

Indian Affairs

people believe to be their rights? These matters have caused a great deal of concern among the native Indian people. John MacDonald, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, circulated a letter to the employees of the department on June 25, the same day the minister announced his policy. I notice that Mr. MacDonald is sitting in the gallery today.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): I do not know why hon. members applaud him. In that letter Mr. MacDonald told his employees that they were going to embark upon a new policy. He set out in the letter what the government intended to do. Let me read part of it:

The government therefore proposes to negotiate with the provinces and arrange with other federal departments for the early transfer of programs and services carried on by this department for the benefit of the Indian people.

The letter refers also to the steps necessary to protect the job positions of the people working in the department, and special steps to deal with the problems of career development. In other words, the program the Minister announced is already being implemented, namely, transferring the programs and services carried on by the department for the benefit of the Indian people. These people have been making life miserable for the Indian people for many years, and now they are being transferred to other departments.

Is this part of the consultation process? The minister has just come back from Nova Scotia where he had meetings, with whom I do not know. Presumably those meetings were to talk about the policy the minister had announced and, hopefully, to change his ideas if they were rejected. At the same time he is doing that he is putting into effect a program which the native Indian people look upon with suspicion. It is fundamental to the whole problem—we have said this innumerable times—in the field of Indian affairs that any program or policy for the Indian people has to be commensurate with their needs and desires. A program or policy should not be developed within the sanctity of the minister's office or by the people working in the department, and imposed from above.

There has been almost universal rejection of this policy by the native Indian people in Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick and parts of Manitoba; for all I know, perhaps all of Manitoba. In the face of this rejection, the minister still goes blindly on his way like a man compelled by a hidden force, unable to

[Mr. Howard (Skeena).]

see, unwilling to hear. Let me read what the Indian Association of Alberta said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Does the house give unanimous consent to the hon. member to continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): There is no unanimous consent.

Mr. Chrétien: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, we are having only one hour of debate, as far as I know, and if not I consent.

Mr. Danforth: Oh, no. It is unlimited.

Mr. Lewis: We are having at least three hours.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Does the house give the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) unanimous consent to continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): There is no unanimous consent.

Mr. Gilbert: Christian charity!

Mr. Ray Perrault (Burnaby-Seymour): Mr. Speaker, it is gratifying that at least five of the hon. member's colleagues remained in the chamber this afternoon to hear the debate on this matter of public importance. It is refreshing to see the New Democratic party so concerned about this matter.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

An hon. Member: Where have you been?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. I would remind the hon. member that that matter has been settled.

Mr. Perrault: I made the point simply to indicate that this is a very important question, and I am shocked to find so few members of the New Democratic party present for the debate.