

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion
 RURAL DEVELOPMENT—REQUEST FOR
 TABLING OF ARDA REPORT ON
 INDIAN POVERTY AREAS

Mr. Robert Simpson (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday of this week I requested permission to table a special report concerning Indian people. That request was apparently not acceptable, mainly because of the actions of government members. I propose to discuss this matter at this time. The hiding of this report is just one more symptom of the insistence of privacy on the part of this government.

● (10:10 p.m.)

The Indian Act is under review, and hearings are relatively public. That is a good step as far as it goes, and we applaud it. But the public approach to the Indian Act is the exception. The rule of this government is to meet in private and to make decisions without adequate consultation. We saw that in regard to the reorganization of the Department of Indian Affairs, and we are seeing it again now. This is a most important report. It is highly critical of the present government, which it describes as "a paternalistic and custodially attuned administration, which has resulted in the failure to arrive at any positive policies and goals, and any comprehensive attack... to alleviate the present disadvantaged position of the Indian people."

Therefore, in this report officials of the government itself condemn the government's own policy in exactly the terms that we and spokesmen of the native people themselves have used. Government policy is condemned by its own officials as being paternalistic and inefficient. That is an important fact because it proves that there is virtually unanimous agreement that the policies of the department of Indian affairs have kept the native people down. The report states the conclusion that "fundamental changes in the direction of federal policy and in the roles of the federal and provincial governments will be necessary before the gap"—between the Indian and the average Canadian—"will begin to close."

This report goes on to suggest a different approach. It points out the importance of using, adapting and co-ordinating existing policies of regional development, health services, manpower and other policies to help the native people. It refers to the serious fact that present policy creates among the native people a sense of separateness which is bound to breed prejudice and inequality. It says that the centralization in the Indian affairs branch

[Mr. Haidasz.]

has "in practice blocked the provinces and other federal programs to Indians, and more particularly, those programs developed to facilitate the relief of economic disadvantage."

The report points out that the income gap between the Indian and other Canadians is growing larger, not smaller. It emphasizes the importance of co-operation with the provinces and suggests the provinces will need money as well as encouragement from Ottawa before they are prepared to actively initiate new programs. It recommends the establishment of a special joint committee comprising "as a minimum, representatives from the Indian affairs branch, the rural development branch and the social development group of the privy council office." It suggests this committee should be struck as soon as possible and should prepare a comprehensive submission to outline strategy and examine both policy and financial implications of various programs.

This report is not a blueprint, of course. It does not have all the answers, and some of its suggestions need study and discussion. But it is a report with some authority, prepared by senior people with extensive experience in public service. It is a report which would be helpful to every group concerned about the condition and prospects of our native people. It is a report that should be made public.

This government has talked about involvement and participation. Obviously it says one thing and does another. The government promises involvement, and then it hides reports. This report will not stay hidden. Although I have been denied permission to table it in the house, we have had some copies made at our own expense and they will be available to representatives of the press and the native people's organizations.

Mr. Chairman, it is important at any time for the public to know what is going on and to have a chance to influence policy. It is especially important in respect of this problem, because it is a matter of great concern to people across the country. It is a question in which Canadians are prepared to become involved, if the government will lift the cloak of secrecy. Even more important, it concerns a group of people who for too long have been denied a voice in their own affairs. Let me quote one last passage:

Concerning the development of leadership and of social organization, the potential represented by the band councils and the Indian organizations has been more or less ignored, even stifled.