secretary proves to the Chair that the reflection bore upon himself or upon the House of Commons, we should leave it at that.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): If I drew Your Honour inadvertently into the remarks I was trying to make, I apologize. I apologize for any imputations that might be contained in my remarks. I was trying to say that Your Honour made a ruling with respect to an original point of order and that you said the gist of my point of order was correct; in other words, that the debate should revolve around reasons as to why or why not the report should be disclosed. The parliamentary secretary chose to ignore that completely. He did not mention anything about the confidentiality or otherwise of the report. That is what I was trying to get across.

Mr. Caccia: The matter was transferred for debate.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): There is some further chattering and muttering from across the way.

Mr. Caccia: The matter was transferred for debate.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): I hope I may be forgiven if I obey the rules and disregard the utterances, because if I pay attention to them, obviously I would be offending the rules and I would not want to do that. I am sure that the parliamentary secretary would not want me to do that, so I ask him to please not entice me any further.

• (5:50 p.m.)

I wish to make one or two other points. It was argued that we should approach the question of notices of motions for the production of papers on a priority basis. All we would have to do is make a list of what we want, say to the government, "Here they are; tell us what you will give us," and pull the rest of them back and be contented, happy and say we would not ask for anything else. That kind of priority lets the government continue in the way it always has done, namely, keeping information secret which should be made public.

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Howard (Skeena): If that is not the situation, the hon. member opposite who advanced the case does not know the rules. When notices of motions for the production of papers are placed on the order paper, whether they are in position No. 1, 75 or 293, the government has the right and opportunity under the rules to be selective and to choose which ones it is willing to accept. It does not matter whether they are at the bottom or at the top of the list, priorities do not mean anything in that situation.

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If it is a question of our consuming time which might be used for some other type of business, it would have been a simple matter for the parliamentary secretary, if he wanted to save the time of the House as the hon. member for Moose Jaw tried to do, to give a brief explanation as to why the material was confidential from his point of view. We could then have had a vote on the matter and proceeded to something else. However, members opposite wanted to talk, gab and consume time until six o'clock in order to deny Parliament the right to vote on this question.

An hon. Member: Who is talking now?

Mr. Howard (Skeena): I want to make one other point. There seems to be a predetermination that when the government says something is confidential, it should not be disclosed. I want to make a point with regard to perseverance. If we had accepted that argument, a number of documents and studies would never have been made public and brought to the attention of the people they affect.

I wish to cite two cases on which a decision of this House was made yesterday. In each session for the past five of six years I have had on the order paper a notice of motion for the production of two particular documents. One related to fish and game laws as they pertain to Indian people and the other was the Stanbury-Fields study and report on taxation as it relates to Indian people and Indian laws in British Columbia. Until yesterday the government stated in each session that it could not table the documents because they were confidential and not in the public interest. I persisted. I do not say that this makes me a better member than anyone else, but I felt they should be made public. Lo and behold, yesterday the government completely reversed itself, said it would table them and the House passed the two motions unanimously. What may be confidential one day somehow or other is not confidential the next.

I have one final point with regard to matters that are confidential. The moment the hon. member for Moose Jaw placed this notice of motion for the production of papers on the order paper, the government concluded that it was confidential and not a solitary word was communicated by the government to the hon. member in a personal way with regard to the documents. From my experience in dealing with some ministers, it is almost standard practice for them to come to us and say that it is confidential for such and such a reason. A number of times members have acceded and said that they did not realize what was involved and agreed to withdraw. In this instance, there was complete silence.

There was silence because the government wants to hide from public view what is in the report, because they know what it contains. I say to the parliamentary secretary that it is embarrassing to the government because the operations of the Department of Manpower do not follow through and are not as effective as they might be. For this reason the government wants to cover up that embarrassment. That is why all this furor, fuss, false and specious argument is being presented.