

Motions for Papers

Mr. Gibson: That is not an issue of the debate.

Mr. Bigg: You will have an opportunity to speak later. I will be about five minutes concluding my remarks.

Mr. Aiken: They are just trying to stall you.

Mr. Bigg: I understand and appreciate what they are doing, but my skin is thick. It has been toughened by the western winds and the cold of the western north, but I do not speak with a forked tongue. I do not believe this government recognizes Indian treaties. I intend to soon resume my seat, but if I did not say this the rocks of Canada would cry out in defence of the Indian. We must start with a solemn recognition of their treaties before the Indians will listen to us. I know these people very well. They sit quietly and listen; their manners are better than ours. They will sit and listen to the minister and the deputy minister, but they would listen more intently if the government assured them that their treaties would be honoured. If it is suggested that their treaties, signed by the great white mother in England, have no meaning or validity, we will get nowhere.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. Has the hon. member completed his remarks?

Mr. Bigg: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Let me remind the hon. member that the debate at this time refers to the production of papers. The hon. member should confine his remarks to that specific subject.

Mr. Bigg: There would be no purpose asking for the production of papers unless the hon. member had a specific point in mind. I believe that his purpose is nothing less than an attempt to prove to the Indian people that we are of good faith. The keystone of good faith in this regard is the recognition of Indian treaties. Unless I am sadly mistaken, my words are easily understood. I refer to the rights of the Indian people.

Let me try in my own inimitable fashion to explain this situation. If there is nothing in those papers which goes against the welfare of the Indian people, they should be made public. If there is anything of this kind in them, we should know about it. Many documents which pass between government departments should not be divulged. There

are certain delicate matters which if made public might be disadvantageous to the Indian people. They do not trust us now. They do not believe that when two groups of white people get together they should be trusted.

I do not intend to castigate the government for not producing these documents if someone can prove to me there is good reason for not producing them. I am easily convinced, and I would not be unhappy about such a decision because I respect secrecy in certain matters. This debate has given me a wonderful opportunity to suggest why the hon. member for Skeena moved his motion. The Indian people in Canada are alarmed, and no matter how polite they may be to ministers of the federal and provincial governments, I assure the House that they are deeply disturbed.

• (5:50 p.m.)

We speak of equality. It is not sufficient to speak of equality to these people. We must firmly and ably demonstrate to them that we believe in equality. We speak of improving their status. We do this behind closed doors. Such action suggests only that they are not equal and that their status is not clearly defined. Until we demonstrate to these people that we intend to honour their treaties, they will have every reason to be suspicious of us. The key to this whole problem is the matter of the treaties. I say this after 57 years experience of these people and because I love them. I would not have bothered getting to my feet today were it not for the fact that I want to state the truth and the simple fact.

We must make the Indian people believe we intend to honour the treaties no matter how out-of-date they may be. They have lived up to their obligations under the treaties, and if we do not sit down with them and discuss these questions it will be clear to them that we have broken the treaties. We must sit down with them as our ancestors did and make a solemn agreement with them. If we do not start there, I do not think we will get anywhere.

Mr. Colin D. Gibson (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, the belief in free access to government documents is based on the principle that monopolistic control of information, a policy of secrecy, is in fact truly undemocratic and reactionary. Such a policy breeds distrust and contempt for the civil service and government departments. However, I do not advocate the "open access" theory which makes virtually all government