

Proposals to Extend Territorial Waters

accordance with the change in the rules this year; but now that he has had an opportunity to give consideration to what is the normal practice of the House of Commons and the custom and usage of parliament I suggest to him that rather than press the matter to a vote he accept the explanation I have given as to our inability to provide him with the material that he wishes to be laid before the house and withdraw his motion.

Mr. Pickersgill: Could I ask the minister a question before he takes his seat? Could he give the house an assurance that negotiations are actively going on at the present time? I think all of us are impressed by what the minister has just said but if we had an assurance that negotiations were actively going on at the present time I am sure it would colour the views of many hon. members as to what they should do about this motion.

Mr. Churchill: I am in no position whatever to give an answer to that question. This matter is one which falls within the realm of interest of the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Green)—

Mr. Pickersgill: Who should be here.

Mr. Churchill:—and in his absence I regret that I cannot answer the question.

Mr. C. W. Carter (Burin-Burgeo): Mr. Speaker, the subject matter of this motion is of very great interest to all of us on this side of the house and of special interest to my province because the survival of our in-shore fishery depends upon some action being taken to extend our territorial waters. Your Honour has pointed out that the debate on this motion should be confined to the desirability of having these documents tabled.

It seems to me that desirability hinges on whether or not negotiations are in progress. When the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Green) spoke to this motion on February 7, as recorded at the bottom of page 631 and the top of 632 of *Hansard*, he gave two reasons. One reason was we should not do anything to prejudice the significance of the 1960 vote at Geneva. Well, the 1960 vote at Geneva has no significance at all if it does not result in action. It can only have significance if further negotiations were proceeding. In his latter remarks, the minister seemed to imply that negotiations might be in progress. I am very sorry that the acting minister this afternoon was not able to give us a positive assurance that this is actually the case.

We can understand that nothing should be done to embarrass negotiations. However,
[Mr. Churchill.]

we feel that there is scope for the government to continue negotiations, particularly with those countries who in 1960 supported Canada's proposal.

Mr. Speaker: I think I should caution the hon. member again that the motion is not to the effect the government should carry on negotiations. It is not really relevant to discuss the issue of whether or not the government is carrying on negotiations or should be carrying on negotiations. The question is whether or not the government should accede to the request that these documents be made available by tabling them. The issue to be met is the objection of the government that it is not in the public interest or in accordance with the practice in international negotiations to produce documents and communications exchanged between governments. I know the hon. member's interest in the broader subject, but it really is not in issue.

Mr. Carter: If Your Honour had borne with me for another ten seconds, I would have made it quite clear that I did not intend to pursue that line of debate, but merely to urge upon the minister the fact that there is the necessity of taking the house into his confidence as to whether or not negotiations are proceeding. Certainly, that cannot prejudice the situation. This is a matter of vital urgency to practically all my constituents and the people on both coasts of Canada.

I should like to commend the minister for the suggestion that he made with regard to this motion. My leader has authorized me to say that we would not wish to press for the tabling of the documents or for any action that might prejudice negotiations that might be in progress or might be in the process of getting started.

Mr. Speaker: I must inform the house that if the hon. member speaks now, he will close the debate.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): I listened very attentively to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Churchill) when he spoke about past practices and the like. From all of it I could only come to one conclusion, namely that the correspondence that Canada carries on with other countries is not too much different from the correspondence that Canada carries on with the various provinces, except that we normally do not go to war with the other provinces in Canada. Perhaps national situations are sometimes more tense than relationships between the federal government and the various provinces. All I got out of the minister's reference to R. B. Bennett, and I can understand his affection there, and his reference to Mackenzie King, and I can understand him there also, is that it would have