

National Parks Act

In the early days when parks were first established in the west, population was comparatively small but distances were great. Townsites were already established, particularly in Banff and Jasper, which made it necessary for the government, in coming to terms with the provincial authorities on the development of national parks, to provide for leaseholds in perpetuity.

I want to deal with the question of perpetual leaseholds because it is the essence of the complaint that has been bothering the residents, particularly of the mountain parks, during the past few years. When the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Sulatycky)—who should know better because he is the spokesman for the residents of these parks, their only voice in this House, even though the minister will not come in and listen to him—attempts to imply that the policy of cancellation of leaseholds in perpetuity in western national parks was as a result of the prior administration, he is serving as an apologist for the government.

Mr. Woolliams: Right.

Mr. Dinsdale: Is he serving the interests of the people he represents and doing his duty as their spokesman in this House of Commons? I have here an official statement from the National Parks Branch which reviews the whole leasehold situation from the latter 1950s when a moratorium was declared on further leaseholds, further alienation of land for national parks, until a total review of all western parks could be made and a master plan developed which would ensure that those parks would meet the high standards required under the National Parks Act. In 1963 the principle of perpetuity was cancelled by the then Liberal government, and this is the point where the controversy began. I have here, in the statement from the parks branch, clause 7 which states: "Under the present minister", referring to the minister who came into office in 1963—

Mr. Woolliams: You mean the new Senator.

Mr. Dinsdale: Clause 7 states as follows:

(a) On assignments leases are changed to 42-year non-renewable leases instead of leaving the leases basically unchanged until they come up for a normal renewal date.

(b) Normal renewals of perpetual renewal leases are for a term of 42 years only instead of the 42-plus 21-leases initiated by the previous administration.

(c) For non-commercial residential properties, new leases for previously unalienated land, leases issued on assignments and leases issued as normal

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

renewals contain a clause providing for payment to lessees of compensation for improvements at fair market value.

That is a statement from the parks branch. I would be very happy to supply the hon. member for Rocky Mountain with a copy of it for his edification. I hope he did not intend to deliberately distort the record, because if so he is doing a serious disservice to the people of the west.

Mr. Sulatycky: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Dinsdale: Certainly.

Mr. Sulatycky: Is it not a fact that between 1958 and 1963, 252 perpetual leases were not, in fact, renewed?

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, if that was the case, it was contrary to government policy and was done outside the minister's knowledge. As a matter of fact, when complaints concerning problems of this kind came to my attention I made an extensive tour of the national parks to meet with the Advisory Councils of Banff, Jasper and the other parks to ensure that there would be no injustice in this regard. I did not tell the people that if they did not like it they could get out of the national parks. We listened to their representations and, as the letter indicates, the people were quite happy.

Mr. Sulatycky: But the hon. member does not deny that 252 leases were not renewed between 1958 and 1963?

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, I am shocked that the hon. member for Rocky Mountain (Mr. Sulatycky), who I thought was an able representative—

Mr. Orange: He is.

Mr. Dinsdale: He has joined the hon. member for Northwest Territories (Mr. Orange) in that when it is a case of the government versus the people—

Mr. Orange: Answer the question, Walter.

Mr. Dinsdale: —they come down on the side of the government—

Mr. Orange: Answer the question. There were 252 leases under your signature.

Mr. Dinsdale: I shall send a copy of this official departmental statement to the member for Northwest Territories who, confidentially in conversation with me, tells me that he