

Supply—Northern Affairs

problems by confronting facts. I am very glad indeed that the committee suggested a visit should be made to Indian reservations.

● (4:40 p.m.)

At the present time, Mr. Chairman, we have some six million acres of Indian reservations in Canada. One of the first things I asked Mr. Battle, our assistant deputy minister when I was put in charge of this department was, "What is the value of the reservations in Canada?" He said to me, "Surely you are not going to sell them." I said, no, the reverse; that I thought that as a general principle we should say there are going to be no more Indian lands sold in this country. However, I believe we should redouble our efforts so that the potential of these reservations is realized for the benefit of the Indian people themselves. For all too long these have been isolated properties which have been regarded by the white man as ghettos. They have not been developed by the Indians because of inactivity, the absence of adequate capital, and lack of general support.

Some of these reservations are today set in the centre of some of our larger cities, yet very little has been done with them. I can give some indication of the value of some of them when I tell you, Mr. Chairman, that in recent weeks certain parts of one of the reservations in the province of British Columbia have been leased for a rental of \$1,000 per acre per year. This is an extraordinary case, but I do not think we have done a particularly good job of managing the reserves in a manner to obtain for the Indian people the maximum. We are going to address ourselves particularly to this problem; and we will also endeavour to obtain funds to assist the development of some industries, be they modest at the start, for Indian people on the reservations and elsewhere. I think that is all I have to say, Mr. Chairman. If there are any questions I shall endeavour to answer them.

Mr. Howard: Mr. Chairman, the declarations by the minister about intent and purpose were commendable both in their phraseology and, I am sure, in the sincere desire of the minister to see them come into effect. We have heard similar declarations from a variety of the minister's predecessors, and without making any disparaging remarks about what has occurred in the past I think it is a fact that, especially in the field of Indian affairs, in order to have any real progress made it is helpful if there is some continuity

[Mr. Laing.]

of ministerial responsibility, instead of tossing this portfolio hither and yon, as has been the case over the past number of years.

I do not know how many ministers of citizenship and immigration there have been, and I am not going to bother to recount the minister's predecessors now, but in the last few years there have been a considerable number. This of course has caused some dismay on the part of the native Indian people. They listened with interest to the declarations made by the Minister of Labour when he held the portfolio and the responsibility for Indian affairs. They listened with interest to the President of the Privy Council when he held that position. They also listened with interest to his predecessor, and to the one before him. But all of these ministers seem to have held the post for a relatively short period of time, each minister being succeeded by another who made the same declarations. Just so much of this can go on, Mr. Chairman, before the people concerned come to believe that all you have is a succession of ministers who are reading the same fine-sounding speech.

What I am getting at is that, barring the possibility of electoral defeat, either of the minister personally or of the government, I should like to see the minister of northern affairs maintain this responsibility for some reasonable period of time in order that there can be a continuity of attitude, so that the ideas which he has expressed may receive the fullest chance of actually coming into being.

The minister mentioned a couple of aspects I should like him to consider. He said that the time is now here when no longer should we sell Indian reserve lands. He made that comment on another occasion outside the house some time ago, and it was gratifying to hear him make that declaration. On the other hand—and I realize that this is a difficult undertaking because the jurisdiction over land rests in the hands of the provincial governments—would the minister consider the possibility of increasing the size of reserves to the extent that this is considered necessary for the economic well-being and progress of the native people?

For example, in British Columbia there are a number of Indian native people who have followed the vocation of logging, which they intersperse with their off-fishing season. Gradually, with the involvement of larger and larger companies which require larger and larger tracts of forest land, they have