

Supply—Northern Affairs

talking to the officials there and to the Indians themselves I was advised that the educational, health and development programs which are being applied to our Indian communities necessitate a great deal of paperwork on the part of the officials who are presently engaged in carrying out these duties, that is the officers, the superintendents and the Indian agents. I am thinking in particular of the case of the Indian agency in White Bear. They tell me that owing to the large area of the reservation a great overload of paperwork is imposed on these officials, with the result that they do not have the time to carry out the very effective and well meaning programs that are referred to them.

I wonder whether the minister has given any consideration to increasing the staff in these agencies. The addition of even one extra clerk or stenographer would relieve them of the burden of this paperwork and would allow them to contribute a great deal more in the field of welfare for these Indians.

Mr. Laing: I think that I should reply to hon. members who have participated in this debate. I certainly appreciate their interest in Indian affairs and I think it is representative of the common co-operation which exists in all parts of the house and which probably augurs more favourably for Indian affairs than it has for many years.

I have been charged with the responsibility of administering this department long enough to know that it is a very difficult department, because we are primarily dealing with people who have not received treatment from the so-called white people in this country such as to make them very happy. We have been dealing with a people who have not received the respect which is due to them and which often provokes a response in kind. We are concerned with some 220,000 Indians whose birth rate is increasing at a much higher rate than the Canadian average. We are dealing with a people who have historically been torn between two objectives: a tremendous ambition to live in dignity and indeed pride in a history that warrants great national pride, and on the other hand a wish to maintain the reservations which were granted to them and historic commitments which they do not wish to give up. On one side they are compelled to go forward in developing their own personalities and their own capacities and on the other side they are afraid of losing the great historic guarantees, as mentioned by the hon.

[Mr. Southam.]

member for Skeena, in the form of hunting rights, rights to land ownership, and so on.

I am quite certain that there is today a wide appreciation of this problem and a desire on the part of this house to find the requisite money to do what parliament thinks is a competent job. I should like to say at once that money badly spent will probably multiply our problems instead of solving them. Money alone will not be a solution in assisting the Indian people to gain a measure of independence and personal pride which will enable them to say "We are as good Canadians as anyone else".

I have arrived at the department at a time when money is forthcoming for planned programs. I had nothing whatsoever to do with the development of those programs over the last several years, and I am not one who takes pride in harvesting another man's sowing. I therefore wish to pay a compliment to the previous ministers who, throughout the last several years, have developed a program for which I think we have adequate funds.

I think a very startling statement has been made in recent years regarding the condition of housing of our Indian people. Some time last year reports were made on the very small percentage of Indian housing having any protection from fire, any inside plumbing, any water or light. We heard that as low as 10 or 15 per cent of Indian houses possessed these facilities. I think it made Canadians agree that not enough had been done to house these people. We have announced as the cornerstone of our policy a policy to provide our Indian people with housing that is at least minimally sufficient.

● (4:30 p.m.)

We had hoped, therefore, to include in our program the building of some 1,150 houses this year, but happily we find we will be building about 1,500 houses. Many members are interested in asking where we are going to put these houses, where is the priority. This is a logical question. The priority will depend upon the Indian people themselves. In all of these programs we are going to try to use such funds as we have available to encourage the Indian people to participate in everything we are doing. This means, in most instances, the preparing of the rough lumber that is going into these houses. In one or two instances it will mean the preparation of finished lumber from small mills located on reservations.