

Supply—Northern Affairs

Mr. Nielsen: Yes. The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate has accused me of contradicting the minister. I am doing no such thing. This program is in addition to that which was provided for the Indian people—a program which has been greatly expanded in the last few years to the benefit of the people of the north.

Mr. Dinsdale: Perhaps I might comment. I forgot it is some four years since the hon. member was responsible for these matters and so many changes have taken place since that time—so much progress has been made—that perhaps I should have been more specific in my reply.

Mr. Pickersgill: That, of course, was why I was inquiring. It is nearly five years since I had the responsibility for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

An hon. Member: Yes. And it will be another five—

Mr. Pickersgill: Oh no. Perhaps five months—

An hon. Member: Four months.

Mr. Pickersgill: I doubt if this is relevant to the item before us, interesting though it would be to debate this subject, and fruitless though it would be to debate it in the absence of the Prime Minister who is keeping hon. gentlemen opposite even more in the dark than the rest of the people of this country.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): They are in a state of agitation.

Mr. Pickersgill: Visibly. However, I want to come back to the question of housing for the Indians. I assume the minister knows that when Mr. Lesage was minister of northern affairs, and I was the minister responsible for Indian affairs, an agreement was made between the two departments whereby the schools in the Northwest Territories were provided alike for the Indians and the rest of the population by the department of northern affairs. I think that was a wise thing to have done and a progressive step to have taken. I assumed that since there are no Indian reserves in the Northwest Territories—the Indians live anywhere they please, as does the rest of the population—the Department of Citizenship and Immigration did not have any housing program but that there was one single program in that area. I was surprised to hear the minister say that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration also had a program. Is that correct?

Mr. Dinsdale: I think the hon. member has answered his own question. All these activities involving welfare, education, housing

and so forth are handled on an interdepartmental basis in the interests of greater efficiency.

Mr. Pickersgill: The minister is, of course, trying to cover up. What he is saying in other words, is that there is only one housing program and it is run by his department. Is that right or not?

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, if I may—

Mr. Pickersgill: Ah, the parliamentary assistant to the rescue.

Mr. Nielsen: The hon. member is trying in characteristic fashion to confuse the issue or else he is genuinely misinformed. As a former minister he should know that there was an Indian housing program across the whole of the north and it is continuing now in greatly expanded form as compared to what was done under the previous administration. This program which the minister has introduced by this supplementary estimate represents an addition to the existing program of the Indian affairs branch and is providing houses not only for the Indian people who may, if they wish, take the opportunity available to them, but to all the residents of the territory so that they might be provided with housing in circumstances where otherwise, because of the high cost of construction in the north and the nature of the present regulations under the National Housing Act, they would be unable to do so.

Mr. Pickersgill: I must thank the hon. member for the Yukon for the first compliment he has ever paid me. He did this by pointing out that there was a very considerable Indian housing program when I was in the ministry. Inadvertently, the hon. gentleman has admitted the truth of what I was pointing out this afternoon, namely, that all these things were started by the previous government.

Mr. Nielsen: Again, I cannot let that go by without comment, because I did not use the word “considerable” at all. If I had to comment on that program I would say that a program which was just piddling along under a Liberal administration has increased tenfold in the last four years.

Mr. Robichaud: Can the minister advise this committee if an estimate has been made by his department as to the cost per unit of this housing and how many units are involved in this item of \$270,000?

Mr. Dinsdale: There is no specific cost per unit. The homes vary in cost from \$500 to \$7000. This is not a charity scheme on the part of the administration. This vote is included to provide mortgages to enable the