

Supply—Northern Affairs

Mr. Pugh: Why did you leave that impression?

Mr. Laing: The hon. member for Okanagan South need not think that—

Mr. Pugh: Okanagan Boundary, get that correct.

Mr. Laing: I am sorry only the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary could think that.

Mr. MacInnis: That is what I thought you said, and so did everyone else.

On a question of privilege, Mr. Chairman. I specifically mentioned the amount of \$600,000 plus in reference to materials that were wasted, and mentioned cement and plywood as referred to by the minister. The minister can in no way withdraw from his statement that there was \$600,000 worth of wasted material shipped up there under the previous administration.

Mr. Laing: When I want the hon. member to put words in my mouth I will tell him, but until that time I will make my own statements. I made the statement that there was an inventory of \$660,000 worth of goods in that small area. I said there was a wastage of cement and plywood, and that there were items in stock which were not useable in that area. I have found similar situations, to a lesser degree, in other areas. There was also a wastage of rations which had been shipped and kept over from year to year. There was some breakage by way of shipment, as the former minister is aware. A good deal of the rations had to be broken open and repackaged, and a great deal had to be removed. Of course I want to say to all members who have spoken on this subject that this is a very difficult area to service.

Mr. Pugh: This is a little different now.

Mr. Laing: The hon. member is not going to make me withdraw my statement to the effect that the situation I found was an example of the worst business inefficiency I have seen in a long time. I can assure this house that goods which have no value in the area of the Arctic will not be sent there under my administration.

The hon. member for Skeena made this point. It is so easy to ship materials or items into the north that have no value to the people of the north. On the other hand, there are some very simple things sent there from southern Canada that have the greatest value to people of the north. We are making changes as rapidly as possible in the direction that has been indicated tonight. There is the old

[Mr. Laing.]

story of the acres of drums. We are replacing them today with storage tanks in most of the larger settlements. We are getting out of state domination as fast as we can. We are about to let a contract for \$350,000 in services to a private individual in one place, involving sewage and water supply as well as other services. In other words, it seems to us that the sooner we can turn over these services to individuals who live there the year round the better for us, and the greater permanence there is for the people there. These are the things we are attempting to do in that area.

I am not grossly critical of the department. I do not agree that there are a great number of employees in the department at Ottawa who care nothing about the north. This is not the case. We have a tremendous number of dedicated servants both in the north and in Ottawa, but I do insist that errors and waste have occurred in the past, which I am going to try to prevent from now on.

Mr. Hamilton: The minister has admitted that there was no waste of \$600,000 at Fro-bisher Bay but I think he should give us some precise figures. I will accept the responsibility for some waste because you cannot operate in the north as you would operate a business in the south. But I do not think the impression should be left that the waste is slightly less than \$600,000. Would the minister estimate whether it was \$10,000, \$15,000 or \$20,000 or \$25,000? Do not leave the figure of \$600,000 lying around or you will have started a real battle.

Mr. Laing: I wanted to make it very plain to the hon. member for Qu'Appelle, and I think he is aware that I stated that the inventory in three warehouses was \$660,000. That is too much for a little community like that, and he knows it. As to the waste estimate, he was not high enough in his highest figure of \$25,000.

Mr. Hamilton: I want to get that straightened out. I do not want to leave anything up in the air. The minister has admitted to less than \$600,000 and he said that \$25,000 was too low. Would he say \$30,000?

The Acting Chairman (Mr. Tardif): Shall the vote carry?

Mr. Hamilton: No. The minister has got himself in a box and I want him to get out of it. I want to know what the waste was. If he is going to make charges at this time of the night he is going to have to give us the facts.