

Supply—Indian Affairs

possession of property representing the average appreciation of land values in the country.

The Acting Chairman (Mr. Richard): Order. I regret to advise the hon. member that his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Barnett: Mr. Chairman, some hon. members have suggested that I carry on. However, I believe I have made my point on this matter. As I have said, I will have an opportunity to deal with other aspects of the minister's department as we proceed with the consideration of these estimates.

● (3:10 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Laprise: Mr. Chairman, I wish to take advantage of the study of the estimates of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to call the attention of the minister to a matter which concerns Indian affairs in particular.

At the outset of his remarks this morning, the minister told us that the government entrusted him with the responsibility of Indian affairs about a year ago. In view of the changes being effected by that department in the area that I represent and where I live, I feel that the minister should also answer to the house for the activities of his departmental officials.

The minister advised me recently in writing of the official decision to transfer the Indian affairs office from Amos to Val d'Or. I had been aware for several weeks that the department of Indian affairs wanted this transfer and I was also aware, having been involved personally, that steps were taken on both sides. I was involved in the steps taken by the authorities and by the public bodies of Amos to keep this office in Amos where it has been for more than 25 years. I wondered why this transfer was being made from one city to another in this northwestern region. After analysing all reasons that were given to me and to the representative of the town of Amos, I concluded that it was more a question of accommodating the civil servants than giving the Indians the service the department is required to give them.

On February 8, I received from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Laing) a letter giving the reasons supplied by his officials to ask for such transfer. Here is what he said, and I quote:

It has been suggested that the main office of a new division which will serve the whole northwestern part of the province, be set up at Val d'Or.

I would like to know who made that suggestion. The minister does not say who did in his letter; he merely says, "It has been suggested". I would therefore like to know who made the suggestion, whether it was the Indians themselves, the leaders of the Indian bands in the area or officials who, for some reason I do not know exactly, prefer living in one city rather than in the other.

The minister also pointed out to me that, according to his officials' reports, and I quote:

Val d'Or has an airport which gives regular service towards Poste-de-la-Baleine and other points, and I understand that that was one of the factors which the branch officials took into consideration.

On January 24, 1967, the clerk of the town of Amos, on behalf of the municipal corporation of Amos, sent a letter to the assistant deputy minister of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in which he said in part:

The town of Amos has now almost completed the municipal airport started a few years ago and air traffic could begin as early as next summer—

Meaning this summer.

—since the landing-ground itself is more than sufficient.

Mr. Chairman, as far as the airport is concerned, I think the problem can be solved shortly and I know that representations are being made by the authorities of the town of Amos with the Department of Transport for the completion of that airport.

So, I continue reading the reasons given by the minister in his letter of February 8:

Moreover, Val d'Or is more central since it is linked by road with Maniwaki and Notre-Dame-du-Nord.

With Maniwaki, right, but it is not quite the same thing as far as Notre-Dame-du-Nord is concerned because to get there—if my information is correct; I live in the area—one must pass by Rouyn, and from Rouyn, the distance to Amos or Val d'Or is about the same. Therefore, only the Maniwaki area would have the distance advantage. On the other hand, the Matagami and La Sarre areas and others to the north would be at a disadvantage, because their residents would have to travel farther to go to the Val d'Or office, whenever the need arises. The letter goes on to say:

The need to expand the office so that it may serve as a regional office is not, it seems, an important aspect of the question, for this need could be met in both places.