

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 1, 1968

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

INDIAN AFFAIRS

REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF DEPARTMENTAL REORGANIZATION

On the orders of the day:

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the right hon. Prime Minister. In view of the anxiety being expressed throughout the country by Indian organizations and other spokesmen for the Indian people, including the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras), about the failure of the government to consult the Indian people before proceeding with the reorganization of the department of Indian affairs will he undertake to reconsider these proposals in consultation with representatives of the Indian community in Canada?

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as this house knows there has been constant and intense communication with the Indian population since this government took office on all aspects concerning the Indian population. The reorganization of the department is something which had been initiated quite a while ago. It is just a matter of internal structure, and the obvious design is to make the services of the government to the Indian and Eskimo population more efficient. It is really a consequence of Indian Affairs being no longer just a branch but being a whole department; because it was a matter of internal reorganization we did not feel it was necessary to advise the Indians in advance of the day that it was going to take place.

Mr. Stanfield: As a supplementary question, will the Prime Minister state whether, before proceeding with this reorganization, the government did or did not consult with the national and regional Indian advisory councils, which I understand were established by the government for precisely this purpose of consultation.

Mr. Trudeau: I believe, Mr. Speaker, that both Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Andras have been discussing this general idea amongst themselves and with the people concerned, but

they will have to answer for themselves when they are in the house. I have no specific information on that.

Mr. Stanfield: As a further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, is the Prime Minister inclined to meet with representatives of the Indian Brotherhood of Canada, which organization has strongly protested this reorganization and demanded a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the matter?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I have not considered that yet. I have not received this invitation. I do not know of it, but I am inclined to believe that the minister and the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras) are very expert and able at this, and that whatever they have decided is a good decision.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): As a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that representatives of the Indian people have made it clear that they consider this reorganization more than an internal housekeeping affair, would the Prime Minister give consideration, first of all, to tabling the details of the reorganization and, second, referring the matter to the appropriate standing committee so that representatives of the Indian people could make public their observations and their criticisms of this plan?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Chrétien tells me he had intended announcing this to the house on Friday—

An hon. Member: You mean the minister.

Mr. Trudeau: —but in view of the number of statements on motions he has postponed it to Wednesday of this week, and I think I can say with authority that Mr. Chrétien plans to make a statement to the house tomorrow on this matter.

An hon. Member: You mean the minister.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): As a supplementary question to the right hon. Prime Minister—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It is Mr. Trudeau now.

Mr. Dinsdale: —the Prime Minister indicated that consultation had been going on between the Minister without Portfolio (Mr.