

*Indian Act Amendment*

proposed legislation might very well be considered by the Indian as a violation of his treaty, if we deliberately take his treaty money or annuity to pay for the care of his children in school.

Section agreed to.

Mr. NEILL: On division.

On section 3—Children from seven to sixteen to attend school.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): This, Mr. Chairman, is merely extending the school age one year.

Mr. COOTE: Two years ago I was interviewed by a number of chiefs of the Blood Indian reserve. They complained that the children were taken from them at too young an age. They think the children should be left with them for another two years. As I understand it, at the age of seven years they are placed in these boarding schools, and can return to their parents only once a year unless the consent of the principal of the school is given to their going home oftener. A child taken from home at the early age of seven years and kept at boarding school until sixteen might scarcely know his parents when he returned home. That is the view of the Indians. It seems to me there is a good deal of reason in their contention. I bring it to the attention of the minister now that this section is being changed. I notice the new section provides:

that where it has been made to appear to the satisfaction of the superintendent general that it would be detrimental to any particular Indian child to have it discharged from school on attaining the full age of sixteen years, the superintendent general may direct that such child be detained at school for such further period as may seem to be advisable, but not beyond the full age of eighteen years, and in such case the provisions of this section with respect to truancy shall apply to such child and its parents, guardians or persons with whom such child resides during such further period of school attendance.

The explanation of that is given on the next page. I must agree that the purpose of this amendment seems to indicate a step in the right direction, namely the safeguarding of those Indian children who have been in boarding schools until they have reached the age of sixteen. At the expiration of their school term there is no proper home to which they may go. I think, in general, this criticism might be levelled at our educational policy. Having kept them in our schools and separated them from their parents from the ages of seven to sixteen, we turn them loose from school and send them back to the

[Mr. Coote.]

Indian reserves. As I see the system, viewing it from the outside, we attempt to civilize the Indian child, and to make a white boy of an Indian boy. When he has reached the age of sixteen we send him back to the Indian reserve, with no provision for him and very little possibility that he will continue to live in the atmosphere in which he has been brought up in the school. I think our effort is largely thrown away.

I was impressed with an article which appeared in the August, 1929, issue of the *Literary Digest*. It refers to the American Indian, but to some extent I think it would apply to the Indians of Canada and their relation to our educational policy. I shall read one or two sentences from this article:

Reversion to the blanket and a primitive way of living is said to be the tragic lot of the educated young Indian. It has been the policy of the government, we are told, to send the young Indian back to the reservation on the theory that he would leave the whole lump; but experience shows, instead, that the returned student is forced by custom and example to drop all that he has learned, and to shed his civilization with his white man's clothes.

It would be unfair to say that that applies entirely, in our own country; but, very often it does apply. There are instances given which appear in the explanatory notes on the opposite page of this amendment to the Indian Act. The note to which I have reference says:

As an instance, an Indian whose wife was dead and who was eking out an existence begging in the streets of a city demanded the release of his daughter from a residential school at the expiration of school age, which was refused.

In my opinion, the refusal was quite proper. Under the amendment the principal of the school may keep the child two years longer, but if the father is still desirous of taking her away when she reaches the age of eighteen, she is not in a much better position. True, she is older, but what future is there for that young child upon which we have spent so much money? We have given her religious and scholastic education; we have protected and sheltered her from the effects of her Indian environment from the time she was seven until she reached the age of eighteen. When she is turned loose from the industrial or boarding school, however, what will become of her; what is becoming of the Indian boys and girls we are turning out to-day?

I think our educational system is falling down in that it does not provide some means whereby these children upon whom we have spent so much money can go on living in what we term a civilized way, rather than