

Supply—Northern Affairs

Mr. Laing: I had not intended to do so, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Aiken: The hon. member for Brandon-Souris intended to be present to make a few comments on these estimates. He may be here before they pass or he may not. If he comes in later, he has a few things to comment upon. These estimates, however, were considered fully in the standing committee and a very good overhaul of the procedures was undertaken at that time.

There are several things which I shall remark upon briefly. One refers to the question of Indian housing, the special program that was announced. I think the investigation by the standing committee indicated that the whole housing program still is very vague and has not yet been pinned down to the point where anyone can go to an Indian band readily and tell them exactly what is involved. One thing which particularly concerned several of us who were on that committee is the fact that there seemed to be three particular methods by which housing may be established on an Indian reserve. It may be housing built under the special aegis of the federal government for needy Indians, in which case the house is essentially free.

The department also is giving consideration to working out a procedure whereby Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation can advance loans for house construction on Indian reserves and, third, there is a possibility of a federal-provincial arrangement for construction of these houses. The one question which was not cleared up completely in the standing committee was as to who gets the free house and who will have to pay for it. This is a very essential question which could not be answered in the committee. The minister may be able to clear this up. Certainly if two persons on an Indian reserve want a house and one manages to get the government to build it for him free—while the other has to pay for it, it seems slightly unjust.

The second thing which I wished to mention is the fact that the committee in its report has included a request to visit some provincial councils and several reserves over a period of time in order to supplement the work they did during the committee meetings. It seems to me that essentially this is a good program, because I believe it will indicate that the members of this house are not only interested in Indian affairs but also are prepared to go to them and speak to them directly.

[Mr. Aiken.]

Mr. Chairman, these are the only comments I wished to make on these estimates. If the hon. member for Brandon-Souris does return, he may have some further remarks to make.

Mr. Howard: Mr. Chairman, just in passing and not in any antagonistic way, I should like to say that I think the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka is mistaken when he says the estimates were considered fully in the committee. I think they were considered just fleetingly and casually. The committee, of which I was a member, touched upon only a few of the many many matters with which both the Indian affairs branch and hon. members are concerned.

● (4:00 p.m.)

There was some reason for this, and justification for taking merely a superficial look at the estimates. I submit that one reason was the announcement or statement of the minister, with which I agree, when he said—and I am paraphrasing—it would be a bit presumptuous for him as a non-Indian, an outsider and a minister of the crown, to be telling native Indian people how to run their affairs. I have agreed with that contention for years, and I think most members of this committee take the same attitude. Parliament has legislated and passed estimates dealing with Indian affairs without having had any real concern for what has taken place for too many years, and that is an oversimplification of the fact because there have been exceptions. That is one reason the committee did not consider in the detail it might have the estimates of this department.

The hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka mentioned another reason why the committee did not give as much consideration to these estimates as it might have, namely that there was a proposal before the committee that it might better serve the interests of parliament and Indians by listening to the thoughts of these people themselves about the operation of the Indian affairs branch and the attitude of the government as illustrated by the estimates.

In this regard there are perhaps two points of view, one of which was not expressed. It was suggested that the committee should visit the communities of these Indian peoples or listen to their briefs presented by them here in Ottawa. The committee decided to recommend to the house that it be authorized to divide itself into subcommittees to travel from place to place outside the precincts of Ottawa while the house is sitting, in order to