

Motions for Papers

in a great many instances the solemn treaties which most of the Indians recognize as their bill of rights are entirely out-of-date and meaningless. If we enter into discussions with the Indian people with this attitude in mind we might as well have stayed home; it would be better to let them suffer the neglect which they have suffered for hundreds of years. We can no longer talk to them with a forked tongue, leading them along like bad children and suggesting in a condescending manner that we are bringing them up to the standards of the white man in the twentieth century. The leaders of the Indian people know they are equal, but it is very difficult to pass this feeling on to the children who are living under disgraceful conditions, in poor housing and in the most degrading circumstances of any citizens of this country.

● (5:40 p.m.)

Mr. Honey: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to be unduly critical or seem to be putting forward a narrow interpretation in respect of this debate, but with great respect to the hon. member it seems to me he is not addressing himself to the point of the debate. The point is whether in fact the government should be required to produce the documents asked for by the hon. member for Skeena. This is not a general debate on the white paper, and I respectfully suggest that the hon. member confine his remarks to that point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): I think the hon. member is coming to the point.

Mr. Bigg: I do not intend to get into a technical argument as to whether I am referring to the specific point of the motion. I am here to present, in my inimitable way, several guidelines in respect of the treatment of Indians. I ask Your Honour's indulgence because this type of quibbling prevents us getting down to the meat of the matter.

I believe the hon. member for Skeena is not only trying to flay this government and put it in an embarrassing position but he is trying to get from all levels of government a complete and frank understanding of the Indians' problems. If anything is going on behind closed doors regarding Indians, you can be sure they know about it. I presume the hon. member for Skeena has been asked by the Indian people to attempt to clarify this matter. I go along with his request. As hon. members of this house well know, I do not always agree with that hon. member but I give him the same

[Mr. Bigg.]

benefit of the doubt that the minister is requesting. The hon. member wants a similar co-operative attitude to be adopted, and a detailed discussion of this matter.

I am not castigating the ministers of the Crown and I am quite willing to overlook discussions behind closed doors among ministers, deputy ministers and officials of provincial governments so long as the discussions benefit the Indian people. Let me warn the government that it must be made abundantly clear to these people—not necessarily clear to me or to the hon. member for Skeena—that discussions behind closed doors or at open assemblies are taking place for the benefit of the Indian people.

I do not think for one minute that the minister intends, as the white paper suggests, that the Indian people should be allowed to remain in their present abject state. Great efforts are being made to provide them with proper housing. Up to now these people have not trusted us because they have not had the opportunity to raise their families in a way worthy of Canadian citizens. If we want them to trust us in the future, we must make every effort to assure them that we respect their treaties. The Indian people believe they have a broken treaty as far as their rights are concerned.

Mr. Gibson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I submit the hon. member is not addressing himself to the issue before the House.

Mr. Bigg: If in the opinion of the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Gibson) I have not been addressing myself to the issue before the House, I suggest he must be deaf. There are 21 Indian reservations in the district of Athabasca and I assure hon. members that I have the confidence and respect of the Indian people. I am attempting to give first-hand information in respect of what these people think. They think this government and all the members of the House have little or no interest in their welfare.

Mr. Gibson: The minister has been traveling all over the county speaking to Indians. He has done more in this regard than any other minister.

Mr. Bigg: I know he has been speaking to the Indians and I know what he has said. I have read everything he has said to them. I am just giving the opinion of one of 264 representatives in this House. The minister is not on the right track.