

Supply—Indian Affairs

for the appointment of a commission composed of an economist, an expert on wildlife and conservation and a geologist to make a detailed and careful investigation and report about the future of this park. I think the situation could be handled in this way rather than by making it a political issue. I believe that if this were done in collaboration with both governments it would be to the benefit of all concerned.

● (5:50 p.m.)

Finally, I want to deal very briefly in the time left to me with the Indian problem. This is a sad and tragic story. The minister has inherited the problem, as other ministers inherited it before him. Our record in this regard is one of which we cannot be proud. We now begin to see some light ahead. Just recently some Indian people came to this city to see the minister. I understand from a press statement issued today that the minister was not able to see them because they were accompanied by others. I ask the minister to reconsider this decision, if it is not too late.

I do not know who all the other men were, but I know one of those who came. He is a young man from my constituency who is an Indian under the Indian Act. This young man has done a considerable amount of work for his people in the Driftpile Indian reserve and acts in Ottawa and elsewhere as a spokesman for the Indian peoples in Canada. I understand that two men who came here were not members of the Fox Lake band. The people in that band would probably find it difficult to come down here and lay their case intelligently and adequately before the minister; therefore they sent representatives. I would urge the minister to give the most serious consideration to this matter, even though I can well understand the reasons behind his rejection. Nevertheless, it is for each and every one of us to be prepared to stretch a point and make concessions in this regard. This is one concession the minister could make.

Mr. Laing: Mr. Chairman, if at this juncture I could explain the matter, it might satisfy the hon. member. I did see Mr. Daniels and Mr. Samson in the company of a member of the House of Commons from the New Democratic Party and an hon. gentleman from the other place.

Mr. Baldwin: I thank the minister for that explanation and am very happy that he did see these people. I have known of this situation for some time. I have not raised it in the

[Mr. Baldwin.]

house at any time because of what I have said before, namely, that matters of this kind should not be the subject of partisan consideration. I am most thankful that the minister saw these people and hope that something will develop therefrom. I know this area; I have been out there. There is a problem in the area similar to that which exists in many other parts of northern Alberta.

When the Indian affairs department decided to embark on the program of building day schools, these schools were built but from time to time with an inadequate knowledge of the conditions which prevail. Fox Lake is a typical example. In this area there are absolutely no economic opportunities or possibilities. A day school was built. The Indian people, who have a great attachment to and love for their children, moved out, built small houses somewhere around the day school and usually subsisted on nothing but the help they received in the way of welfare payments.

It is absolutely essential that the most careful and anxious consideration be given by the government and the officials of the department to establishing the areas in which day schools are to be built. A great deal of attention must be paid to the wishes of the Indians. It may well be that their wishes do not make sense in the light of the knowledge of the officials of the department. But where there is a conflict, I submit with great deference that the most careful consideration must be given to the wishes of the Indian people. If that had been done in this case, and as it should have been done in the neighbouring reserve of Habay, these problems would not have arisen.

I am happy that the Indian affairs department has resolved itself into subcommittees. I hope these subcommittees will honestly, intelligently and realistically take the opportunity of bringing their views to the Indians and, what is more important, will hear the views of the Indians. I have spoken with the member for Northwest Territories. It is our hope that the trips to our areas will be made in the middle of the winter when conditions are the most difficult, when all the problems of poverty, lack of education and lack of housing accommodation can be seen at their worst. I hope this will be done all over Canada. In that way, while we may not solve the problem, at least fair and reasonable attempts will be made to obtain the views of the people most concerned. In this way we can make a most serious attempt at least to resolve some of the problems.