

Supply—Northern Affairs

Mr. Knight: But in the sense of my question I take it that there is actually no commercial cutting of timber in the national parks of Canada?

Mr. Lesage: No, except in Wood Buffalo for Eldorado Mining and Refining Limited. I am also informed that there are four or five permits which existed before the western parks were created. These permits were not abolished and the people who held them still can cut, but according to well known rules of forest management which are pretty severe in our case.

Mr. Knight: I hope the minister's face is set against that sort of thing. Certainly mine is.

Mr. Lesage: Definitely.

Mr. Knight: I am a little worried about when the leases expire to which the minister has referred. Are they in perpetuity?

Mr. Lesage: I will have to look into the matter of the expiration dates. It is of no relative importance.

Mr. Knight: If any of it is being done it is of importance to me and I think to the people of Canada. I should like to remind the minister of what, in my opinion, was the rather scandalous situation that existed in the park to which he has made reference, Riding Mountain park in Manitoba. It was before the minister's time in this department, but I believe it is a fact that the particular lease that was held by a lumber company for that area allowed this company to cut timber there as long as there was anything of any commercial value. It eventually got to the point where the company was cutting the small trees for fence posts.

Mr. Lesage: That is all over.

Mr. Knight: I am pleased that it is all over, and I think it should be kept that way. I directed my question to the minister to ascertain if these leases had run out. So far as Riding Mountain park was concerned, the company got the timber and the people of Canada got the stumps. I think that was true in that particular case. A few years ago I was assured that so far as Riding Mountain park was concerned the matter had come to that conclusion and there were no longer any leases in that park.

I should be sorry if this idea of giving leases for almost any purpose in these parks were continued. I was a little worried when the minister admitted that certain timber concessions had been given to certain mining companies—

[Mr. Lesage.]

Mr. Lesage: That is not what I said. I am sorry, but I said that one crown company, the Eldorado Mining and Refining company in the Northwest Territories, had been given the right to cut timber in Wood Buffalo park. The cutting of this timber is permitted under severe forest management rules and under our supervision for something which is considered as essential to Canada. It is only mature timber that is cut at Wood Buffalo park, which is in the far north.

I can assure my hon. friend that I am in complete agreement with him. The reason Newfoundland has no national park yet is that the authorities there are negotiating with some people who hold timber limits and the authorities have to have the land set free of those rights before we accept it. That is the policy of the department.

Mr. Knight: I should like to ask the minister a question which may be a legal question, and that is something I do not know anything about. Where timber leases are given—I have nothing against that—or sold—

Mr. Lesage: We do not give any.

Mr. Knight: —is there some legal method by which it can be arranged that such leases would be automatically cancelled in case that area were taken over later by the nation as a park?

Mr. Lesage: No such leases are given. I have said that once. The ones that are left have existed for years and years before the parks were parks.

Mr. Knight: Once more the minister has not understood my question. I am not talking about leases that are given for national parks. I am talking about leases that are given on public lands of some sort, where there is no park, but if that land later becomes a park is there some way by which a provision could be written into that lease stating that the lease would be terminated when and if the nation assumed control of that property as a national park? This would avoid the situation that arose in Riding Mountain park in Manitoba. As I say, it is a legal question and I do not know whether or not the minister can answer it. I believe I have said enough to at least impress upon the minister the desirability of keeping the property of national parks for the people of the nation.

Mr. Lesage: That is the purpose of establishing national parks. The hon. member and the committee may rest assured that it is my utmost desire there shall not be