

Adjournment Debate

province of Saskatchewan, out of 42 native houses constructed last year, 21 have burned to the ground. Indian schoolteachers on reserves have been cut back or withdrawn. All of this is in the name of restraint, yet we see the same department, Indian affairs, increasing its internal administration by 17 per cent. We think that is the figure.

We on this side have been trying to persuade the minister, the parliamentary secretary and the chairman of the standing committee to call the minister's estimates before the standing committee. As remarked by one member on this side this evening, as of midnight on the last day of May, those estimates are to be presumed to have been passed without the careful scrutiny and examination they so richly deserve. It is little wonder, on the basis of the facts that are known and those yet to be disclosed, that the National Indian Brotherhood decided the time had come, after exhaustive discussion for months and months, that they should withdraw.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) laid it on the line for the National Indian Brotherhood in his response to questions advanced by the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald). I quote *Hansard* of April 18. As reported at page 4601, the Prime Minister, responding to concern which had been expressed by the hon. member for Egmont about the provision of basic and essential services which many of us have come to expect but which are denied to the Indians on the reserves, stated:

● (2202)

In times when the federal government is attempting to restrain the rate of growth of its bureaucracy and when federal budgetary expenditures are being restrained it is obvious that in some areas of Canada the public will not find services growing at the rate they would like.

We do not ask that these services should grow. We ask, however, that they be maintained. We are not interested in growth, now, if there is to be restraint. But we are interested in the continuance of the basic services which have been provided to the Indian people. The Prime Minister has said this is a period of restraint. He did not tell us that he did not care how much internal administration was costing. Then the right hon. gentleman in a typical display of arrogance went on to say:

Obviously, government restraint means restraining government expenditure toward some people.

Which people? The Indian people?

As far as details of each departmental expenditures are concerned, the blue book is before the House. It can be discussed in the standing committees.

That's a joke, Mr. Speaker. When is this standing committee going to be called? Then the Prime Minister, once more with his customary disdain and demonstrating his absolute ignorance of the functions of the House of Commons as well as a short memory of what he and his government have inflicted upon us, went on to say that the government House leader would be happy to discuss with House leaders on this side when they wanted those estimates to go to standing committee. What nonsense! The Prime Minister should know better than that. He should know there is no need for consultation among the House leaders on this matter.

In conclusion, let me say I have every reason to understand why the National Indian Brotherhood walked out of that cabinet consultative committee.

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Brisco), both on April 19 and this evening, has expressed concern about the state of affairs in the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. I am advised that as a result of the budgetary and other control systems which have been initiated in the department there is a much firmer grip on resource management than may have been the case a few years back.

The hon. member has suggested that somehow the department is withholding funding from the National Indian Brotherhood. This is not so. Nothing is being withheld from the brotherhood. The brotherhood put forward its proposed budget three weeks ago, as is customary. This submission is being actively reviewed and it is expected that it will have been dealt with within the next two weeks.

Reference was also made to a sum of \$28 million being held back. This appears to be a misunderstanding of the requirement by Treasury Board that the Indian and Inuit program submit a capital management plan to the board before the board authorizes expenditures of \$28 million in capital funding. It is a reasonable precaution on the part of the board to require this five-year capital plan before authorizing use of those funds. The program is now in the process of complying with that requirement.

The hon. member also said administrative costs have increased by 17 per cent. Since the 1972-73 fiscal year administrative costs have, in fact, remained practically constant at 6.1 per cent of the budget. There is good reason to believe that the institution of financial management and controls on resource allocation and expenditure will result in an improvement even in that picture in the months ahead, while services to native people are maintained.

● (2207)

The hon. member also referred on April 19 to a large deficit in Saskatchewan. I am advised that over-expenditures which have occurred there have arisen from enrichment of services beyond the funds allocated. Steps have been taken to ensure that regional allocations are respected in future delivery of services through a system of budgetary controls instituted as a result of reviews conducted by the program's senior management and the Auditor General.

Hon. members are aware that the department's spending estimates were referred to the committee almost two months ago. When the committee meets, the minister will be pleased to discuss any further concerns of hon. members about the administration of the department.