

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Does the hon. member wish to ask a supplementary question? He knows he cannot present an argument or enter into a debate.

Mr. Howard: I simply noted, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister was picking up his earphone and I wanted to wait until he had it on.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Howard: And he is now putting it away, which obviously indicates he is turning a deaf ear to the plight of the Indian people in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Howard: I want to ask the Prime Minister whether the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was indicating government policy when he said, as I took it, that he and the government had no interest in protecting the rights of the Indian people?

Mr. Chrétien: On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair will recognize the minister on his question of privilege, but obviously we could spend the rest of the question period debating the issue. I think the 40 minutes should be reserved as much as possible for questions and answers and not debate. The minister has the floor.

Mr. Chrétien: The hon. member for Skeena implied that we do not have the interest of the Indians at heart. I must protest that he cannot say so. If we are not at the hearing it is because we are no longer paternalistic, as he would be if he were in charge. We let the Indians do what they want to do.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sure that all hon. members, including the hon. member for Skeena and the minister, will appreciate that this is a matter of debate between the minister and the hon. member which could go on for a long time. My hope is that we can move on to further questions. However, if the hon. member has a further supplementary he will be recognized for the purpose of asking it and then the Chair will recognize the hon. member for Yukon. After that, we will go on to the next question.

Mr. Howard: May I ask a supplementary question which probably will prompt a reasonable response, and inquire of the minister whether he would be prepared to refer the question of aboriginal rights to a special committee of the House of Commons in order that all aspects of it might be examined?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, in all circumstances the committee can agree with any procedure and if it wishes to set the moment when it will study appropriations for the department on that question, it will be a pleasure to discuss the matter with the committee members.

[*English*]

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): In the absence of concurrence on the part of the minister in the suggestion made by the

[Mr. Howard.]

hon. member for Skeena, and in the total absence of any mention of the Indian people in the Speech from the Throne, can the minister tell the House today what the intention of the government is with respect to the settlement of aboriginal land claims in this country?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, we are always in communication with Indian peoples. On many occasions, we have stated that we will abide by the provisions of the law which the government must assume in favour of the first citizens in Canada. We intend to pursue discussions of those questions with them. I think we would be ill advised to mingle politics with that problem.

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[*English*]

AGRICULTURE**CROP DAMAGE, NORTHERN ALBERTA AND BRITISH COLUMBIA—MANNER AND TIME OF PAYMENTS TO FARMERS**

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture. Would the hon. gentleman tell us today in what manner and when he intends to make his token payment to the disaster-stricken farmers in northern British Columbia and Alberta?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the payment to the farmers in Alberta and British Columbia will be as large as any payment we have made to farmers in any other part of Canada. As soon as we receive the claim forms and submissions from the provinces concerned we shall act accordingly.

Mr. Oberle: May I ask the minister whether he is considering further payments to these farmers, because the payment he is suggesting is obviously only a token payment and these people have suffered—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is now making a speech.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): In light of the drastic decline in farm population as a result of deliberate government policies—

Some hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Baldwin:—I should like to ask the minister whether it is his intention to change those policies?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.