

revision of the unemployment insurance fund, and the redirection of those moneys.

NORTHERN AFFAIRS—SETTLEMENT OF NATIVE LAND CLAIMS—
GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Epp) for attending this evening. I would much rather have the minister deal with this issue than his parliamentary secretary. The issue I wish to raise deals with land claims across Canada but specifically those within the province of Saskatchewan.

Last week I asked the minister a question with regard to the government's policy on land claims dealing particularly with the province of Saskatchewan. In the last two years the Government of Canada has not completed one land claim settlement or land entitlement settlement. There is one exception, and that is the COPE agreement, but the government has refused to ratify it.

The minister has admitted that his government, even after six months in office and after having showed us the thick binders which were supposedly to indicate that they were ready to govern, still does not have a land claims policy. As a result, native groups throughout this country are waiting to see what the government intends to do. The problem which the minister has is that he must go to his cabinet committee, make presentations to them, and from there he must go to the full cabinet to get agreement. We understand the minister has a problem. He is not in the inner cabinet and he does not have a direct say in the direction of this country or control over what is happening in his own department.

The question which we, as parliamentarians, must ask is, how can the government act or negotiate with native people if it does not have a policy?

Even more curiously, how can the government allow mining developers to go ahead with their developments if it does not have a policy? It cannot negotiate and settle negotiations with native people because it does not have a policy, but at the same time it allows mining developments to go ahead. I would suggest there is a contradiction there, Mr. Speaker.

● (2215)

I would like to mention the specific problems of the native people in Saskatchewan and I refer, of course, to the Saskatchewan formula. In 1975 the then minister of Indian affairs and northern development stressed to the premier of Saskatchewan that certain land claims and land entitlements were outstanding. As a result of the meeting that took place then, an agreement was signed in 1976 which resulted in the Saskatchewan formula. The agreement set the figure of 128 acres per person for the population registered in December, 1976.

Three years later, on October 19, the minister wrote to the government of Saskatchewan saying that the federal government was reviewing the availability of Crown land for native people. In effect, he was also saying that he was reviewing the

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obligations of the federal government. Last week in the House I put a question about this to the minister and he replied that he wanted a settlement which was agreeable to the other provinces. Unfortunately, the province of Manitoba with its Conservative government, and the province of Alberta with its Conservative government, will not accept the Saskatchewan formula. The impression that the minister left with the House and with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians was that he would not live up to the agreement referred to as the Saskatchewan formula. He had apparently said at a meeting with his provincial counterparts, the previous night, that the formula was too costly or too rich.

Mr. Epp: I never said that.

Mr. Murphy: That is what was said, according to the news report, Mr. Speaker, and that is the impression he left with this House last week.

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indians wrote to the minister about this answer, not at some private meeting, but which were given to questions in this House. I know that the minister has received that letter and responded to it. The problem is, however, that the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and other native people in the country are not sure of the direction the government is taking. They are not sure whether the government will live up to the Saskatchewan formula which was signed three years ago, and they are not sure what type of recommendation the minister is making to the government.

I would ask the minister to answer these charges and make it perfectly clear where the government stands, not only in the Saskatchewan case but in the case of all native Canadians.

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) that the government's land claims policy is very clear. I will not repeat that because of lack of time now, but I went into it today in committee when the hon. member was present.

The hon. member is correct that no new land claims have been settled in the last two years. For that reason my parliamentary secretary is attending at the negotiations now proceeding with the Council of Yukon Indians, so that we may reach an early agreement. It has been agreed to seek an agreement in principle by the end of April, 1980. I would suggest to the hon. member that this shows we are moving with great speed, in view of the complexity of the issues faced in the comprehensive land claims.

The hon. member has said that I have refused to ratify the COPE agreement. I would indicate to him, Mr. Speaker, that at this stage there is no agreement to be ratified. There is an agreement in principle which was approved by the former administration. What is needed now is a final agreement, and this will have to be negotiated between the Committee for Original Peoples Entitlement and the Government of Canada. In order to get that process under way, I will meet with them at 3.30 tomorrow. I hope that we can eradicate some of the