

Indian Affairs

being tabled because it is fairly representative of the opinion of the planning directorate. I think that before making a new code for the Indians we should put our own house in order, and this document gives us some basis for so doing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the hon. member concerning this problem—

[*English*]

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, may I point out that the minister really does not have this particular right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was just going to confirm that. The minister has spoken and he cannot speak again.

Mr. Chrétien: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, although I have spoken an argument has been raised to which I think I should be entitled to reply.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to suggest that the house give unanimous consent to the minister to make these comments, because of their value and the importance of the subject.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I do not want unanimous consent for something to which I am entitled.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is some confusion whether this debate has or has not expired. If it has expired, then my impression is that the minister can close the debate, speak for five minutes or some limited time. My impression is that the debate has expired, unless other hon. members wish to speak? Then, I recognize the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, do I only have five minutes to speak?

Mr. Lewis: We will extend it to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: I would like to deal with this matter of the Garden River reserve. In my opinion, the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) completely missed the point. It was a question of deciding whether we could legally recognize the election of a sixth councillor in the Garden River reserve. According to the official, it was not a matter of discretion. There had been an error, and it was

provided in the act that on a reserve, there can be one delegate for every 100 people. Now, on election day, there were not 600 Indians on that reserve. Therefore the official had no right whatever to do anything but to void the election.

● (5:50 p.m.)

I know it is ridiculous that this mistake should have happened. We have made the appropriate remarks to the official concerned; everyone knows it is fairly easy to count to 603 or 575. Such a mistake is ridiculous but it has been made. In fact, there were not enough Indians on the reserves to allow for the election of more than five representatives.

We have asked the Department of Justice for advice, and we have been assured that by an order in council we could confirm the election of six councillors instead of holding another election. I thought it best to settle things this way.

However, I cannot, as a minister of the Crown, go beyond what I am authorized to do by the law, and then the law did not give me the authority to validate the election of the six delegates.

That is why I had an order in council passed. Today I wonder how come, after I have straightened things out, the hon. member blames me for having done so. If I had not settled the situation, he would have blamed me for having done nothing.

I would ask the hon. member to tell me if he wanted five or six Indians on the reserve to be elected. If he does not know what is the exact situation, he should have asked for information before making representations in the House of Commons.

As far as the document is concerned, I do not have to reject or accept it. I repeat my point which is quite simple. Hundreds of documents full of suggestions are prepared in all departments to enable the minister to formulate a policy.

The documents themselves are not very important. What is important for the Indian people, as well as for the house, is to know the minister's policy. And I receive advice and recommendations of all kinds and from all sides.

Like all ministers, there comes a time when I have to take a decision. However, it would be impossible, in my opinion, to table all the documents prepared by our officials; first of all, the house would not be large enough to hold them and, moreover, that would involve a waste of time for everyone.