

An hon. MEMBER: I wonder if the steering committee should not be a group sizable enough to look at the picture and to report back with a proposed agenda?

The VICE-CHAIRMAN: Especially after this one trip that we are planning.

The Minister is here. Mr. Laing, would you care to say anything at this time?

The Hon. A. LAING (*Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development*): No; my purpose in coming, Mr. Chairman, was only to try to convince this Committee that I have some interest in Indian affairs. I am going to try to attend Committee meetings a little more regularly from now on.

The committee system in our government is based on the assumption that a committee is its own director, and although charges have been made in the House that the government tripped up the Committee, and so on, I do not think that these are valid at all. The Committee had difficulty making up its mind where to go.

I had thought, and had accepted the idea at once when it was first broached to the Committee, that it would be one of the better ideas if members of the Committee could see some reservations in Canada.

Mr. Watson; you are wrong. We have 2,300 reserves in Canada, of which some 1,860 are in British Columbia, and the best that the Committee could do would be to visit a microcosm of the whole problem. I would think that we could come down to a discussion of six, eight or ten reserves at the outside that would be representative.

You had made the decision to visit two reserves before I came in—Caughnawaga and St. Regis. They are not representative of Canadian Indian reserves at all. We have some terrible conditions on the reserves in the country, and there are no terrible conditions at either of those reserves. However, I do think that you could pick out eight, or ten, or twelve, at the outside, that would be representative. You have to pick out some that are known to be without resources, where the people are in a very, very bad state, so that you have representative reserves.

We have been doing a number of things lately in the department, Mr. Chairman. We have probably, to a considerable extent, addressed ourselves to the reserves where progress could be made more quickly than other reserves. We have one or two instances in British Columbia today where, I think, an open-minded white man would say that probably an Indian could run things as well as a white man. We have an Indian manager in one reserve letting contracts of up to half a million dollars and making agreements with people to build high-rise apartments; they are running their own affairs, and are completely in charge of their own funds. We have extended this authority to a great number of reserves.

We hear about all the bad things but there is no portrayal of the good things that are going on. Some astonishing progress has been made, particularly in my own Province of British Columbia, but not there alone; in other parts of the country, as well.

I would think it would be a fine thing for the members to see representative reserves. You cannot see very many. I would think that within ten or twelve you